

FOOD

HOW FADS, DOGMA, AND DOCTRINE INFLUENCE DIET

CULTS

Edited by

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Rowman & Littlefield Studies in Food and Gastronomy

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Food Cults

*How Fads, Dogma, and Doctrine
Influence Diet*

Edited by Kima Cargill

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Chapter Fourteen

“Herb Is for the Healing of the Nation!”

*Marijuana as a Consumable Vegetable among Ghetto
Muslim Youth of Maamobi in Accra, Ghana*

De-Valera N. Y. M. Botchway and Charles Prempeh

The consumption and use of marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*) are as ancient as the origin of humankind. The making of it as part of the human diet, as medicine, as an industrial and recreational substance, and as a religious object stems from antiquity. Yet, despite its significance over millennia, the vegetable is a subject of controversy in the discourses of scholars, legal experts, and the general public today.

Negative testimonies about its inhalation or ingestion or topical application have increased calls from anti-marijuana campaigners for it to be criminalized. They produce “data” and different reasons to discredit its usage in whatever context. Pro-marijuana people have endeavored to prove it is harmless. Some writers, such as Grinspoon and Bakalar¹ and Zimmer and Morgan,² deem it a plant with beneficial chemical and nutritional assets and want it decriminalized. Conversely, detractors such as Nahas and Latour³ and Walters⁴ think otherwise. In Ghana, many persons, reflecting popular knowledge installed by the police that marijuana is often found on hardcore criminals, identify marijuana with social misdemeanour and violence. Nevertheless, the herb enjoys widespread cultivation, production, consumption, and use globally.⁵ In 2012, about 227 million people were estimated to have used cannabis, corresponding to between 2.7 and 4.9 percent of the population

aged fifteen to sixty-four years.⁶ The vagueness about the perceived harm or benefits of marijuana has largely resulted in a universal criminalization of it by governments, even though the United States, United Kingdom, and some few countries have taken steps to declassify it as a Class A drug and accepted it in their pharmacopoeia, and prescriptions of it for therapeutic purposes are limited to special physicians or psychiatrists. Holland and Canada permits its use for specific medicinal and recreational purposes.

In Ghana, the cultivation, possession, use, or sale of marijuana is a felony. The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 236 and the Narcotic Drug Law (1990) state, "No person should undertake any activity for the purpose of establishing or promoting any enterprise relating to narcotic drugs." Marijuana is considered a narcotic; hence, using marijuana, which in the legal lexicon refers to all parts of the herb (seeds, resin, every compound, manufacture, salt, derivative, mixture, or preparation of the plant),⁷ for any purpose, is illegal under Ghana's laws. It is ironic, though, that Ghana's market imports marijuana-derived items such as hair creams, fabrics, and ropes.

Despite Ghana's legal position, the cultivation of marijuana for a domestic market and export is a major business for a number of farmers in the least accessible areas of Ghana's forest.⁸ The tropical climatic conditions of the countryside favor its growth. It is eaten, smoked, infused in water and drunk as bitters, and mixed with local gin and drunk as a beverage,⁹ and its consumption is trans age, trans gender, trans social class, and trans locality in Ghana. Many secondary school and university students patronize it.¹⁰ Daniel Akwasi Amankwah of the Narcotics Control Board disclosed on national media in October 2014 that, in terms of marijuana consumption, Ghana tops the list in Africa and places third in the world.

In Maamobi, a suburb in Accra, Ghana's capital, the consumption of marijuana, which has acquired currency among many of the youth, especially in established "ghettos"—special places where marijuana is sold and consumed—goes back to the 1950s. Maamobi has a large Muslim community, and many of the youth (male and female) who consume marijuana profess Islam. Information we obtained from the police stations of Maamobi and the adjoining community of Nima indicated that many of the youth who were prosecuted for consuming marijuana claimed to be Muslims. Marijuana is illegal in Ghana; it is also considered *haram* by many leaders in Ghana's *ummah* (Islamic community). So what sociocultural structural forces in the history of marijuana use in Maamobi and Ghana predispose some Muslim

youth to consume marijuana? How do they rationalize their consumption of the herb and conceptualize its effects on their lives?

PROFILE OF THE MAAMOBI COMMUNITY

The Maamobi land originally belonged to the Ga ethnic group of Accra. However, it has largely become a migrant community that evolved from the settling of early Fulani and Hausa traders in the urbanized space of Accra in the 1940s. Hence only a few Ga people live there today. Ex-servicemen of the British West African Frontier Force, mainly Muslims from northern Ghana, and Hausa soldiers from Nigeria and other Anglophone West African countries also settled there after World War II. By the mid-1960s the community was multiethnic in character. Different West African ethnicities live there today. The early settlers were mostly Muslim, so Islam is dominant in the region. The majority of the population share the commonwealth of the faith. Hausa, which was largely used by the early Muslim traders and missionaries to propagate Islam, is the lingua franca of that multiethnic community. This migrant community, encased in the pressures of urbanization in Accra, suffers from the problems of overcrowding, squalor, and paucity of social amenities. Many children are thus exposed to different economic activities to make a livelihood for self and family. Some work alongside schooling. The advent of *Sakawa* (online cyber scam) has induced some of the youth to discontinue schooling and go into the practice with the hope of making quick money to meet different needs.

The ghetto has been one space where a lifestyle of friendship and sharing, revolving around a common cult(ure) of marijuana use, persists. This character attracts many of the youth whose poor backgrounds are unable to give them a sense of social security to go to the ghetto in search of comradeship and social security among the ghetto commune of marijuana users who experience the herb as a euphoric and crucial mystical sacrament capable of enlightenment and alleviating sufferings from the reality of social insecurity, alienation, and poverty.

HISTORY OF MARIJUANA USE IN GHANA

Marijuana is commonly known as *wee* in Ghana, but some people also refer to it as *ganja*, *tampe/ntampi*, *sundu*, *obonsam tawa*, *apopo*, *taba*, and *wee bitters*. Oral tradition avers that it was used as a psychotropic substance or

depressant or stimulant because of indigenous knowledge about its chemical properties in the precolonial era.¹¹ Some indigenous ritual specialists must have chewed marijuana leaves and/or other more potent hallucinatory leaves before they initiated themselves into the psychic realm and trances. Many priests and priestesses of popular indigenous shrines and mystery cults in Ghana still use some hallucinatory substances to alter or heighten their state of consciousness during initiation rites and incantations.¹² Some indigenous warriors also used hallucinogens from the vegetable world to remove fear and give them psychological strength for the rigors of fighting. Among the Akan this practice was expressed as *Ye ko noa asa* (“We are going to cook war”). This secret activity was usually done in the thickest forest.¹³ Some traditional priests and priestesses and herbalists still use marijuana for rituals and explore its properties for medicinal purposes.¹⁴

Next to the view of local traditions that the herb is indigenous to Ghana is the opinion that ex-servicemen who returned from India and Burma after World War II were responsible for the prevalence of the plant in postcolonial Ghana. Even though an ex-serviceman in Maamobi, who pleaded anonymity, stated that some ex-servicemen brought marijuana to Ghana, Yussif Iddris Konate, an imam of Accra and the chief imam of Maamobi, argued that the ex-servicemen were not known for smoking marijuana, although they did smoke tobacco that the colonial administrators supplied to them. Two of the earliest settlers and assemblymen of the Maamobi community, Alhaji Haruna Bukari Dabre and Abdul Godwin Baba Ali, corroborated the imam’s information. Vincent Adjei, a World War II veteran, did not accept or deny the allegation that veterans brought the herb back and used it in the country. Cautioning that the possibility should not be overruled, nor the allegation generalized, he opined that the bravery of some of the ex-servicemen, which, it was alleged, was induced by their use of marijuana, gave currency to the claim that they brought marijuana into the country.¹⁵ The Krio from Sierra Leone who worked as stevedores along West Africa’s coast may have also introduced cannabis to the country during the colonial period.¹⁶ Marijuana’s medicinal and nonmedicinal value was popular in Sierra Leone, and in the 1930s some Sierra Leoneans began to explore a market for cannabis within British West Africa. They capitalized on Freetown’s importance as a major port, the presence of Sierra Leonean sailors on steamships, and a Sierra Leonean diaspora in port towns in West Africa, where many worked as stevedores, and spread cannabis in other West African countries, including Ghana.¹⁷ Despite this multivocality about the genesis of marijuana in Ghana,

the colonial regime’s law classified its cultivation, use, and possession as criminal.¹⁸ The steady flux of governments that have come and gone have never up to this date legalized the herb. Despite the law, marijuana’s popularity soared in the late 1950s because “[w]ith the decline in world market price for cocoa from 1958, cocoa farmers may have been encouraged to diversify into cannabis cultivation”¹⁹ to satisfy an existing local clientele, which included some Muslim youth in Maamobi.

THE BACKGROUND OF SMOKING MARIJUANA IN MAAMOBI

The consumption of marijuana, especially smoking, in Maamobi became noticeable in the 1950s. Imam Yussif Iddris Konate of Maamobi avers that Krio stevedores who occasionally worked at the Light House Port in Accra introduced marijuana smoking to the community through the youth. The early consignments were allegedly sourced from Congo, so marijuana became popularly known as “Congo tobacco” in Maamobi in the early days.²⁰ America House, a unit in the community, became a popular ghetto. Apart from America House, the area of Avenor also supplied marijuana to users in Maamobi. The early “pushers” (sellers) in the ghetto then included Mahma Issaka, Awolah, Medicine, and Mamare. They obtained marijuana from different parts of Ghana for sale in Maamobi. The prevalence of social vices and criminal activities such as armed robbery came to be associated with smokers of marijuana.²¹ It was alleged that robbers were involved in the sale of marijuana and the glamorization of smoking it among the youth. Armed robbery, accompanied by the Hausa expression *Kawokudi* (“Bring money”), was so rife that this scenario gave a section of the community the name *Kawokudi*. Consequently, Maamobi became a major target of the country’s security agencies when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a military government that claimed that it wanted to rid the country of crime and corruption, came to power in 1979. This focus on Maamobi by the police and soldiers contributed to the collapse of America House. Barracks and later Four Junction emerged as major alternative ghettos. They are still popular and major ghettos that different consumers, including some Muslim youth, frequent. In the view of these Muslims, their ghetto marijuana smoking cult(ure) is spiritually, psychologically, and socially functional to their existence in an economically hard and squalid space like Maamobi, and not at variance or illegal or to be deemed un-Islamic.

MARIJUANA CONSUMPTION IN EARLY ISLAM AND VIEWS OF THE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT ABOUT IT IN ISLAM

The legality or illegality of marijuana has been debated in the post-Muhammed era of Islam for centuries. The contention basically evolves from the multiple definitions of *khamr*. No particular definition is sacrosanct, because it is the Qur'an that is infallible and not the interpreters.²² The definition of *khamr* can be contextualized in a specific geocultural milieu and time and it is difficult to wholly apply it to all Muslim communities, because in some areas in Africa staple foods contain some traces of intoxicants. For example, Muslims of the Savanna belt of West Africa continue to take fermented millet, corn, and sorghum without deeming them un-Islamic.

The consumption of marijuana found some currency in the culture of the Muslim world in the ninth century. Muslims from the Arabian world contacted marijuana-consuming societies in places such as Syria, Persia, and parts of Asia Minor through jihads after the Prophet's demise. The Islamic culture assimilated some of the eating norms, including marijuana consumption, of these places. Furthermore, the translations of Greek literature on medicine into Arabic by Islamic scholars exposed marijuana's therapeutic value. Consequently, some Muslim physicians cautiously experimented and recommended the therapeutic values of marijuana in the early part of the history of Islam. The physician al-Rhazes (c. 854/865–925) prescribed it for ear infections, dandruff, flatulence, and epileptic cases.²³ Some people used it to treat asthma, gonorrhoea, constipation, and poisoning;²⁴ to stimulate the appetite and aid concentration and hearing;²⁵ and to reduce libido. However, the abuse of it as a drug emerged in Muslim societies.

The spread of political unrest in various parts of the Muslim domain and the rise of many religious schools of thought, mysticism, sufism and sectarianism helped further the need for ways of escape from hard realities for many, and led to the wide spread [abuse of cannabis and] drug addiction.²⁶

Some Sufis used cannabis to endure the long hours of fasting, prayers, and solitary meditation.²⁷ Allegedly some members of the Hashishiyya, from which the word *assassin* evolved, which was a Sufi group reportedly founded around 1090, killed their opponents under the influence of marijuana. The marijuana connection to Hashishiyya violence partly provided a political motivation for the criminalization of marijuana in the Western world.²⁸ Shaikh Haidar, founder of the Haidari Sufi order in Kharasan (northwest Iran

and Afghanistan), who lived around AD 1200, reportedly used it and told his disciples, "Almighty God has bestowed upon you by a special favour the virtues of this plant, which will dissipate the shadows that cloud your souls and will brighten your spirits."²⁹ Other Sufis do not use marijuana because they deem it a bad psychoactive substance.³⁰

Arab Muslim traders may have also picked up the marijuana consumption norm from China and India and popularized it in the Arabian and Islamic world.³¹ Ibn Batuta reported that people ate marijuana, even in the mosques sometimes,³² during his travel through parts of the Islamic world in the fourteenth century. In Morocco, marijuana ("kaif" or "kif") featured in the religious ceremonies of the Sunusi sect.³³ The authorities prohibited it because of abuse in the thirteenth century.³⁴ Muslim jurists, historians, theologians, poets, and storytellers who were confronted by the silence of the Qur'an about marijuana and, more important, the multiple definitions of *khamr* discussed the "merits" and "evils" of the herb for centuries.³⁵ Some legal scholars interpreted *khamr*, often cited as wine, to include any intoxicant that befogs the mind. According to Dixon (1972),³⁶ *khamr* is derived from the verb *khamara* (to cover, or conceal) and could be extended to denote any substance that covers up the mind. However, some interpreters equated *khamr* with wine only.³⁷ Notwithstanding the semantic confusion, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools of law broadly defined *khamr* and consequently classified marijuana as an intoxicant, hence outlawed in Islam.³⁸ Consequently, Sheikh ibn Taymiyyah opined:

Sinful people smoke hashish because . . . it produces rapture and delight . . . to drunkenness. . . [I]t promotes dullness and lethargy . . . disturbs the mind and temperament, excites sexual desire, and leads to shameless promiscuity.³⁹

Shak-al-Harin, a thirteenth-century jurist, also argued, "All the destructive effects of wine are found in hashish many times over."⁴⁰

The Hanafi school of law's restricted definition of *khamr* allows moderate therapeutic use of marijuana. In the light of that outlook, a Shafute legal scholar, az-Zarkashi, opined in 1360 that "any use of wine is forbidden because it is unclean, unlike hashish which is permitted but not for intoxication." Another jurist, Agfashi, also declared in 1390, "Contrary to wine, hashish is used as medicine. It is not subject to punishment, and eating a small quantity of it is not forbidden as long as it does not influence the mind or senses."⁴¹ The outright rejection of marijuana by schools of thought apart from Hanafi is a kneejerk response to a challenge in society—abuse—and

not essentially a demonization of a plant, which is part of God's creation, a creation that Islam deems good.

MARIJUANA CONSUMPTION CULT(URE) OF THE GHETTO

The conscious consumption of marijuana as a vegetable "food" in Maamobi's ghettos, mainly animated by the deprived suffering masses, is considered by the Muslim youth who partake in it as a way of life that upholds a "special food." Whether they ingest it by chewing or drinking a concoction of it or inhaling smoke from the leaves, they regard the herb as food. Food here is construed as any substance that is consciously put into the human body to nourish and sustain its physiological, biological, spiritual, and psychic parts. The intention of consuming marijuana, within the context of this ghetto-based feeding lifestyle, a cult(ure), is to assist the holistic human composition to derive certain spiritual and health benefits and not to befog the mind. Hence they do not deem the herb, which they perceive as a visionary plant, as khamr. This ghetto-based lifestyle provides partakers with a certain sense of group distinctiveness and moral judgment.

As a supplier of social and moral identity, food generally transcends mere nourishment and fitness for humans. Some people rally around a particular diet or food item in their efforts to acquire a unique identity and/or a worldview in their pursuit of satisfaction in life. This is a direction that produces diet or food cults. For example, the ancient Hebrews derived an unusual sense of a unique group identity and a conviction of moral superiority over adherents of nonkosher dietary regulations. Those who deemed themselves true Hebrews therefore had to adhere to the kosher cult(ure). They disapproved of others who did not share their food preference. Similar is the African Hebrew Israelites community's obsession with a vegan diet. This community, which was started in the 1960s in the United States by African Americans but has now raised branches internationally, believes that a vegan diet is the healthiest and original food requirement that Yah (God) gave to humans (Genesis 1:29), the first blacks (Hebrews) of which they are descendants. Members of the group strictly adhere to a plant-based diet because it signifies a return to their true identity and obeisance to Yah, who chose them over others.

Food cults provide unique names to a particular food or dietary style that they draw their special identity from. For example, kosher as against nonkosher, plant-based diet as against non-plant-based diet. They usually find sci-

entific (pseudoscientific) and at times religious explanations and scriptural hermeneutics to justify their special food/diet as "best," superior, and healthy—physical, spiritual, and mental health—than others, or as a *conditio sine qua non* for health, even if one takes other foods. Followers tend to be emotionally attached to the food, not rationally per se, because of the sense of identity that they and the community that enfolds their membership derive from the diet. Such groups commonly advocate nutritional "musts." Consequently, their demonization of certain "foods" helps them to define their culture as distinct from the others whose dietary culture or foods they criticize as unhealthy to the human constitution. Their forceful rhetoric about their "hallowed" dietary preference helps them to attract followers who desire to move away from what the group criticizes as toxic and addictive.

The rhetoric of the culture of marijuana consumption in the ghetto advances certain fantastic scientific and religious and economic ideas about why the herb is a necessary food despite the opposing views of some Islamic scholars and Ghana's laws. In the ghetto opinion, many nonusers labor in trepidation before the mass media's adverse publicity of oppositions and hysteria, which has accompanied the reality of the herb. One of the realities of the ghettos about marijuana is the perceived supernatural powers of the herb to protect the consumer from evil. The second is its power to bring the user closer to God (Allah), the third is the silence of the Qu'ran about it, and the fourth is that their consumption of marijuana negotiates a form of nationalist resistance to the conspiracy of Western economic imperialists to kill its economic benefits to Ghana.

The consumption of marijuana has a unique way of fomenting group solidarity among smokers in the ghetto. The sharing of "joints," similar to the Rastafari practice of "Reasoning" and the Christian practice of the Eucharist, has a way of establishing a sense of we-feeling among smokers in the ghetto. In the ghettos, many smokers have a different hermeneutical meaning for *wee*. In the logic of the ghetto, the word *wee* means "all of us." The ghetto members have some degree of emotional attachment to each other due to the sharing of marijuana. It is the understanding of the communalism of the smoking cult(ure) that has over the years frustrated every attempt by non-smoking members of the community to eradicate all ghettos. The sense of we-feeling among smokers finds expression in the assistance that is extended to members in need. A number of the smokers have acquired vocational skills such as block molding, driving, and auto mechanics because of their association with the ghetto. Also, the cultic nature of the marijuana culture is

exemplified in the fact that members deem it their responsibility to unite in defense of another member who finds himself in trouble outside of the ghetto. The ghetto philosophy of solidarity is similar to the pre-Islamic Arabic philosophy that enjoined the Arabs to stand by their brother whether he is being oppressed or is the oppressor. In the Maamobi community, any attack on a marijuana smoker by a nonsmoker is often interpreted by smokers to mean an attack on all marijuana smokers. Thus, until quite recently, feuds have been a major feature of the Maamobi community. As part of the orientation into ghetto life, neophytes learn to see themselves as having a responsibility to protect other members of the ghetto.

Similarly, because marijuana smokers consider marijuana to be a type of food that has spiritual significance, smokers claim to possess some esoteric knowledge that is unavailable to nonsmokers. For example, another name for Four Junction, one of the oldest ghettos in the community, is the University of Four Junction. Members in the ghetto believe that the smoking of marijuana predisposes them to a kind of knowledge that helps them to offer cultic attention to Allah, the Ultimate Reality. Smokers consider nonsmokers absolutely ignorant about the ethos of social life, since the kind of knowledge that marijuana exposes them (marijuana smokers) to is unavailable to them (nonsmokers). It is also widely believed in the ghettos that marijuana has a way of stimulating critical and analytical thinking among smokers. That marijuana is able to stimulate critical thinking has encouraged some smokers to dabble in cyber scams, since they believe that, with the aid of marijuana, they are able to stay behind the computer for longer hours and also stupefy their clients. Proceeds from *Sakawa* are used to support members during marriage ceremonies (*awure*) and naming ceremonies (*Suuna*). Also, the belief that marijuana is a cultic food with spiritual significance has informed the decision by ghetto leaders to not encourage the sale of cigarettes and alcohol in the ghettos. While some ghetto members consume cigarettes and alcohol, albeit very moderately, the general understanding in the ghetto is that these other substances could undermine the inherent spiritual potency of marijuana. The prescribed practice in the ghetto is, therefore, that members "must" consume marijuana.

The cultogenic nature of the marijuana culture dovetails with the politics of the sale of marijuana. In the ghettos, marijuana is not sold to nonmembers. The substance is sold only to members of the ghetto and close friends of members of the ghetto. Much as this practice is well carved to outwit the police, who often organize swoops (known in the ghetto as "scatter"), it is

believed that nonmembers may not be able to identify with the kind of common episteme that is shared by all ghetto members.

Finally, the cult(ure) of marijuana has gender implications in terms of membership. It is believed that marijuana consumption predisposes smokers to a kind of knowledge that must be kept secret within the smoking fraternity. For example, it is believed that when one smokes, the jinns inhabiting the substance are able to lead one into venturing on business enterprises that could be very rewarding. Females, according to the philosophy of the ghetto, are ontologically unable to keep secrets. So the ghettos do not admit females as members. The cult(ure) of marijuana has been a magnetic force that attracts nonsmokers to the ghettos. Thus, over the years, state-sponsored negative testimonies, which filter through the media—print and electronic—have not been able to discourage new members from being initiated into the marijuana cult(ure). The cultogenic nature of marijuana has likewise been demonstrated in rituals that have evolved around the substance.

SMOKING OUT THE WITCH FROM THE SLUMS: MARIJUANA TO THE RESCUE

Marijuana's importance in the ghettos of Maamobi stems from the seemingly cultic belief of users that it has an inherent divine ability to make a positive impact on them. The most common way of consumption is smoking, which is a form of feeding/eating according to the smokers. Thus the herb is food, whether it is smoked or cooked and ingested. The herb is believed to be disliked by malevolent spirits. Smoke from it repels such spirits, especially those that support witchcraft. The marijuana users in the ghetto uphold a belief in witchcraft because such a notion is part of the cosmology of their indigenous society. Belief in the force of witchcraft as mostly antilife is very ubiquitous in African societies. The belief that witches use negative energy to retard the progress of people is a prevalent idea in Maamobi. The activities of witches are believed to be mainly nocturnal, and they are superhuman and cannot be understood by material investigation. Witches operate with their astral bodies to cause harm, especially diseases, death, and poverty to people. Thus, they cannot be confronted physically. Targets of witches experience the effect of a witchcraft attack not immediately but later, after the event. According to the cult(ure) lore of the ghetto, marijuana is an antidote to the metaphysical operations of witches who cause harm to their relatives and nonrelatives. Muslim youth in Maamobi are wary of the activities of witches.

Because of this fear, many resort to different spiritual means; they wear charms, rings, and amulets and inject into their bodies anti-witchcraft substances prepared by some Muslim ritual experts to protect themselves from witchcraft activities. It is this same mindset of finding security, and also a burgeoning mistrust in the commercialization of the anti-witchcraft services of many ritual experts, that has made some Muslim youth resort to feeding on marijuana, the ghetto-prescribed anti-witchcraft food. According to ghetto lore the spirit of a person is what witchcraft attacks; however, when people feed on marijuana the anti-witchcraft divine essence of the herb establishes with their spirit and protects it. Thus, the Muslim youth in the ghetto believe that the smoke of the herb undermines witchcraft and protects the smoker.

This conviction is a rationalized outlet for marijuana smokers in the ghetto to find a causative explanation for the existential challenges of life. Interestingly, witches are blamed for insanity and other psychotic cases in the ghetto community and not on marijuana, as most psychiatry books and experts will do. Witches are perpetually at work to mischievously interfere in people's lives and even cause them harm, such as insanity or death as they smoke. Thus, within the cult(ure) of marijuana use among Muslim youth in the ghetto, a ritual invocation of God's presence and security is performed before the herb is consumed. Most smokers recite the *Fatiha*, the first chapter of the *Qur'an*, and this is believed to also heighten the spiritual potency of marijuana. MacDanji⁴² explained this rite as follows:

I always recite the *Fatiha* before I smoke *taba*. I do this because *taba* has its own power and to activate that power, one must first plead with Allah, the creator of all things, including *taba*, to enjoy the spiritual benefits of *taba*. It is the activation of the inherent spirit in marijuana that drives away the spirit of witchcraft. Witches do not like the smoke of *taba*, because the smoke of *taba* is charged with the spirit of Allah. As researchers, you might have heard that every plant has a spirit inhabiting it. That explains why herbalists perform special rituals before they make use of any herb. In the ghettos, we also believe that *taba* as an herb has its own powers, and its powers are best invoked to counter evil spirits.

This practice is similar to what most herbalists do in Ghana. Herbalists perform rituals before taking parts of certain plants for medicine because they believe that permission must be sought from the spirits in the plant, which would also make the therapeutic components of the plant potent. Many of the Muslim youth in the ghetto believe that it is a benevolent spirit;

many deem it jinn, in or attached to marijuana, and that gives the vegetable an anti-witchcraft ability.

The belief in jinns is prevalent among Muslims in Ghana. The Qur'an expressly justifies the existence of jinns, whom it is reported share certain attributes with humans. For example, they worship and depend on God (Qur'an 51:56); they are social, and they can learn and listen (Qur'an 46:29-30); and they can work (Qur'an 34:13). Nevertheless, they are not human; they are invisible, fiery in composition, and can perform miracles. The belief about the jinns-marijuana nexus is part of a unique marijuana food cult(ure) carried by ghetto Muslim youth, which is not universally shared by all Muslims. The general understanding among the ghetto community is that a symbiotic relationship is between the vegetable and spiritual worlds, hence the one between marijuana and jinns, and humans can exploit that alliance to fight evils spirits, especially witchcraft in the human world. In line with this thought, an older Muslim mystic, locally known as a Mallam, who consumes marijuana even though he is not a member of the marijuana culinary cult(ure) of the ghetto, shared his experience:

[J]inns can be ordered to work [for] human beings . . . for negative things. [and] for constructive purposes. Those of us who use marijuana are able to implore the jinns to protect us from witches. And this we believe works for us. [J]inns are more powerful than witches.

WORSHIPPING GOD IN SILENCE: THE GRACE OF MARIJUANA

Marijuana has a tranquillizing chemical compound. The ghetto Muslim youth claim that since marijuana keeps one in a relaxed mood it is able to induce a high level of concentration in them, and also helps them in their spirituality because it allows them to "stay cool" in deep thought and meditate on Allah and the Qu'ran when they "feed" on it. The popular out-of-the-ghetto assumption that marijuana induces aggressiveness and violence does not hold legitimacy in the psyche of the Muslim youth in the ghetto. They believe that aggression is produced by synthetic drugs and not the natural herb of marijuana. Masud apologetically contended:

Taba alone cannot let anyone go wild . . . to be violent. Anyone who smokes taba and misbehaves should be checked properly. Such a person uses other substances. Such a person is likely to quaff alcohol . . . or . . . uses heroin and cocaine in addition to taba. I have been smoking taba for so many years and I

have lots of experience . . . concerning this precious herb. . . . [M]arijuana rather helps one to concentrate on Allah and meditate upon His word. Whenever I smoke taba in the company of my friends, [I] am able to think deeply about Allah and . . . about my life.

The view that marijuana alone will not predispose anyone to violence until another drug or chemical is consumed alongside it, because the herb is a tranquilizer that can also aid the spiritual exercise of meditating on Allah and by extension life, is common to many youth in the ghetto. Because of the perceived ability of marijuana to connect the consumers to the divine, the Muslim youth circle of the ghetto deem the herb a "sacred" vegetable food that "must" be taken and venerated as a natural conduit to spiritual experience despite the fact that several Muslim scholars have proscribed it because of the unsettled controversy about the herb's propriety in the wider space of Islam and the risk of being prosecuted if caught using or possessing marijuana in Ghana.

THE SILENCE OF THE QUR'AN: A JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CONSUMPTION OF MARIJUANA

It is curious that this circle of youth will risk their freedom to pursue a foodway fixated on the consumption of marijuana even though one can be shunned by other Muslims and can be imprisoned for a minimum of five years if one is caught experimenting with marijuana. What justification do they give? The first is that the Qur'an and Hadith are silent about the herb and the consumption and smoking of it. Nevertheless, jurists who criticized the post-Mohammed social issue of the consumption of marijuana broaden the definition of *khamr* to include marijuana and use the injunctions against alcohol to incriminate the consumption of marijuana. Even though marijuana and alcohol are both intoxicants, the two are not the same. Also, according to knowledge from the ghettos, consumers of this medicinal plant are capable of performing religious rituals, while alcohol-intoxicated persons can hardly perform them. One of Muslim youth respondents who sought a defense from the Bible, a book that Muslims are enjoined to respect, and the Qur'an to justify marijuana consumption revealed in his ghetto hermeneutics of the books that

the silence of the Qur'an is not for nothing. Allah knew that the smoking [consumption] of marijuana is not haram. Granted that it is bad, Allah would

have revealed it to the Prophet even if it was unknown during the time of the Prophet. [L]ogically . . . Allah is all knowing and He knew . . . that today marijuana would be smoked. [I]f Allah did not want marijuana, He would have revealed its prohibition to the Prophet. There are . . . issues that the Qur'an talks about that were unknown during the Prophet's time. If marijuana were bad, Allah would not have also created it. But since the Qur'an and the Hadith are silent about hemp, we should go to the Bible, because . . . the two religious books are all from the same one God, who gave the same message to all the prophets, but only at different times. Psalm 87 and Numbers 6 . . . come to the same conclusion with me that God, after all, is not against the smoking of hemp. If you agree with me on this principle then we can refer to all those who criminalize hemp as hypocrites and blind . . . about God's creation. People who condemn the smoking of hemp do so out of ignorance and religious bigotry—they are forever blind . . . and they will never know anything about its potency until God opens their eyes one day. Out of ignorance when I go to the mosque to pray as a Muslim, some people tend to look down on me as someone who is practicing a syncretism of religion—Islam and Rastafarianism,⁴³ because of my dreadlock. I know that no man other than God can judge me and so I am not worried about their ignorance.

The silence of the Qur'an and Hadith is a justification leeway for the peculiar feeding habit in the ghetto, so despite the contention of some Muslim scholars that alcohol befogs the mind and so does marijuana so the ban on alcohol should be extended to the use of the plant, the ghetto marijuana smokers deem alcohol and marijuana as two different things in terms of composition and the effects they have on humans. All the marijuana smokers that we conversed with in the ghettos were of the opinion that if marijuana were inherently bad, God would have revealed that to the Prophet. Claiming that there are harmful things that have not been criminalized, such as cigarettes, whose boxes commonly bear the inscription that it is harmful to health, yet their precious vegetable has been demonized, they remain steadfast in believing that marijuana is harmless.

WHY MARIJUANA AND NOT TOBACCO?

Marijuana, according to ghetto knowledge, has no negative effect and should not be criminalized, unlike other legalized substances like cigarettes and alcohol that should rather be criminalized because they commonly cause cancer and dipsomania. With a contrived Afrocentric view, the lore contends that the criminalization of marijuana is part of a grand plan that is politically

and economically motivated by some Western capitalist powers to keep Ghana, and by extension Africa, a puppet of the West. The criminalization of the herb during the colonial period is linked to the assumption that marijuana, which was comparatively cheap and readily available, especially in the forest areas, competed with the sale of cigarettes, which was introduced by the colonizer's economy. As a result, the colonial regime's commercial interests in the sale of cigarettes had to be protected with the purposeful criminalization of marijuana. Thus, the criminalization of marijuana's cultivation, sale, and use is a neocolonial plan to deprive Ghana, and many African countries, of a huge source of revenue. Consequently, its proscription by the government in the postcolonial moment today is a neocolonialist appeasement. The above view was articulated by a ghetto member as follows:

They will criminalize everything African. Why would they criminalize *taba*? Why don't they criminalize cigarettes, which they themselves universally agree is harmful to human health? Why won't they criminalize alcohol since, again, it is believed to be harmful to human health? They always claim they burn *taba*, when they arrest any pusher with the substance, but have you ever heard them burn cocaine? This white people have an agenda: an agenda to keep Africans continuously poor? If their land were to be good enough to sustain the cultivation of marijuana, do you think they would have criminalized it? You are educated, and it is good you have come to us to seek our opinion on this substance. We will continue to consume *taba* because we know the benefit we derive from it.

CONCLUSION

Whether marijuana is entirely harmless is contentious. In the ghetto, the herb is taken as each person sees fit, but it is commonly smoked. It can be prepared in the form of a tea or used as condiments to other foods. It is cut and cleaned of excess seeds on a wooden board, sanctified with a few drops of water, and recut and rolled in smoking paper into conical-shaped "rolls" or "spliffs." The act of passing the spliff or the cup of tea from a friend to a friend or around the brethren is considered a reverential and unification practice in the ghetto and an invocation toward powers of the spiritual world. When smoked in a gathering it symbolizes the act of physical, mental, and spiritual association among the assembly. It is accepted as binding the participants together in the fullness of God, thereby creating a concerted flow of mutual meditation and reasoning among those participating in the sacramen-

tal feeding. For them, it can reveal the divine and living presence in all humans. It releases an energy flow carrying the revelations of the inner creative source otherwise covered in the grosser reality of the mundane physical body. This experience is a positive act toward God and not a negative end.

Every now and then, some persons are imprisoned for either possessing or cultivating marijuana in Ghana, and yet reports on the consumption of marijuana continue to find space in the newspapers. The ghettos in Maamobi continue to record neophytes who join the ghetto lifestyle to consume marijuana because of the rhetoric of the ghetto lore about the perceived benefits associated with the substance. The users claim that, contrary to outside social rhetoric intended to sway them from their attitude to and belief in the herb, they alone are the sum awareness and reality of their own health, spiritual, and social experience of the herb within their body and spirit and mind. They argue that the ethical and medical reality of the herb resides solely with the individual and his conscience. They choose to see it as fit because they know and for them it is so! Their consumption has not succumbed to the negative testimonies about the substance. Its historical significance in Islam and in the indigenous milieu of Ghana and its assumed ability to ward off witches continue to make the consumption of marijuana current among some Muslim youth in the ghetto. The fact that marijuana continues to enjoy some significant acceptance in Ghana requires a broader discourse on the substance. We need to do a good analysis of this subject to clear doubt about the benefits (or otherwise) of marijuana.

NOTES

1. Lester Grinspoon and James B. Bakalar, *Marihuana, the Forbidden Medicine* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993).
2. Lynn Zimmer and John P. Morgan, *Marijuana Myths, Marijuana Facts: A Review of the Scientific Evidence* (New York: Lindesmith Center, 1997).
3. Gabriel Nahas and C. Latour, "The Human Toxicity of Marijuana," *Medical Journal Australian* 156 (1992): 495–97.
4. Elaine Walters, *Marijuana: An Australian Crisis* (Malvern, Australia: E. Walters, 1993).
5. G. E. Woody and W. MacFadden, "Cannabis Related Disorders," in *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*, 6th ed., edited by H. I. Kaplan and B. Sadock (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkens, 1995), 810–16; United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2009* (New York: United Nations, 2009); United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2010* (New York: United Nations, 2010).

6. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *World Drug Report 2014* (New York: United Nations, 2014), 41.
7. Gary J. Miller, *Drugs and the Law: Detection, Recognition & Investigation*, 2nd ed. (Longwood, FL: Gould, 1997), 412.
8. Henry Bernstein, "Ghana's Drug Economy: Some Preliminary Data," *Review of African Political Economy* 26, no. 79 (1999): 13–32.
9. Joseph B. Asare, *The Problems of Drug Abuse in Ghana* (Accra: Sedco Publishing Ltd., 2008), 26.
10. N. Joshua Kudadjie and Robert Kwasi Aboagye-Mensah, *Christian Social Ethics* (Accra: Asempa, 2004), 159.
11. Dr. Asiama, a lecturer at the School of Performing Arts, and practitioner of herbal medicine, interview by author, Accra, Ghana, October 4, 2010.
12. Dr. Asiama interview.
13. Dr. Asiama interview.
14. Some of the traditional priests and priestesses interviewed for this study pleaded anonymity because of the legal status of the substance in the country. We are, therefore, unable to mention their names.
15. Vincent Adjei, an ex-serviceman, interview by author, Accra, Ghana, November 13, 2010.
16. Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa: A Case Study of Ghana," *African Affairs* 104, no. 416 (2005): 429–47.
17. Akyeampong, "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa," 433.
18. Ato Essel, "Ghana's War on Narcotic Drugs," *GhanaWeb*, May 25, 2009, <http://209.197.117.98/GhanaHomePage/features/Ghana-s-War-On-Narcotic-Drugs-162563>, accessed on October 1, 2015.
19. Akyeampong, "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa," 435.
20. The position of the chief imam is supported by other elders of the community, including Baba Moro Issa, chief of Wangara community, and Alhaji Haruna Bukari Dabre, assemblyman for Maamobi East Electoral Area.
21. Anthony Prempeh, interview by author, Accra, Ghana, September 12, 2008.
22. A. Ali Mazrui, *Islam: Between Globalization and Counterterrorism* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006).
23. Gabriel Nahas, "Hashish in Islam: 9th to 18th Century," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 58, no. 9 (1982): 823.
24. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam."
25. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam," 823.
26. Sami Hamarneh, "Pharmacy in Medieval Islam and History of Drug Addiction," *Medical History* 16, no. 3 (1972): 231.
27. Hamarneh, "Pharmacy in Medieval Islam and History of Drug Addiction," 232.
28. Oakley Sten Ray and Charles Ksir, *Drugs, Society & Human Behaviour* (St. Louis: Mosby Year Book, Inc., 1996).
29. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam," 816–17.
30. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam," 817.
31. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam."
32. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam," 820.
33. Hamarneh, "Pharmacy in Medieval Islam."
34. Hamarneh, "Pharmacy in Medieval Islam," 236.
35. Nahas, "Hashish in Islam," 824.
36. Cited in Nahas, "Hashish in Islam."

37. Nahas, “Hashish in Islam.”
38. Nahas, “Hashish in Islam,” 825.
39. Ruqaiyyah Maqsood, *Islam* (Lincolnwood, IL: NTC, 1994), 160.
40. Nahas, “Hashish in Islam,” 826.
41. Nahas, “Hashish in Islam,” 825.
42. The real names of our respondents are not used because of security reasons. The statements attributed to the names are accurate, but the names are fictitious.
43. Many followers of Rastafari wear a hairstyle popularly called dreadlocks and consume marijuana as a holy sacrament.

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