

**Senses and Local Environment: The Case of Larabanga in the Northern
Region of Ghana**

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Abstract

This study argues that the sensory order employed during everyday activities deepens our understanding of local people's relations with the environment. This study was conducted in Larabanga, Ghana, employing anthropology of the senses and phenomenology. The study reveals that people acquire ways of doing things and organising their lives through their sensory engagement with their environment. Their engagement is further highlighted by the way they make themselves a home in their environment which informs about these sensory orders.

Keywords: Senses, Larabanga, Kinaesthesia, Livelihood, Islamic religion, Skin politics

Dedication

To Ellen Abudey and Ellen Sekyi

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Introduction

“Sensorial anthropology has been concerned with how patterning of the senses varies from one culture to the next in accordance with meaning and emphasis attached to each of the modalities of perception” (Howes 1993, 3). The emergence of sensorial anthropology has helped to give insight into sensory elaborations among cultures (e.g Geurts 2002; Howes 1993; Classen 1991). Scholars have detailed how some societies or cultures have sensory models that extend beyond the five traditional senses (e.g Geurts 2002; Stroeken 2008). Many more have demonstrated through detailed ethnography how aspects of cultural values are displayed through body movement and gestures, therefore constituting a part of the sensory orders (e.g Geurts 2002; Howes 1993). Through these ethnographic works, we come to comprehend how people tend to perceive their world. In this thesis, I explore the relations of the Larabanga people with their environment through the lenses of anthropology of the senses and phenomenology. As a Ghanaian citizen, I have travelled extensively across the length and breadth of the country. I had the opportunity to witness the people of Larabanga go about their daily activities and the impact of the Mole National Parks on their efforts to meet their livelihood needs. I was in total shock when I learnt through interactions with some members of the community that they and other communities initially resided and lived on the park land. The government of Ghana reached an agreement with them, promising that the park will bring development to their community, but this engagement has not been fulfilled. The Larabanga situation awoke my interest in understanding people’s relations with their environment to contribute to debates on local people’s involvement or non-involvement in the creation and management of parks. Therefore I undertook this study to share in the sensory experience(s) of the local people of Larabanga as

they are the closest to the Mole National Park in Ghana. More specifically I experienced how and which senses are employed in the performance of their everyday life activities.

My ethnographic account is based on my lived experience among the people of Larabanga in 2009. While fieldwork is always a phenomenological exercise, I found it useful to also apply a phenomenological approach for its strength to account for the relationships that exists between what we do and our senses. I realized that it will take lived experiences to elicit essential meaning, especially concerning the senses, to find answers to the following questions: How and which senses are employed in the everyday life of the people of Larabanga? How are these senses used during everyday activities? Finally, more encompassingly, how is paying attention to these sensory engagements useful to understanding the community life of the people of Larabanga? In turn, how can it inform environmental policies about these engagements in the management of parks?

Methodologically I approach this study ‘phenomenologically’ conducting ethnography for three months. Theoretically, I use Marcel Mauss’s Habitus (Mauss 1973), Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962) and Tim Ingold’s dwelling perspective (Ingold 2011) in relation to the case of the people of Larabanga. I argue that sensory engagements showcased during daily activities by local people deepen our understanding of their relations with their environment. By bringing to light the relationship between the people of Larabanga and their environment through their sensory experiences, this study contributes to studies on the anthropology of the senses. In addition, if we are to sustain natural resources in the face of population growth and development, considering the fact that resources of the world are becoming a series of bio resources and commodities, this research creates the opportunity for environmentalists, conservationist, scholars and the international community to know about the

Ghanaian context thereby creating the opportunity for the local people to benefit from some dialogue with regards to issues which affect them.

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter discusses the theoretical perspective used to explain the findings. The chapter also discusses how the fieldwork was conducted. The contextual background of Larabanga and the Northern region is described in the second chapter. The third chapter gives an ethnographic account of religious activities in Larabanga and the sensory modes or codes that emerge. Similarly chapters four and five describe respectively people's sensory experiences as they engage in political and livelihood activities. I conclude with the relevance of the study to the academi and international community.

Chapter One

Theoretical framework and methodology

Introduction

Through their daily activities, societies develop practices, know-how, skills and beliefs that sustain their existence in their environment. These practices, ways of knowing, doing and being constitute the culture of the people, revealing how members of a society conduct and organize their life. Embedded in a group culture are aspects highlighting sensory orders or sensorium. Sensory order “is a pattern of relative importance and differential elaboration of the various senses, through which children learn to perceive and experience the world and in which pattern they develop their abilities” (Geurts 2002: 5). Furthermore, over the years, people establish relations with their environment through particular sensory orders. In other words, embodied sensory experiences are acquired through everyday life in particular environments.

The central aim of this thesis is to understand people’s relations with their environment. I approach this understanding of local people’s relations with their environment through the senses. Specifically my argument is that paying attention to how the senses are used in the everyday activities of the people of Larabanga gives in-depth understanding of their relations to their environment. The encompassing interest in people’s relations with their environment lies in the possibility to recognize the knowledge developed to maintain this environment sustainably. In turn, the specific history of Labaranga and the development of a National Park nearby 55 years ago could benefit from such a study which makes their ‘traditional’ knowledge recognizable and interest with conflict with the land and the desire to highlight useful ways to manage the environment through proximity with the latter

In this chapter, I explain the theoretical perspectives I utilized in pursuing this goal. In the initial section, I discuss approaches in the anthropology of the senses to clarify how I will understand the key concept of the thesis: the senses. Secondly, I discuss the theoretical notions of habitus, embodied phenomenology and the dwelling perspective of Marcel Mauss, Merleau-Ponty and Tim Ingold. Through these frameworks, I connect the everyday practices of the people and their sensory orders to understanding the relationship that they establish with their environment. Furthermore, I discuss how I went about my fieldwork in Larabanga. I describe my methodological approach and the tools I used during data collection.

1.1 Approaches to sensorial studies

Sensorial anthropology is to a large extent a post-colonial endeavour (Stroeken 2008). Since its emergence there have been several views concerning what exactly should be or not be the focus of anthropology of the senses (e.g. Howes 1988, 1991; Synnott 1991; Stroeken 2008; Ingold 2000; Parr 2010). However, preceding the emergence of the subfield of anthropology of the senses, the narrowest or everyday understanding of the senses has been based on the five traditional senses namely touch, hearing, smell, sight and taste advocated by Aristotle (Geurts 2002). As stated by Geurts (2002, 228), the above understanding of the senses “revolves around the idea that we have bodily structures that receives stimulus from objects outside our bodies and these organs send messages to the brain that are registered and finally interpreted by the mind”. Reading from the literature within the subfield of the anthropology of the senses, three broad perspectives have emerged. These are the multi-sensory approach, the cross-sensory approach (Stroeken 2008) and sensory production approach (Chau 2008).

According to Stroeken (2008, 466) scholars concerned with a “multi-sensory approach depict culture as specializing in a sensory mode such as tactility (Howes) or kinaesthesia (Geurts)”. In other words, they are concerned with “how different cultures may have different configurations of senses or sensory orders” (Chau 2008, 486). In this case, sensory experience/perception is considered both a physical and cultural act; therefore, the senses of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch are not the absolute means to apprehending physical phenomenon but avenues for the transmission of societal values (Classen 1997, 401). In other words, such perspectives focus on “non-verbal and multi-sensorial experiences in non-western cultures based on the assumption that every culture is prone to elaborate on one of the sensory modes – ocular, tactile, kinaesthetic, and so on- at the expense of others” (Stroeken 2008, 466). Within the multi-sensory approach, scholars focus on interpreting sensory orientations of specific cultures or societies. Examples include Howes’ (1992) study amongst the people of Dabu and Kwoma in Papua New Guinea. In this study, he compared their sensory models, analysing the collective importance of their diverse sensory practices such as the importance of shining bodies, the connection between love magic and scents of mint and ginger, and the aural power associated with names. In a similar approach in her study among the Incas, Classen (1993) explored the world of the Incas focusing on how they are organized, disordered and reconfigured. She did that by studying their various sensory symbols (Classen 1997). In her book *Culture and Senses: Bodily Ways of Knowing in an African Community*, Geurts (2002) tried to find answers to how Anlo-ewe speaking people know what they know. She revealed that among the Anlos, balance is considered a sense. Furthermore among the Anlo-ewe speaking people the senses of sight, taste and hearing belong to a large class of words with the prefix *nu* literally meaning “thing” (2002: 44). This is because among the Anlo-ewe speaking people the

senses of sight, taste and hearing are concerned with apprehending external phenomena (2002:46). Finally, she highlighted that the Anlo-ewe speaking people consider sensation as *seselelame* meaning “feeling in the body” (2002, 45). Geurts linguistically and cognitively detailed the sensorium or sensory order that constitutes the culture of the Anlo-ewe people. Paul Stoller (1989, 128-129) revealed the sensory life of the people of Niger. For example, he studied the value of the fragrance of perfume among Songhay women and people in general. Stoller described into detail how spirits are presented with fragrances by the women. These studies explored the sensory orientations of different cultures, revealing that sensory elaboration extends beyond the five traditional senses.

The second perspective, that is, the cross sensory approach advocated by Ingold (2000) agreed that sensory models extend beyond the five traditional senses, but then challenged the idea of uniform sensory model development by members of the same culture. Accordingly, Ingold argued that the postulations underpinning the multi-sensory approach constitute a return or a repetition of to the mind-body dichotomy because they are not concerned with the variety of sensory experiences generated in the course of people’s practical, bodily engagement with the world around them, but with how these experiences are ordered and made meaningful within the concepts and categories of their culture (2011, 283). Ingold therefore postulated a cross-sensory perspective where within a culture different sensory engagements can be developed by two individuals of that culture. Roberts Desjarlais, in his book *Sensory Biographies* (2003), revealed how two elderly women developed heterogeneous sensory engagements of the world even though they are of the same culture (Chau 2008. 487). During Desjarlais’s fieldwork among the people of Yolmo, Nepal, he tried to understand phenomena such as working of times, form, perception, bodies, selfhood, suffering, personal agency, morality, vision, memory and language

as they have taken form in the life of the informants he was working with (Chau 2008, 487). Consequently, an elderly woman Kisang Omu's (Desjarlais' informant) life history is full of concerns of sounds, especially the sounds of others, while another elderly woman Ghang Lama's (another informant) life history is informed by memories and visions (Chau 2008, 487). In this example we see how two different people develop different sensorial experience within the same culture.

Stroeken (2008) critiqued both multi-sensory and cross-sensory perspectives arguing that they all rather tend to further deepen the distinction that has prevailed concerning western and non-western cultures. He argues further that both the "multi-sensory approach and cross-sensory comparison are in a danger of elevating either the senses or difference in cultures because they do not sufficiently account for cross cultural empathy and plurality within a culture" (2008, 473). Stroeken proposed a sensory code model drawing on Howes' sensory modes and Ingold's dwelling perspective in his study of the Sukuma culture. He argued that sensory codes help to recognise shift in sensory perception both culturally and cross-culturally (2008, 482).

In the third perspective, the sensory production model advocated by Adam Yuet Chau (2008), he argues that the *active participation of members as social agents* in their environment or world culminates in the *production* of sensorially rich social world (Chau 2008, 485). In this approach Chau attaches importance to the active participation of community members and the production process. During his fieldwork in rural Shaanbei in Northern Shanxi Province of North-Central China, he highlighted with detailed ethnography how the people through their temple festival produce *honghuo* (red-hot sociality) a form of 'social sensorium'. Briefly, during the festival large numbers of people gather at the temple to worship. At the gathering there are

multi-sensory stimulations as the people engage in diverse activities. These include talking, milling around, shouting, eating, drinking, smoking, playing, dancing, singing, burning incense gambling and more. The gathering of numerous people is what Chau, calls massing. This massing is a necessary condition for *honghuo*-making. Chau (2008, 500) writes, the “temple festival are not simply expression of people relationship with deities but rather they are also at the same time a construction and affirmation of such relationship”. Therefore, “the imperative to produce *honghou* (red-hot sociality) through the techniques of sensorialized massing points to the need in theorizing about the body, the senses and being-in-the-world to bring the social back into the picture” (ibid.)

My study, on the other hand, is distinctively concerned with the relationship of members of a community and their environment. In other words, it is about how their sensory orders inform their relations with their environments. As Howes writes, “we relate to and create our environment through all of our senses” (Howes 2005, 7). Therefore, with a focus on the everyday life activities of the people, we grasp the various sensory models and sensory codes that are employed and through these sensory models we tend to comprehend the people’s relations with their environment. Based on the aim and approach of this study, the three sensory models I discussed above are together relevant to understanding the case of Larabanga, especially in the ways they help to reveal relations with their environment. Further, three sensory approaches are compatible with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, which relies upon an understanding of culture as habitus as postulated by Marcel Mauss and adopts Merleau-Ponty’s embodied phenomenology and Tim Ingold’s dwelling perspective..

I will give detail description of Larabanga later in chapter two, but briefly, I will describe Larabanga as a ‘uniquely complex’ community. I use the phrase ‘uniquely complex’

due to the location of the community, its history, tourist attractions, national park, livelihood activities and other facets that constitute their environment. With this 'uniquely complex' attribute I relied on the habitus, embodied phenomenology and dwelling perspective as theoretical perspectives because they provide a good opportunity to account for the relations of the people with their environment through the senses.

1.2 Habitus, embodied phenomenology and dwelling perspective

Mauss (1973) in his paper *Techniques of the Body* introduced the concept Habitus. By habitus, Mauss was referring to every human activity that involves the body. These include movements such as walking, jumping running, dancing; techniques of birth, infancy, sleeping, waking, and other body activities. Mauss argued that the human body is man's first 'instrument' and most neutral instrument" (1973, 75). With this instrument as human beings, we have lived in the world and learned to adapt to its changes. From childhood to adulthood, our bodies have adapted and learned several ways of doing things and behaving. More precisely, in our quest to survive in different climatic conditions, our bodies have learned to cope. In our effort to satisfy our hunger and thirst, our bodies have learned and adapted multiple mechanisms to achieve well-being, not only within a specific period of time, but over years, generations, and across continents and societies. Mauss writes that, the term habitus:

does not designate those metaphysical *habitudes*, that mysterious 'memory', the subjects of volumes or shot and famous theses. These habits do not just vary with the individual and their imitations, they vary especially between societies, educations, proprieties, and fashions, prestige. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than in the ordinary way, merely the soul and repetitive faculties (1973, 73).

Mauss gave an example of a peculiar gait adopted by Native Maori women of New Zealand: a loose-jointed swinging of the hip that was acquired by these women in youth. According to

Mauss, mothers drilled their daughters to accomplish this peculiar gait called *onioni*. Clearly Mauss is highlighting the ability of different cultures to develop different uses of the body and in different contexts. Movement, as I indicated in my example above, is one of the basic techniques of the body. In terms of the senses, movement is also called kinaesthesia or muscle movement. I therefore argue that sensation is part of body techniques. The Anlo-ewe speaking people from Ghana who consider sensation (*seselelame*) a feeling in the body is an example of a technique of the body constituting a mode of sensory perception (Geurts 2002). This argument also falls within the defining characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's notion of embodiment.

The works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty do not only highlight the unity between the mind and body but also between body and the senses. Merleau-Ponty (1962) claims that, the body is central to whatever we claim to know as individuals and groups. With the notion of embodied phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty postulates that perception is an embodied activity. That is to have lived in an environment means the presence of a body that perceives. In his book *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) Merleau-Ponty epistemologically argues that, what we know is what we have experienced (bodily experience). Merleau-Ponty called this lived experience “*embodied*” experience, which precedes all new engagements in the world. Explaining further he maintains that “the body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having the body is, for a living creature, to be involved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and be continually committed to them” (1962, 82). In *Eye and Mind* (1964), he explains the continuous interlacing between seeing and moving, always working hand in hand. He argued further that in employing our senses such as the eye to see, or the hand to touch is not an activity taking place outside of the person, but is together the powers and the same body integrated into one and the same action (1962, 317-318). Meaning sensing or sensory

experiences is the basis of bodily experience. He writes, “our body is not merely one expressive space among other bodies, for that is simply the constituted body. That is, the body is the origin of the rest, expressive movement itself, that which causes them to begin to exist as things, under our hands and eyes” (1962, 169). Explaining further:

Each of us sees himself as it were through an inner eye which from a few yards away is looking at us from the head to the knees. Thus the connecting link between the parts of our body and that between our visual and tactile experience are not forged gradually and cumulatively. I do not translate the ‘data of touch’ into the language of seeing’ or *vice versa*—I do not bring together one by one the parts of my body; this translation and this unification are performed once and for all within me: they are my body, itself. Are we then to say that we perceive our body in virtue of its law of construction...(1962, 173)

What Merleau-Ponty means is that through our senses we experience the world of which our body is part. In other words, “bodily experience forces us to acknowledge an imposition of meaning which is not the work of a universal constituting consciousness, a meaning which clings to certain contents” (1962, 170).

Ingold, on the other hand, argues that the recognition of the perceiver (human being) as a being in the world means the recognition of an ‘embodied’ presence (2011, 169). This very notion of an *embodied* presence underlines the postulations of Merleau-Ponty. Ingold (2011) argues - opposing the separation of humans from the ecosystem- that humans engage with their environment practically through which they accumulate knowledge and establish relationships with their environment and they are the resultant of skills, sensitivities, orientations that they have developed through long experiences of conducting their life in their environment (Ingold 2000).

Drawing from the works of Martin Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Ingold defended the collapse of the dichotomy between mind and body as well as nature and culture (the ontologies of the Cartesian Rationalism). He indicated that every human is first and foremost a being-in-the-

world (a concept postulated by Heidegger). In other words, the total disengagement of the subject from the world is a pure fiction, therefore the self and world merge in the act of *dwelling* (Ingold 2011, 169). Therefore, the people of Larabanga cannot be separated from their environment because they merge with their environment through the act of *dwelling*. Ingold illustrated the dwelling perspective with the harvester painting of the Pieter Bruegel using the concepts of landscape and taskscape (Ingold 1993). The “landscape is the world as known to those who have dwelt there, who dwell there now and who will dwell there, and those whose practical activities take them through its manifold sites and who journey along its multitudinous paths” (Torp 2008, 12). Taskscape on the other hand is the practices or activities of those who dwell in the landscape. The basis of landscape is to be found in the practices of people who live there. These activities or practices constitute the taskscape (Torp 2008, 12). Therefore, it is through the taskscape that the social character of any landscape is produced hence a place of memory and temporality (Torp 2008). Torp’s sums up Ingold’s argument as follows:

An emphasis on ‘dwelling’ brings out the following characteristics of the relationship between people and landscape: that there are spatially and temporally distributed tasks; that these are organised through a variety of social practices; that relationships with what is taken to be ‘nature’ are embodied, involving a variety of senses; that there are physical components which constitute such ‘dwelling...’(2008, 12).

In this study, I employ the habitus of Mauss to signify the diverse body techniques that are involved in the performance of daily activities by the people of Larabanga. I use the notion of embodiment of Merleau-Ponty to mean the practical engagement of the people with their environment through their senses. Finally, I use the dwelling perspective of Ingold to mean the presence of people as agents in their environment as a result of which they have acquired their traditional ways of doing and knowing. The people of Larabanga are constantly journeying the paths in their community to farm, gather plants, hunt, pray or perform other daily activities.

Since the founding of their community, they have performed these activities and they will continue to perform them. Performing them involves several body techniques that Mauss spoke about. These body techniques also constitute the practical engagement of the people with their environment hence their embodied knowledge. These together make up what Ingold termed landscape and taskscape.

Through the taskscape sensory codes for respects, purity and other sensory models have been enshrined in aspects of the culture of the people highlighting important values and customs. The enshrining of these sensory codes further reveals the traditional knowledge of the people and also speaks of the resilience the people have to develop as they *dwell* in their environment for long periods of time. This is evidenced in their religious practices, customs, norms, values, beliefs, and taboos. The sensory experience embedded in the everyday life of the people reflects the forms of relationship that have been established with the land, plants animals, park authorities and others. These sensory experiences cannot be detached from the body due to the embodied presence of the people. Furthermore these sensory models that are embedded in religious, political livelihood activities such as farming, hunting, and gathering have become “somatic modes of attention” (Csordas 1993) which are “performatively elaborated” (Csordas 1993). Through the concepts of habitus and embodied phenomenology, we realise that the everyday life activities through which people experience their environment are embodied and constitute forms of knowledge in this environment. It is so because of the unity between subjects (human) and objects (plants, animal and others) which is a direct result of having a body (and its techniques). In this light, the people move and attend to each other in their dwelling environments. Attending to their sensory skills is thus attending to their relations with the environment.

1.3 Methodology

The method I apply is ethnography with a particular attention to the senses. In other words I took less the role of observer and more the role of apprentice making sure to be together-with as opposed to being a distant observer. I explored the sensory experiences of the local people of Larabanga in relation to their environment by attempting to experience them as well. The study was conducted from October 2011 to December 2011 using the following data collection tools: participant observation, group discussions and free listing, narrative or oral history and in-depth interview.

1.3.1 Entry into the field

My entry into Larabanga was through D.O 5, a friend who lives in Tamale.¹ He introduced me to Baba Seidu in Larabanga. D.O 5 is my gate keeper to Larabanga while Baba Seidu is my key informant. Baba Seidu was with me throughout my studies, he was not just informing me, yet also ‘being with me’ and sharing the lived experience of conducting a fieldwork with me. I was also ‘being with him’ sharing the lived experience in relations to their traditional knowledge, practice and everyday life activities. The names of the participants used in the study are pseudonyms.

1.3.2 Data collection

My approach, that is, phenomenology placed me in the position where I actively participated in everyday life of the people as means of assessing the senses enacted in the everyday. According to Russell, “active participation is when the researcher actually engages in almost everything that the people are doing as a means of trying to learn the cultural rules for

¹ He requested that I use this name, which is his artistic name.

behaviour” (2000, 265). Just like Malinowski (1922) in his pioneering participant observation in his study of the Trobriand Islanders, I also laid emphasis on everyday interactions and observation. I immersed myself in the community and partook in most activities that went on. My involvement was not only limited to my sense of sight, but included all other senses. This is to enable me to directly scrutinize the sensory experience involved in daily activities and also comprehend the meanings attributed to those experiences. In addition, it enhances the quality of the data I collect and also made the interpretation less cumbersome (Russell 2000). I structured my daily activities so that I could learn with and from the people in aspects of their everyday life such as religion, politics and livelihood.

I spent the first week getting used to everyday life activities like greetings. This was to familiarize myself with the community and the people so they would stop considering me a stranger, approach me easily and finally feel comfortable whenever I was around them and they were around me. During this first week, I accompanied my key informant to run most of his errands, visit his friends and hang out with them, play football, went for motor cycle riding, watching movies and dancing. I occasionally took a walk with him through the community as he greeted elders and friends. I joined in the greetings and he introduced me as a friend. In the evenings, I joined him and his friends to share jokes and make fun. The last two days in the first week as a means of ‘popularity and acceptance test’, I walked through the community alone and engaged in greetings and chatted with some people who had become conversant with me. Realizing that the people were at home with me, I started to involve myself in family and community activities with “eye”, “mind” and “body” of a researcher. Activities in which I partook ranged from sweeping, fetching of water, praying, fetching of firewood, farming, trading, cooking, and eating, to running errands. The main challenge was that, sometimes I

couldn't take note on the spot but had to wait to make notes when I am about to go to bed. I engaged in most of these activities with different families. Being an Islamic community, people are always awake as early as 4.30 am to pray. I occasionally also woke up at this time and joined my key informant in prayers, walked through the community to observe and participated in other morning activities. I also at times made unannounced visits to families where I had made friends and requested to participate in whatever they are doing. I ate, farmed, played, prayed, danced, sung and did every single activity with the local people. Immersed in community activities, I identified elderly people, farmers, hunters and other key people and arranged with them for my narratives, in-depth interviews, group discussions. My participation lasted the entire duration for which I was in the community and during that period I conducted two oral history interviews, six in-depth interviews, and one group discussion.

I used the narrative or oral history tool to seek for historical accounts of the community and their existence in relation to the environment as well as the other happenings in the community that none of my senses could access and only the elderly had the insight to tell and explain. These include political issues such relations with the park authorities, tourist and chieftaincy. In addition, I sought for information on the changes that have taken place in the community and the impact of these changes on their lives and the community as a whole. I conducted this narrative exercise with two elderly people, a male and a female. With the female elder, Grandma Ayisha, I discuss the gathering of plants, herbs and picking of fruits. These elders were selected because they are part of the council of elders in the chief's palace. The exercise took place on different days, as agreed by the participants, in the comfort of their homes after dinner. The narratives were conducted in Twi. I will give more details on Larabafi, the language spoken in Larabanga in the second chapter but I wish to state that Twi is one of the

common languages spoken in Ghana. I therefore conducted the narratives and all other forms of interaction in Twi because I cannot speak or understand Larabafi, but the local people speak and understand Twi. Each oral history lasted for about 90 minutes. The narratives were recorded on a digital audio recorder and later transcribed into English. Field notes were also taken with particular emphasis or attention on gestures, giggles, pauses and other physical expressions. The narrative or oral history took the form of storytelling and sharing of experience which made it possible to explore the lived experience.

During my participation in the activities of the community, I identified three farmers and three hunters for the in-depth interviews. I chose farmers and hunters because it will give me the opportunity to share in experience of conducting and organising subsistence activities with relations to the environment and also to understand the effect of the creation of the Mole National Park on the performance of these activities. The participants in this case were also selected because they are well experienced in what they do and well recognised in the community. Interviews with the farmers took place at different locations, time and days. Abusa had his first interview in the comfort of his home. The second interview session took place while I was taking a walk with him through the bushes and some other parts of the community. The final session was conducted on the farm. Hamza's interview sessions took place firstly in the market on Sunday. The second took place on the farm and the third and final in-depth interview was conducted during the Islamic festive day in a public space. The last farmer, Aunty Selina had all her interviews sessions conducted in the comfort of her home. The first interview session for all farmers lasted for 90 minutes, the second lasted for 45minutes and the final sessions lasted for 30 minutes. Locations, times, and venues were agreed upon by the farmers. All interviews as well, were conducted in Twi and later transcribed into English. With permission from farmers,

video recordings were done on the farm situation. Photographs were also taken alongside field notes. With the hunters, all the interview sessions were conducted in their homes on different days but all in the evenings. Each interview session lasted for 45 minutes. It was conducted in Twi and was recorded on a digital audio recorder and later transcribed into English. I also took notes alongside the interviews. The in-depth interviews also took the form of discussion, hence the possibility to share in the lived experience.

The final exercise I engaged in to accumulate enough data to understand relations with the environment was a group discussion. Initially, I did not plan on engaging groups in any form of discussions but the common reappearance of conflict in my oral history and interviews led me to bring some members of the community together for discussions on the issue of conflict and other issues relevant to my research and also relevant to them as well. I identified ten youth in the community and arranged with them for a possible discussion. These youths were selected because I encountered them several times while going about my usual community participations and I realise they have a lot to share. The venue and time was agreed upon by the participants. The discussion was set for an afternoon when most of them are free under the big tree (a tree located in the community where most people always go to take a rest). The discussion was conducted in Twi and the topics covered included: conflict with park authorities, land seizure, religious activities, tourism, how much they knew about their own community, what they do for their living and why they do what they do. The discussion lasted for two hours. The whole discussion was audio recorded. There was also note taking. Once again the group discussion does not only offer the chance for lived experience, but also brings to fore the social and economic dynamics of the location of the park on the people. This produces socially lived experience of situations like conflict and the loss of traditional knowledge.

Summary

Three broad perspectives have emerged since the development of sensorial anthropology. These are the multisensory, cross-culture and social production approaches. The aim of thesis which is to understand people's relations with their environment creates room to adopt the three models because they provide an opportunity to access the detailed sensorium of the people and how that informs their relations with their environment. Secondly, the three perspectives are compatible with the three theoretical frameworks behind this study. Habitus helps explain the various techniques involving the body like movements as people go about their daily activities. The embodied phenomenology explains the practical engagement of members of the community with their environment. Finally, the dwelling perspective shows that the presence of people in their environment is not just a collection of people, but a group of people who have organised activities, therefore making their presence a dwelling in their environment. Based on these theoretical foundations, I did ethnography in Larabanga with particular attention on the senses from October 2011 to December 2011. I conducted two oral histories, six in-depth interviews and a group discussion during three months of participant observation. In the next chapter, I describe the contextual background of Larabanga and the Northern region.

Chapter Two

Contextual background

Introduction

Larabanga is part of the Northern region of Ghana. In this chapter I discuss the background of the whole Northern region. I highlight the socio-demographic patterns of the people who inhabit the region. I describe the geography and environmental profile of the region. Further on, I share the story behind the founding of Larabanga and its relationship with the Gonja people. Finally, I give a general account of the current conditions and everyday happenings of the community. These include sensory orders, trading, the Mole National Park, tourism and more. The chapter unveils the core characteristics of the people of Larabanga, thereby creating the opportunity to understand the succeeding chapters that focus on their religion, politics and livelihood; the sensory experiences embedded in these aspects of the community life and how these sensory experiences turn to inform their relations to their environment.

2.1 Land and people of the Northern region

The Northern region is the largest region among the ten regions in Ghana. Ghana has a land area of 239,000.00 km. sq. (Ministry of Environment and Science 2002, 3). The Northern region alone covers 70,383 square kilometers of the country's land area (Ministry of Environment and Science 2002). It shares boundaries with neighboring countries like Togo to the east and Ivory Coast to the west. It shares boundaries with the Upper East and Upper West regions to the north. On the southern borders are the Brong Ahafo and Volta regions. Ghana has two major vegetation zones; the savannah woodlands which covers the north and coastal areas and the high forest zone, centered in the southwestern part of the country (Okley 2004, 3). The

Northern region is located within the savanna belt which consists of the Sudan, Guinea, coastal savanna as well as the forest-savanna transitional zone (Environmental Protection Agency 2002; Ministry of Environment and Science 2002).

The Northern region is under the influence of the tropical humid climatic conditions and experiences the two major seasons in Ghana. These are the rainy season and dry season. These are brought about by the harmathan, a dry dusty wind that blows along the northwest coast of Africa (Tamakloe 2004, 1). The Northern region has one rainy season during May to August (Dyasi 1985). The amount and distribution of rainfall varies from region to region as a result of difference in vegetation. The rainforest gets more than 1905mm of rainfall per annum while the Northern region gets 1016mm per annum (Dyasi 1985). From the middle of December to the end of March, the harmathan wind that blows from the northeast lowers the humidity resulting into a series of hot days and cold nights in the region.

The major ethnic groups that make up the Northern region are the Mole Dagbon, (52.2%) the Gurma, (21.8%) the Akan and the Guan (8.7%) (Ghana Statistical Service 2005). Among the Mole-Dagbon, the largest subgroups are the Dagomba and the Mamprusi, while the Komkomba are the largest of the Gurma, the Chokosi of the Akan and the Gonja of the Guan (GSS 2005). Dagomba is about a third of the population of the Northern region (GSS 2005). The region is divided into twenty districts. Language is one way of identifying the people of the Northern region (Awedoba 2006). According to Awedoba (2006), the people of the Northern region speak a variety of related languages which have been classified as members of the Gur sub family of languages. The languages spoken by the inhabitants of the region vary from district to district. The West Gonja, East Gonja and Bole speak the Gonja language. Dagbani, the language of the Dagomba, is spoken in nine of the thirteen districts (GSS 2005). The Kokomba

language is spoken mainly in some parts of Saboba-Chereponi, Zabzugu Tatale, East Gonja and Nanumba Districts (GSS 2005). More than half of the population of the region (56.2%) are Muslims. The rest are largely adherents of Traditional religion (21.3%), Christians (19.3%) and other religious groups (3.3%) (GSS 2005).

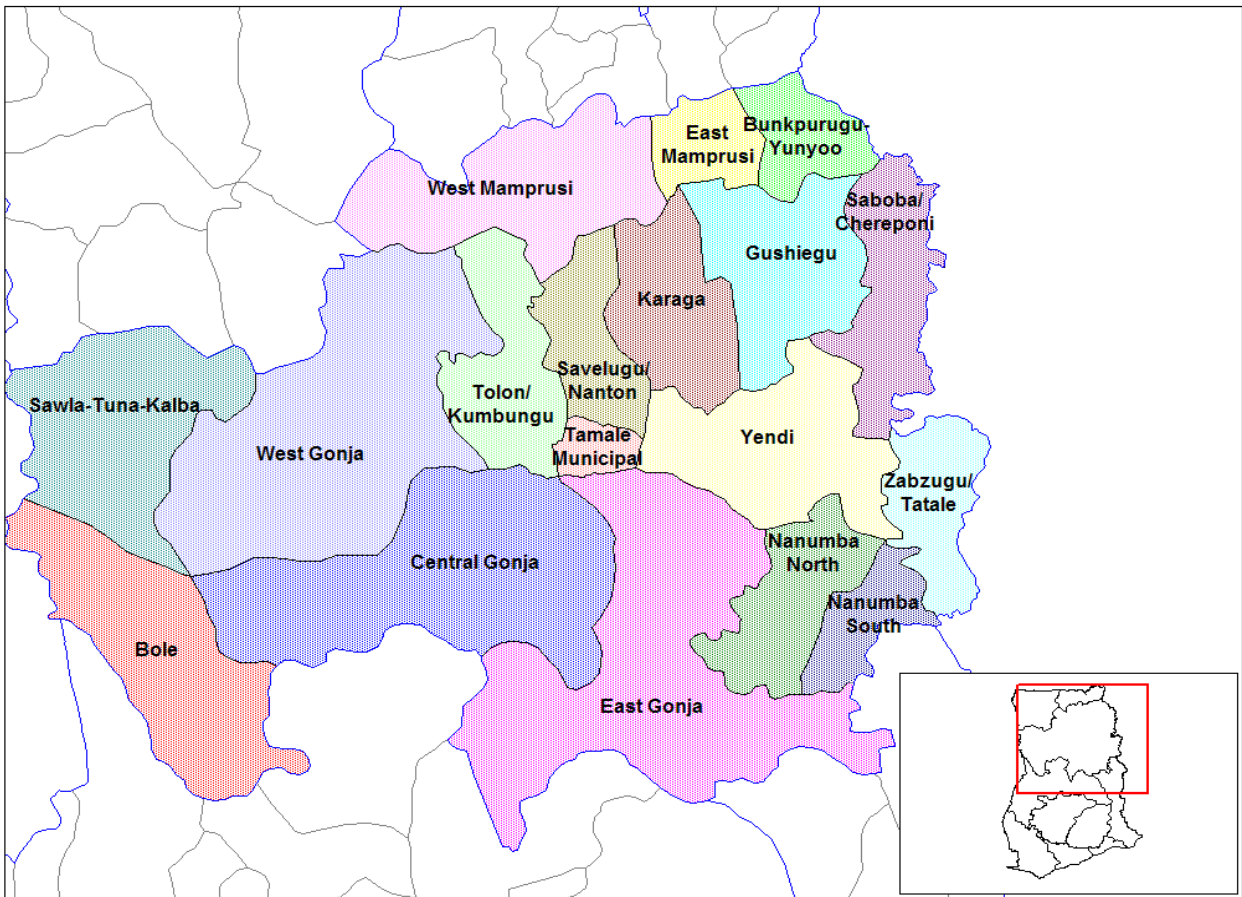


Fig 2.1 Map of the Northern region of Ghana showing the districts (source: Wikipedia)

Larabanga is in the West Gonja District. It is a hundred percent Islamic community with a population of about 4000 people. A ‘native’ of Larabanga is known as a Kamara. The people of Larabanga speak the Larbafi language in addition other languages spoken in Ghana, especially Dagomba, Gonja and Twi. Even though they occupy a portion of the Gonja land, they do not consider themselves to be part of the Gonja ethnic group. However the relationship

between them and the Gonja people is one that is defined religiously and historically. Religiously, the Larabanga community has the traditional duty of providing spiritual protection and guidance to the whole Gonja group. This duty is result of a historical event in which the Larabanga community saved the whole Gonja land from destruction.

2.2 History of Larabanga

The story pertaining to the founding of Larabanga is on the lips of most people in the community, ranging from children to the elderly. While children tell the story poetically, adults share it emotionally, passionately and religiously. One evening, at about half past 7pm, I paid a surprise visit to Sabina, a cousin of my key informant Baba Seidu. On my arrival, it was time for dinner; so a dish of *fufu* made from yam was served.² I was offered a seat and I joined them to enjoy the nicely shaped *fufu*. As we ate, the siblings of Sabina, Kezia and Dodu started discussing the founder of Larabanga. I got very interested. Sabina's mother, Adzia, realised my curiosity to hear exactly how events unfolded towards the founding of the community and instantly started sharing the story prolonging the dinner section. I learnt that Larabanga was founded by a Mallam called Yidan Braimah locally called Ibrahimia, a Kamara man who originated from Madina in Saudi Arabia. He was a spiritual consultant to the warrior Ndewura Jakpa. At the mention of Ndewura Jakpa I remembered my basic education days in the 1980s at Mensah Sarbah International School, Teshie Accra. All I could remember was how powerful he was. According to Adzia, Ndewura Jakpa was a great warrior who fought lots of wars and conquered lots of groups and communities in the quest for territorial strength and wealth. During his adventure, it got to a point where defeating some communities became very difficult. Specifically, Ndewura Jakpa was finding it difficult to defeat the people of Kango, an ancient

² In the southern and central part of Ghana, *fufu* is mostly made from cassava.

town in what is present day Ivory Coast. He was advised by some of his followers to pray to God for His support. He was specifically told to seek the services of a spiritual consultant whose sole duty would be to pray for him and with him.

Ndewura Jakpa listened to the advice and suggestions of his followers, travelled to Saudi Arabia and met Yidan Braimah (Ibrahima). He was a powerful spiritualist (a *Mallam*) in Saudi Arabia. Upon hearing the purpose for which Ndewura Jakpa had called on him, Ibrahima accepted his proposal and followed him. He wrote some charms which enabled Ndewura Japka to defeat the people of Kango. Ibrahima accompanied Ndewura Jakpa, counseled and prayed for him anytime he found it difficult in fighting. Together they fought through the Black Volta basin conquering surrounding villages and groups. During their journey and battles, Ibrahima mentioned to the warrior Ndewura Japka that as they fought on, they would cross two rivers together, but not cross the third. So they fought through two rivers including the Black Volta, but when they got to White Volta, the warrior was killed in battle, leaving Ibrahima unable to return to Saudi Arabia.

He then moved southwards to find a place to settle. He first settled at the current location of the mystic stone, a sloppy and rocky place. It was very difficult to erect structures to house people. Mallam Ibrahima, after offering prayer, threw a spear promising that wherever the spear lands is where he would settle and build an accommodation. He threw the spear and it landed on the current location of the old mosque. The foundation of a mosque was already there, but with no indication of a previous settlement. He went around the mosque and found an inscription in Arabic that said, 'this is where God has assigned him to settle' and the procedures to build the mosque. During this period, he returned to the mystic stone area to sleep and pray

until the mosque was completed. During my oral histories, this history was narrated to me just as Adzia did; however, further insight on the mosque, mystic stone and Koran was shared.

2.2.1 The Mosque, Koran and blessed tree (baobab tree)

According to the elders and the people of the community, Larabanga mosque is the oldest mosque in Ghana. It is also one of the oldest in West Africa. It was built in 1421 with clay, sandy and loamy soils. It has four entrances, each with its specific function. The entrance to the west is for women, the southern entrance is for the men. The Imam enters the mosques through the east gate and the *moazin* (who calls believers to prayer) enters through the north gate. The mosque itself is divided into two parts. The men take the front part while the women take the back part during prayers. The mosque also has an ancient Koran, which was sent down from Heaven to the community. According to people, Ibrahima came to the awareness of the need as a spiritual leader to have a Koran. At that moment in time, the number of Korans that existed in the world were only seven. All these seven Korans were hand written. They were wrapped together in blankets and stored in large calabash bowls far away in Mecca. Ibrahima went to the Mystic Stone and prayed hard for a Koran to be brought to Larabanga. His prayers were answered when he was rewarded with one of the original seven Koran from Mecca believed to have been delivered to him from Heaven. This Koran still exists in Larabanga. It has been well preserved by the assigned caretaker. Every year, during the fire festival which is celebrated by the ethnic groups in the Northern region to mark the beginning of a new Muslim calendar, the Koran is brought out for reading. Many people come to Larabanga from far and wide to attend these readings outside the old mosque. Unfortunately for me, the fire festival was to take place two weeks after I have left the field, but I still had to leave due to financial constraints. As a result I could not stay to experience the fire festival. However my key

informant shared with me his experiences of previous fire festivals. I will also share the details of his experience in my third chapter. I return to the history specifically the blessed tree.



Fig 2.2 Old mosque of Larabanga

The blessed tree is a baobab tree that has been sanctioned by the chief and Imam from destruction because it embodies the spirit of the founder of the community. With regards to the blessed tree as a sacred plant forbidden from destruction, I will give detailed account on that during my discussion of political issues in Larabanga. Nevertheless, the blessed tree is a baobab plant found behind the mosque. The people explained to me that the blessed tree is a gift from Allah through their founder. Ibrahim, the founder of the community, asked that he should be buried beside the mosque when he dies. He also added that after three to four months after his burial a tree will germinate over his grave, that tree is a blessed tree. Every year the leaves of the tree should be harvested and shared among the four clans in the community. This blessed tree

has therefore become an integral part of the community life. Members of the community find it difficult to live far from the tree. Currently people do not wait for the harvest time in September before eating from the blessed tree. Essentially to the people, the tree is a gift of life, therefore taking that regularly one remains in constant relationship with Allah while keeping his or her body pure, healthy and strong.



Fig 2.3 The baobab tree behind the mosque



Fig 2.4 blessed tree

2.2.2 Mystic stone and Larabanga-Gonja relationship

The mystic stone tells mysterious stories. I learnt through my oral histories and other people in the community that, after Larabanga and the rest of the Gonja lands had settled, a fierce warrior named Samuri Turi attempted to conquer the Gonja group. Samuri Turi was described to me as a ‘terrible warrior’ who was capturing lands and groups of people across West Africa from what is currently known as Guinea. According to the people, his attacks were unstoppable and even the trees would collaborate with him in battle. According to elder Alhassan, ‘all these fierce attributes of Samuri Turi became void when he got to the mystic stone area on his way to conquer Gonja lands’. Specifically, his horses were unable to pass along the route at the Mystic Stone. According to the people, the horses sank into the ground. Elder Alhassan added that Samuri was therefore forced to heed an old warning that had been given to him by his grandfather. He had been told by his grandfather that his conquests would be many and great, but that he would one day get to a land he should not venture to fight. Samuri Turi therefore sent a message of peace to the elders of Larabanga telling them he would not try to conquer them. The elders held a quick meeting, discussed the peace offered and decided to accept the offer in which his horses would be led around the Mystic Stone. The community therefore sacrificed a cattle and prepared food as a welcome for the warrior. In addition, they prepared a hat with magical powers that was worn by one of the elders to the meal. It was believed that if the warrior asked for the hat for himself and put it on his head, the magical powers of the hat would weaken the warrior and he would surely fail to conquer the Gonja lands. At the meal he indeed demanded for the hat and placed it on his head. In this way, Larabanga continued to fulfill its important obligation as spiritual protector to the Gonja people. Also

according to the people, the Mystic Stone and its routes are charmed places where people and individuals with war intentions cannot touch.

Again I was told of the manifestation of the mysterious power of the stone during the construction of a major road through the community. I learnt through my oral histories and other members of the community that, when the contractors moved the stone so they could construct the road, they returned the following day to see the stone back to its original place. On three occasions the stone was moved only for them to come the next day to see it back to its original place. The stone was even sent as far as the Ivory Coast but after some few days the stone returned to its original place. The contractors had no option than to construct the road through a different direction. The stone has become a tourist attraction. People have traveled from all over the world just to have a glimpse of it.



Fig 2.5 the mystic stone showing names of some people who came to see it in the past

2.3 Community life

2.3.1 Sensory orders

The everyday life of the people of Larabanga reveals aspects of their culture that are enacted through their sensory orders. In other words, these aspects of the Larabanga culture are embedded with sensory orders that reflect aspects of community life that are so valuable to the extent that they are maintained and children are socialised into adulthood acquiring these valuable cultural categories. In Larabanga, just as many other societies, the people engage with their environment multi-sensorially. In each aspect of community life specific senses tend to be paramount. In addition these sensory engagements are bodily experiences. Aside from the five traditional senses, there exist sensory models or sensory codes that characterise aspects of community values. These include sensory codes for respect and purity.

Table 2.1 Sensory order of the people of Larabanga

Organs	Larbafi	Expression in larbafi	Expression in English (sensing)
Eye	Numbiri	Nnyei	Seeing
Nose	Nonya	Nnubuya	Smelling
Ear	Tore	Nwaya	Hearing
Tongue	Zeloeli	Ntara	Tasting
Hand	Nubisi	Ntisia	Touching
		Nzia	Feeling
		Drema	Respect

The table above show the various names given to the external organs that mediate the people's engagement with their environment. Secondly, the table shows expressions involved in the use of the senses or sensation. The people of Larabanga express themselves with regards to sensations using the above sensory models. For example, the people express the use of their sense of sight saying *Nnyei*, meaning I see or seeing. In Larabanga, seeing extends to spiritual events. In seeing spiritually, the people at times use or associate it with hearing and feeling. In other words seeing, hearing, feelings are used interchangeably with regards to spirituality, describing a kind of sensory shift that Stroeken (2008) advocated with his research among the Sukuma people (Stroeken 2008). With regards to the senses of smell, they say *Nnubuya* meaning I smell or smelling. However depending on the item, sometimes feeling is usually associated to it. *Nzia* (feeling) tends to be used in several occasions in place of other sensory engagements. Furthermore the people distinguish between the sense of touch and feeling. To them we touch with our fingers and feeling its result in our body. In other words, touching and feeling are not the same but rather touching precedes feeling.

Also the people have a sensory code for respect and purity. Respect is kinaesthetically performed among the people of Larabanga. Kinaesthetics, which have to do with the sense of movement, is foundational to the sensory orientations of the people of Larabanga. Elders make statements like *Nzia drema* meaning feeling respect. Respect to Allah, as well as to chiefs and elders, are highly cherished values among the people. This is closely linked to the sensory code for purity. This sensory code is attached to religious practice and the history of the community. Staying pure has to do with performing the religiously accepted kinaesthetic rituals of ablution (*wudhu* in Arabic, *wonkuo* in Larabafi) and exhibiting kinaesthetics that indicate respect (*derema*). Staying pure and showing respects open up ones spirit to hear (*Nwaya*) from Allah and

spirits within plants and animals. Religiously the sense of hearing, that is *Nwaya*, is very important. The people do not only hear from Allah, they hear from plants and animals. Farmers and plants gatherers highlight the importance of hearing from plants and animals. With a question like “how do you hear from plants and animals?” they often tell me Allah speaks through the plants and animals. It is only possible when the individual is pure. The details with regards to how these sensory orders are use during everyday activities will be discussed in three chapters that follow.

2.3.2 Enskinment and succession of chief

Chieftaincy in the Northern region dates back as far as the 15th century (Awedoba 2006). It is described as skin politics simply because the chief of the Northern region sits on piles of animal skin (Awedoba 2006). That is, unlike communities in the southern and central part of Ghana, where chiefs sit on a stool, the northern chiefs sit on animal skins. The chief of Larabanga sits on a pile of antelope skins. For this reason, any individual who aspires to become a chief of the community must be able to provide the skin of antelopes. In contrast to other communities in the Gonja ethnic group, where chiefs are succeeded patrilineally, succession of the chief rotates among the four sections of the community. In addition, the succession process is marked with ‘accepted’ conflict and controversy over the uprightness of the successor. The Larabanga community is divided in four sections. These are *Zooni*, *Yuukpani*, *Furupoa* and *Tugbani*. Each section is made of several clans. Together, Larabanga has twelve clans.

I did not have the opportunity to experience a succession process because the community has a chief. However, I learnt from my oral histories and key informant that when news of the death of an incumbent chief is made official by the elders of the community, the

succeeding section prepares its candidate to take over. The process is automatic. Each section knows amongst themselves which section is the successor. The succeeding section however must fulfil the following criteria; the successor must provide the skin of antelope and special cloth or robe, the successor must be old enough to lead the community and finally he must be upright religiously, that is he must attain the symbolic state of purity. How to attain this 'symbolic state of purity' will be discussed in the next chapter. The onus therefore lies on the succeeding section to make sure they meet all these criteria. However, other sections investigate the succeeding candidate to find out if there is a reason for them to oust the said candidate.

The conflict and controversy over the succeeding candidate takes place during the ritual day to officially initiate the candidate. The ritual process is simply this; the succeeding candidate and his section slaughters' a white sheep behind the old mosque. This is to officially offer to the founder of the community a sacrifice of a sheep to seek for his approval and blessing. If another section has justifiable reasons why the succeeding candidate should not become the chief of the community, they have only one chance to stop him. This is by interrupting the ritual process.

The section interrupting the process must make sure their candidate has met all the criteria as well. The interruption is marked with conflict because they interrupt and perform their ritual which enskins their candidate as chief. Being able to stop one section from slaughtering its sheep so you can slaughter yours is an accepted customs of the community; however, human blood must not be shed. Sometimes all the four sections fight each other because all of them believe they have justifiable reasons. At the end the candidate's whose section slaughters it sheep becomes the chief of the community. He rules over the activities and resources of the Kamara land until his death.

2.3.3 Mole National Park and tourism

The Larabanga community is among 30 other communities surrounding the Mole National Park. Specifically, Larabanga links the Mole National Park to Tamale, the capital of the Northern region. The Mole National Park is the largest protected areas in Ghana covering 4577km.sq (Ministry of Environment and Science 2002) . The government initially set aside the land as a wildlife refuge in 1958 and in 1971 relocated the human population of the area and turned into a National Park. I learnt through my oral histories that, the park area was originally a Gonja land on which Larabanga and other communities depended for their livelihood needs. However the government of Ghana entered into an agreement with the chief of Gonja promising to use the revenue generated to develop the communities whose livelihood has been taken away. This engagement has not been fulfilled up to date. As a result, the relationship between the Larabanga community and the park authorities is one characterise with conflict and rancour. I will discuss into details relations of the people and the park authorities in my fourth chapter but now let me focus on the other resources that can only be provided by the government which has not been provided up till the time I left the field.

I indicated in my introduction that I have traveled around Ghana for work and vacation. Based on this experience, I can vouch for the enormous infrastructural facilities in communities in the southern and central part of the country. In contrast, during my fieldwork in Larabanga (the whole Northern region is facing a similar situation), I experienced the difficulties the people are going through as a result of the unfilled engagement by the government. The community has no potable (pipe water) source of water. Their main source of water for cooking, drinking, washing and bathing is a river on the way to the Mole National Park. Women and children walk for about fifteen to twenty minutes to fetch water for family use amidst the danger

of encountering wild animals. In my case, I spent nearly thirty minutes because I could not walk very fast with the water on my head. There is only one basic school in the community. Even with that, only few children attend school. Young adults who desire to pursue education further have to move and stay in Damango, the capital of the West Gonja district and school there. They, however, come home every weekend to help their families and also take some food with them for the week. Similarly the community has no hospital. Most people who rely on formal medicines have to go to Damango or Tamale for treatment when they are ill. Larabanga also has the main road that connects the Northern region to Upper West region. The only buses that pass through the community are those that are transporting people and goods to the upper east region and neighbouring villages like Daboya and Murugu. Internally, the main means of transport is the bicycle and motorcycle. Riding is done by all sexes. Both women and men ride up and down the streets running errands for themselves and their family. Farmers and their children also ride to their farms. I learned from Allasan, one of my farmer interviewees, that riding became an integral part of the community life only about four years ago. It was due to the need to reach their farms early and also be able to get home early. He indicated that sometimes farmers send their sons very early in the morning to scare off pest and animals that come to destroy the food crops.

Tourists also rely on the motorcycle to get to Mole National Park. Due to the presence of the mosque and mystic stone, most tourists on their way to the Mole National Park make a stop in the Larabanga community to see and learn about them. During my stay in the community, I encountered several tourists who had come to see the mosque and the mystic stone. According to my key informant, lots of tourists visit the community every year. They are taken around these monuments by educated youth who have been appointed by the chief. However, the tourists were

not charged any fee but some of them gave voluntarily for the maintenance of the mosque. The chief directs that monies donated towards the mosque be kept by the imam because he is the spiritual head of the land. The tourists also take the opportunity to buy from the shops items like bottled water, drinks and some local foods as a means of experiencing the community life.



Fig 2.6 Map of Northern region highlighting the Mole National Park

2.3.4 Buying and selling

Trading of goods in Larabanga is the least of livelihood activities but very unique and interesting. The people have a very small market. It is a block building divided into twelve stores; six in front, six at the back. The market is not located within the community but on the way to the community. Sundays are market days in Larabanga. Farmers, families and traders bring their items meant to be sold as earlier as 7.00 am and organise them nicely to attract potential customers. During my visit to market, I realise that items are cheaper on market days.

Baba Seidu explained to me that people turn to take advantage of the market day sales as items are cheaper. Some of the items sold on the market include yams, cassava, tomatoes, peppers, okro, garden eggs, chicken, salt, ginger, and beans. Others include hair products, toys, clothing and more. On this day, items that are not produced in the community are found on the market. These are bought from Damango by members of the community who have taken trading as their main occupation. Such people take advantage of market days in other neighbouring communities and sell their products.



Fig 2.7 Salt and other local items displayed for sale on a market day

There is one form of trading that I noticed while I was in the community. I named it in my field note as “transport sales”. Larabanga has the road that leads to Wa in the upper west region of Ghana. The bus from Tamale to Wa passes through the community only once every day. When the bus gets to Larabanga, passengers buy yams and other items in huge quantities to sell in their villages on the way to Wa or Wa itself. As result, women have special tables and structures along the street where they have advertised varieties of yams, cassava and other farms

products. In the centre of the community are two stores that sell items like sugar, bottled water, canned, milk and processed food items. Other items include electrical gadgets and appliances.



Fig 2.8 A Tata bus on its way to Wa. Buying and selling taking place.

I used the phrase ‘uniquely complex’ to describe Larabanga in the previous chapter. The ‘uniquely complex’ character of the community and people of Larabanga is based on comprehending details of their religious strength, chieftaincy and main livelihood activities of farming, hunting and gathering. In addition, we must understand how these activities are tied to the resources that prevail in their environment as well as their engagements with these resources and other facets of their environment through the senses. In the next chapters, I discuss in detail

the religion, the politics and livelihood activities of the people highlighting the sensory experiences embedded in them. Secondly I reveal how these sensory experiences in turn inform and deepen our understanding of the people's relations to their environment.

Summary

In this chapter, I first detailed the socio-demographic and geographic particularities of the Northern region and Larabanga. Larabanga is part of the West Gonja District in the Northern region of Ghana. It is an Islamic community with a population of about 4000 people. The community is among the 30 communities surrounding the Mole National Park. Specifically, the community of Larabanga is on a crucial route between the Mole National Park and Tamale, the capital of the Northern region. Larabanga is a tourist community due to the presence of the mystic stone, the old mosque and the fact that tourists have to pass through the community to get to the National Park. The people of Larabanga speak the Larabafi' language and a person from Larabanga is called a 'Kamara'. Major activities include; hunting, gathering and farming. The history and culture of the people of Larabanga make them uniquely complex without a doubt. In the next chapter, I give a detailed ethnographic account of religious activities and sensory experiences that characterise these activities.

Chapter Three

Religion: Purity, Hearing and Being a Kamara

Introduction

According to anthropologist Raymond Firth, religious beliefs are “a set of ideas more less integrated by reason but held with conviction that they are true, that they are meaningful to reality” (Firth 1996, 15). As I indicated in the previous chapter, Larabanga is an Islamic community. Islam like any other religious belief is “characterised by its content, including the supernatural or the quality of the sacred” (Dornan 2004, 26). The practice of Islam permeates other aspects of community activities. The Islamic religion defines, explains and shapes the relationship the people have established with each other and their environment. Also, the practice of Islam led to the development of sensory codes for purity. Secondly, the sense of hearing is of great importance in the practice of the religion. Through the concepts of habitus, embodied phenomenology and the dwelling perspective, I highlight the sensory engagement that is established with the environment religiously.

3.1 Islamic religious practices

Before I got to Larabanga, I spent some days in Tamale. I observed how people went about their Islamic religious activities and practices. The passion and commitment to the practice of Islam as I witnessed in Tamale was far below the attitude of the people of Larabanga. Larabanga is unique among the ethnic groups that practice the Islamic religion in Ghana. This uniqueness is due to their history, mystic stone, old mosque and their spiritual duty to the Gonja land that I discussed in the previous chapter. Everybody; children, adult, men and women fervently believe and practice the Islamic religion. As argued by Firth, religious belief constitutes a “mode of action” (1996, 16). From my participation and the stories I heard, the founder of the

community plays a symbolic role in the practice the religion. In other words, the Kamara people believe in Allah, Prophet Mohammed and their founder. To them Mohammed is a prophet while their founder is a messenger. They read and follow the Koran strictly.

One ritual activity I never lost sight of during my fieldwork is the five daily prayers (*salah* in Arabic, *won* in Larabafi). It is an important aspect of the practice of Islam. The people of Larabanga, like any other Islamic community, pray five times in a day and each day of the week. During a conversation with my key informant Baba Seidu, he explained that they pray every day because it is part of their duty as Muslims to have a daily worship with Allah (*Naa-wuni*; *naa* meaning great and *wuni* meaning person), connect with him, and seek his presence all the time. Sunday to Thursday, prayers are mostly performed on individual basis mostly in homes. While in the community, I shared a room with my key informant. I watched him pray often in the room while I was still on bed. At times, I joined him to pray. He explained that it is not necessary to go to the mosque and participate in group prayers especially when the condition at that particular time of prayer makes it difficult to be at the mosque. A person is allowed to pray at home or where ever he or she is located at the time of prayers. Even that if the place is not conducive that particular prayer can be delayed for the next day. In this case, the prayer has to be performed on another day in addition to that day's prayers. However, on Fridays members are encouraged to join group prayers at the mosque.

Aside the old mosque, Larabanga has other prayer centres all over the community. This is to make it easy for members to join prayers no matter where they find themselves. On each of the days, members of the community can pray at any centres of their choice based on their proximity to the praying centre. Most importantly, it is mandatory for an individual to always come to the presence of Allah clean or pure. The performance of prayer is preceded by

two ritual activities. Firstly there is a call to prayer by the *lendani* and secondly there is cleansing process called *wonkuo*

Before any prayer there is a call to prayer by “*lendani*”. I am woken up every morning at 4.30 am as result of the call to members of the community to perform their first prayer of the day, Fajr. I had similar experiences during the few days I stayed in Tamale but this was more intense because it was a small community and the mosque was within the community. The call involves a recitation that is broadcasted through a loud speaker found at the main mosque. The caller, “*lendani*” is a farmer. Due to the nature of his religious duty, he has his farm very close to the community. Apart from calling members to come for prayers, the *lendani* indicates the exact prayer which is due among the five daily prayers and encourage members to purify themselves and come to communicate with Allah.

Wonkuo, the second ritual activity is a purification process that makes the individual clean and pure to go to the presence of Allah. My key informant explained that, Allah is clean and pure, for that matter, His children must be in a very good shape, pure and free from dirt before appearing at his presence to communicate with him. As my key informant use the word “children,” he made me believe he was talking about the founder of their community. However he explained that the relation between them and Allah is a spiritual one. That is a ‘spiritual father-children’ relation. I understood him clearly because as a Christian I know have a spiritual father relationship with God. Based on this relationship, a Kamara therefore washes the parts of his body which are mostly visible to the outside world. These include the hands, the feet, the face and nostrils. Others are the inner of the ear and the whole head. Before washing of the body parts, the individual declares his or her intention that what he or she is about to do is for the purpose of worship and purity. The cleansing begins with the washing of the hands up to the

wrists three times, rinsing out the mouth with water three times, cleansing the nostrils of the nose by sniffing water into them three times, washing the whole face three times with both hands, if possible, from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin and from ear to ear, washing the right arm three times up to the far end of the elbow, and then do the same with the left arm, wipe the whole head or any part of it with a wet hand once, wipe the inner sides of the ears with the forefingers and their outer sides with the thumbs. This is done with wet fingers. Finally they wash the two feet up to the ankles, three times, beginning with the right foot. After this they are ready for prayer. They do this before every prayer section unless one can prove that he or she is clean after the last prayer section. It is always better to do it before every section.

Wonkuo means prayer water. That is *won* for water, *kuo* for prayer. This signifies that the whole process is carried out with water. However there are instances where sand (*tani*) is used. This means that sand is used to clean dirt from the body. According my key informant, when a person finds himself or herself in a situation where water is not available, he or she can use *tani*. This goes to emphasize that the cleansing process is a symbolic ritual. The symbolism is not only in the water or the sand, but also the cleansing process which is ordered and organised. A deviation from the standard process makes the whole ritual void. The reason being that, “rituals and religious practices are central mechanisms through which beliefs and experiences are articulated and instantiated” (Dornan 2004, 29). The laid down cleansing processes, which constitute a ritual, highlight the ‘symbolic state of purity’ that an individual must assume to connect with Allah. It is only when a person completes the cleansing steps successfully, that he or she attains that symbolic state of purity. In this case, he or she is in a good shape to be in the presence of Allah (*Naawuni*). In connection to Merleau-Ponty’s notion of embodied phenomenology, the enactment of *wonkuo* enhances particular ways by which the people of

Larabanga are engaging with their environment, which they reset 5 times a day to remain 'pure' or in good relation with the environment. Together, this is how they turn to dwell in their environment.

However, my key informant indicated that there are instances where the *wonkuo* performed by a person becomes stained, e.g. natural discharges like urine or gas, vomiting or falling asleep. Whenever a person experiences any of these, he or she must renew the *wonkuo* before prayers. Succinctly, the symbolic state of purity, which is a spiritual state through which an individual connects with the supernatural, is linked to bodily activities. In other words, a person's bodily activity can nullify his or her symbolic state of purity. When an individual attains this symbolic state of purity, he or she is ready to communicate with Allah through prayer.

Similarly, the performance of the prayer is a bodily activity or techniques of the body (Mauss 1973). The bodily activity constitutes 'somatic modes of attention' (Csordas 1993) because it has meaning and it is performed according to instructions and recitations. Participants sit on a rubber mat, cloth or animal skin with their legs coiled into each other or directed sideways, that is either left or right, or directed backwards in which case the person sits on his or her heels on the mat, cloth or animal skin. During group prayer all participants present at the prayer sit in rows, in an organised manner.



Fig 3.1 Individual prayer by the researcher

Each recitation is accompanied by movements and postures which in turn informs the whole prayer. The number of bodily movements accompanying the prayer is a unit. Fajr is the first prayer of the day. It is performed at 5.00 am. Performing Fajr has two units. The unit is explained through the accompanying movement. Zuhr, the second prayer of the day has four units. It is performed at 1.00 pm. The third prayer of the day is the Asr. It involves four units as well. Just after the Zuhr members start preparing for Asr which takes place at 3.00 pm. At 6.00 pm, members of the community perform the three units that make up the Magrib, the fourth prayer of the day. The final prayer in a day is the Isha. The Isha has four units and it is performed at 7.00 pm.

During my stay in the community, I realised that individuals who are not able to perform one or more of the prayers at the particular time perform it the next day. For example, if

a person cannot perform the Fajr and Zuhr due to reasons beyond his or her control, he can perform all these two together with their respective prayers the next day. According to my key informant, it is very important to perform the five daily prayers. Aside the fact that it is obligatory, it keeps a person closer to Allah. I discovered that movements or techniques of body involved in the performance of prayer make the prayers effective and communicated to Allah (*Naawuni*). These movements constitute kinaesthesia. As Geurts (2002, 51) explains, “Kinaesthesia implies perception through movement in the joints, muscle and tendon of the entire body, not just a locus of the leg in the course of walking.” The recitation as form of communication to Allah (*Naawuni*) is dependent on the person’s development of kinaesthetic sensory skill or what Mauss (1973, 77) described as “classification of the body according to efficiency.” During my participation in the prayer, my key informant explains the techniques of the body or kinaesthetic orientations involved in a unit of prayer:

The first position involves raising our hands up to the ears. The second position involves bowing with your hands holding your knees. While going back to first position we recite a prayer and haven assumed that position we recite another prayer. We then take the fourth position. In this position we kneel down and bow with our foreheads touching the ground. Rising from this fourth position, the fifth position which involve sitting on ones heels is assumed. To complete the unit, we assume the fourth position and recite the prayer. We repeat these positions amidst others to perform two, three or four unit. In each position there are prayers we recite. For example, at the first position we say Allahuh akbar, meaning Allah is great, we then follow that with the following prayer recitations: Praise and glory be to you O Allah. Blessed be Your name, exalted be Your Majesty and Glory. There is no God but You. I seek Allah's shelter from Satan, the condemned in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful. Praise be to Allah, The cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds; Most Gracious, Most Merciful; Master of the day of judgement. Thee do we worship, and thine aid we seek, show us the straightway, the way of those on whom thou hast bestowed thy grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray

I was born and raised a Christian. All my life I have been practicing Christian religious rituals, as a result, I know how it feels to pray and have the Holy Spirit (the presence of God) come upon me. At the beginning of my participation in the performance of the *wonkuo* and the *won* it was

very difficult. This goes to emphasize Mauss' argument that "the constant adaptation to a physical, mechanical or chemical aim is pursued in a series of assembled actions, and assembled for the individual not by himself alone but by all his education, by the whole society to which he or she belong, in the place he or she occupies in it" (1973, 76). Therefore, as I continue to participate, occasionally joining my key informant in the mornings, I begun to comprehend and experience the symbolic state of purity as well as how it felt to have the presence of Allah. In comparison to my Christian experiences, it was a whole new experience just as Merleau-Ponty argues; we engage with our environment constantly and differently. During my Christian prayers and worship, the holy spirits descends on me like fire; it takes charge of my whole body and throws me down onto the floor. With regards to my Islamic experience, I felt like a warm wind hovering around me. I could not participate in group prayer because I am not a practicing Muslim therefore I will not be allowed into the mosque or prayer centres. Therefore, I could not experience in the mosque what Chau (2008) called the "social sensorium." However, my key informant indicated that the presence of Allah is experienced in a different way during group prayer. He said: "It is stronger, powerful and awesome. We feel more connected as a group."

3.3 Purity and hearing

The whole ritual of cleansing before prayer and the prayer itself is characterised with specific movements-a vital technique of the body- and recitation. Therefore Kinaesthesia as a sense of movement is culturally and performatively elaborated among the people of Larabanga. In the performance of the *wonkuo* and *won*, the people showcase the importance of purity to the worship of Allah, prophet Mohamed and the founder of their community. One's ability to perform the *wonkuo* and the *won* correctly and constantly is said to be pure. This state of purity is therefore important to the whole community life. This is because ones state of purity reflects

his or her uprightness thereby affecting his livelihood activities. Similarly kinaesthesia is greatly linked to the sense of hearing as it also culturally and performatively elaborated through the ritual call to prayer.

As the people are called to prayers by the *lendani* and during prayer recitation, listening to and repeating what they hear from the Imam, they develop a particularly attuned hearing ability. This extends hearing as far as plants and animal. Grandma Ayisha mentioned to me that, Imam means leader. He is the leader of the Islamic community. He leads prayers at the main mosque and during festive occasions. He is their spiritual father. The people of Larabanga hold their Imam in high esteem. They believe it is through his guidance and prayers that their livelihood activities have become fruitful. Obviously “an individual tends to develop his abilities grounded in senses that are more highly valued or frequently utilized in the pattern of sensory orientations characteristics of a particular place or within a specific cultural milieu” (Geurts 2002, 68). For that matter, the Kamara people are so much oriented towards their sense of hearing. To the people, hearing from the *lendani* and the Imam is hearing from Allah and natural spirits that He Allah has deposited in the various plants and animal. In other words, the people have developed that ability to hear from plants and animals in their environment or through them. The people showcase this ability to hear from plants and animals during festive occasions and their livelihood activities.

Islamic festive days are really important to the people of Larabanga. Everyone participates fully. During my stay in the community, I participated in the celebration of Eid ul-Adha festival. This festival follows the Eid ul-Fitr celebrated just after Ramadan. On this day prayers were held in the community school park. Everybody in the community, from children to adults, gathered at the park with their rubber mats, cloth or animal skins and prayed. They also

heard the New Year message from the Imam. In addition, members wished each other well in the coming year by shaking and hugging each other. They also used the opportunity to pray for their community, their chief and the Imam. Huge celebration followed just after the prayers. One key event that characterised the aftermath of the prayers was the slaughtering of sheep, goats, cows and other domestic animals and birds to prepare variety of meals.



Fig 3.2 Festive prayer at the school park



Fig 3.3 some member of the community about to slaughter a sheep during the festival

Animals are not just slaughtered; they are sacrificed according to religious principles. The one to do the slaughtering will first recite some prayers. Through the recitation, the person communicates with the spirit of the animal. The one to slaughter the animal hears clearly from the animal as to whether it has granted itself to be sacrificed. In case of events where the animal has not offered itself, he repeats the prayer as a means to seek the intervention of Allah. If the animal finally agrees, the slaughterer makes a pile of sand with a hole in the middle where the blood of the animal is allowed flow into. The blood is considered the spirit of the animal. The blood is mixed with the sand and made into balls which are placed on high grounds like walls, roofing sheets. This is to offer the spirit of the animal to Almighty Allah and thank Him for the gift of life.

For the proper acceptance of the spirit of the animal, the slaughterer is helped by others who hold the legs of the animal to make it easy to cut through the throat of the animal. He

or she must cut through the throat of the animal and throw the knife away quickly. It should be quick enough so that the animal does not die at the time that he is still holding the knife. Otherwise the meat of the animal becomes unwholesome for consumption because the spirit of the animal will not be accepted by Allah. During the day there is constant communication between Allah, chiefs, elders, spirits of plants, animals and between members of the community. Being able to hear is dependent upon one's purity and respect to Allah, chief and elders of the community.



Fig 3.5 Just slaughtered the sheep and threw the knife away quickly

This slaughtering is a communal activity; every single home kills an animal to celebrate the day. It is characterised with music and dance depicting various kinaesthetic tendencies that emphasize respect, purity and hearing. As part of the celebration, members share fresh meats, cooked meal, uncooked food and others with each other. The people therefore demonstrate their being with each other. I personally received lots of gifts like cooked meals,

yams and fresh meat. The celebration lasts for about three days. Throughout the celebration people demonstrate what it means to come from Larabanga, more specifically, the sense of being a Kamara.

3.4 The sense of being a Kamara (Kamara identity)

While in Tamale trying to establish contacts in Larabanga, most people I encountered seeking for help described the people of Larabanga differently. Abdul, a cousin to D.O 5, described them as ‘sweet people with a sweet language.’ Barihama, also a friend to D.O 5, described them as ‘people who know their land and their land know them’. Finally, Farzia, a chop bar operator, in Tamale described them as ‘Allah’s chosen people’. Again while I was journeying from Tamale to Larabanga, I had to share a seat with Musa a passenger on his way to Mole, a village after Larabanga. I engaged Musa in conversations focusing on Larabanga. Musa used words like powerful, blessed, favoured, protected and peaceful to describe the people of Larabanga and their land. During my stay in the community, most of these descriptions begun to play back to me like a recorded movie. The people exhibited in diverse ways why they are blessed, favoured, chosen by Allah and more through their commitment to the practice of Islam, the knowledge of the history and sense of being Kamara. The degree or the intensity of the Islamic religion in the community is based on their attachment to their history. They hold the view and strongly believe that the history or the story behind the founding of their community is not just a story or a history but a living message from Allah. Furthermore, they know that the history forms a key factor in the success of their everyday activities. The attitude of the people towards the worship of Allah and reference to His directions tells the degree to which the history is embodied. The embodiment of the history forms the basis of the several qualities attributed to them.

Also every single member of the community adds Kamara to his official name. I have chatted with Hamidu, a very close friend to Baba Seidu, on three occasions. He has never mentioned to me he was also called Kamara. On the fourth meeting, Hamidu added Kamara to his full name. I also encountered some children returning from fruit picking one afternoon while I was taking a walk through the community. As I requested their names, each child ended his or her name with Kamara. When I return home, it was Baba Seidu's mother I met. Putting a question like, are you also a called Kamara? She answered positively. She explained that, their founder was a Kamara; he then founded the Kamara land. Therefore, once you are a person from this land, you are automatically a Kamara. This reveals that the name Kamara is a symbol of identity that keeps the people attached to their land, their founder and all the monuments and landscapes. Just as Geurts (2002) detailed on how the history of Anlo-ewe speaking people's journey to their current location constitute their name identity hence the name Anlo, so does the people of Larabanga embody the history of their land and it has become an identity hence the name Kamara. There is, therefore, sensory perception linked with being a Kamara. That is peaceful, religious, powerful, pure and more. These attributes are core of the history and the people live and showcase these attributes through their belief/knowledge/skills, and practices of Islam.

Together through shared embodied histories, "a term used by Pierre Bourdieu to invoke the active presence of the whole past" (Parr 2010, 8), the people have also developed a strong sense of place. As Geurts (2002, 112, citing Feld 1996) wrote "as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place". Essentially, a Kamara does not consider the stone just a mystic stone but a dwelling of the powers of Allah and his continuous presence, protection and care to members of the community. Similarly, they view the mosques as unique

hands of Allah since it was built by His direction. The people intimated that, because their founder threw a spear and Allah directed the spear to their current location, there is no other place they could have been apart from where they are at the moment. Through these monuments that carry the history of the people, they make sense of their place and their place makes sense to them. In other words, we are always with perceptions and emplaced experiences (Geurts 2002). Elder Alhassan, said to me: *“The mystic stone and the mosques are gifts from Allah, they mean a lot to us. I can’t see myself leaving these blessings and settling somewhere. These things form parts of us and we have a duty to keep them for the next generation telling the story as we have been told.”*

Clearly, through the senses of hearing and kinaesthesia, the people have internalised the history of their community and together with the mystic stone, mosque and the blessed tree that I discussed in the previous chapter, the people have developed a religiously passionate human–environment relationship. Consequently, every aspect of community life is shaped and organised through the Islamic religion, its local histories and monuments. Just as every aspect of the Islamic practices carries a message so does the messages shape and inform every single activity in the community. We will see later on in the next chapter how the people have tend to developed sensibilities of bitterness, anger, resentment and likes in their relations with the park authorities because they are being denied a land that form part of their history.

Summary

Through the practice of Islam, the people of Larabanga in addition to the sense of hearing have developed a sensory code for hearing spiritually. This ability is something to tailor and some develop it more than others. Also kinaesthesia, sense of movement is coded with

purity. That is through some specific movements linked with the daily prayers, individual attain the symbolic state of purity. Being pure is a vital moral value to the people. This highlights how sensibilities are tied to morals and norms. Together the people have developed a sense of being Kamara and coming from a Kamara land.

Chapter Four

Politics: Antelope skin, respect and relations with the park

Introduction

Political issues in Larabanga also highlight the people's relations with their environment. In this chapter, I discuss the antelope (*malfu*) as a symbol and authority of the chief, his duty as the custodian of the land and the relationships between him and the Imam as they together inform the moral conducts, values and customs that sustain the Larabanga community. Furthermore, I discuss the relations between the people and the park authorities and sensibilities involve as well.

4.2 The antelope (*malfu*) skin as a symbol and authority

Chiefs play vital roles in most Ghanaian communities. They are symbolic figures who are revered and held in high esteem. Their spoken words are treated with respect, cherished and obeyed. In chapter two, I mention that chiefs of the Northern region sit on piles of skins of animals. The animal on which the chief sits speaks of the character of the chief and the community. This association between chiefs or communities and animals reveals the relationship between such communities and their environment.

The chief of Larabanga sit on piles of antelope skin , therefore, any person from Larabanga who desires to be the chief of the community after the death of an incumbent must provide the an antelope skin amidst other items. The issue that arises here is how a potential chief hunts for an antelope when hunting is forbidden in his environment. This is because the antelope is considered a symbolic animal to the people of Larabanga. In this case, the political organisation, strength and authority of the local people is threatened. Among the people of Larabanga, as explained to me by Grandma Ayisha, the *malfu* have three main symbolic

meanings. It stands for being skilful, peaceful and harmonious. Secondly it represents an ardent mind for politics and the ability to foresee opportunities, and lastly, the refusal to rashly attack an enemy, but rather prefer to stand their grounds than risk harming another wrongfully. Thus the antelope signifies harmony, purity, polity and peace. The people have the understanding that the meekness and purity of the antelope connect them to Allah which brings security, wealth and victory to their land.

The people of Larabanga perceive their community as one possessing the qualities of the antelope I mentioned above. Therefore they associate the position and authority of the chief to the antelope because the chief is considered a symbolic figure, the representative and leader of the land and people. The chief, therefore, sits on the skin as the person embodying the qualities of the antelope. In other words, “he is the mirror of the community”. In comparison, this is similar to ancestral stools among other ethnic group in southern part of Ghana. These include the Ewes, Asantes, and the Gas. “An ancestral stool is considered a symbol of heritage and authority being a seat of power and it plays a significant role in the religious rituals of a lineage or a clan” (Geurts 2002, 87). Geurts (2002, 87) explains “the symbolic significance of the ancestral stool as a source of all traditional, political and spiritual power among the people.” Similarly the antelope skin is a symbol of authority that tells the character of the Larabanga community, revealing the relationship between the community and their environment which includes the founder and Allah. The chief as result of his authority serves as the custodian of the land.

4.2 Duties of the chief

The duty of the chief which include protecting the land of the people and making sure they live a comfortable life by benefiting from the resources in the land comes into conflict with

park authorities' decision to take that authority from the chief. In other words, in Larabanga, the chief is the custodian of the land and all natural resources with which the Larabanga community is endowed. He has the main duty to enforce all necessary taboos to govern resources and life activities within the community, to make living comfortable not for present generation but for the generations to come.

4.2.1 Taboos

Taboos can be found in all human cultures (Kideghesho 2009). “They are moral or cautionary restrictions placed on certain action by recognised authorities such as chiefs, priest, elders and others (Kideghesho 2009, 88). These authorities try to specify rules of behaviour in particular cultures. Taboos emanate from religious and long-established ‘traditional’ beliefs and social customs. Taboos in Larabanga are decrees from the chief relating to activities and behaviour in the community. The performance and effectiveness of taboos is grounded in the strength of the authority of the chief to command and be able to enforce rules and regulation. Because the people in Larabanga revere their chief and hold him in high esteem, they go about their activities adhering to these taboos. For examples: some taboos inhibit hunters or any member of the community to kill a pregnant animal. In addition, killing of animals fending their offspring and young animals are prohibited. The elephant and the monkey are sacred animals among the people of Larabanga; therefore killing and eating of them are strictly abhorred. The punishment attached to breaking the taboos include huge fines, confiscation of products, barred from further hunting. Most of the taboos have to do with how the people go about harvesting and using the flora and fauna in the environment. As the dwelling perspective dictates, with this notion of taboos we comprehend how people dwell in their environment as agents. Arguing further, these taboos sustain the taskscape which in turn protect the landscape. Meaning, the

activities of the people of Larabanga is governed by these taboos, so with these taboos they make efficient use of the landscape. I will discuss into details livelihood taboos in chapter five. Here I focus on the taboos governing community life especially the importance of showing respect and observing religious principles governing the baobab tree, the antelope, the monkey and the elephant

4.2.2 Sacred animals

Broadly or generally, discussions on sacred animals often involve totemic systems (Lévi-Strauss 1966). With regards to totems, specific animal species are considered holy, sacred or special because they serve as emblems and symbol whose role in the affairs of the tribe, clan or community cannot be detached through any means. Totemic animals include elephants, lions, bats, python, vultures, monkeys, antelopes and the eagle (see Table 4.1 for list of communities, clans or tribes and their totems). The choice of most totemic species stems from the fact that the particular animal saved the clan in the past, or that a clan tried to associate themselves with the essential attribute of the animal. Examples include purity, skilfulness bravery, courage, speed and wisdom.

Among the people of Larabanga the antelope can be likened to a totem. I use the word ‘likened’ because totemic animals are often forbidden from consumption, but the people of Larabanga consume the meat of the antelope. Earlier on in the chapter, I highlighted the symbolic character of the antelope that is attributed to the Larabanga community for which reason it is a symbolic animal. One of such quality is purity. The people of Larabanga consider eating the antelope (*malfu*) animal as means to remain pure, a vital state that is needed as an Islamic person in Larabanga. As mentioned in the third chapter, attaining a ‘symbolic state of

purity’ is vital religiously; eating the meat of the antelope is one way that an individual maintains this ‘symbolic state of purity’.

Table. 4. 1 Tribes, traditional areas, clans and region with their totems in Ghana

Tribes/clans/traditional areas	Totems
Sunyani and Nkoransah	Fruit bats
Drobo traditional area	Crested Purcupine
Wenchi	Tree tyrax
Odumase traditional area	Elephant
Techiman	Madfish and bats
Manya Krobo Traditional area	Python
Yilo Krobo	Python
Buem	Vulture
Tapa and Nkonya	Crab
Krachi	Lion
Anglo	Nile Monitor Lizard
Central region	Elephant
Sefwi Wiaso	Crown crested Eagle
Greater Accra	Lion, Elephant, Sea turtle, Crown crested Eagle
Kwahu, Akyem Abuakwa	Leopard
Northern/upper east and west	Patas Monkey
Volta region	Lion, Royal Antelopes, Elephant

Source: ghanaweb.com

The duty of the chief in this regard has to do with ensuring that antelopes are not killed indiscriminately so as to sustain them and the meat are treated with respect, that is, they are sacrificed according the religious standards which involve cutting the throat of the animals quickly and throwing the knife way. This is to offer the spirit of the antelope to Allah. On the other hand, animals like the monkey and the elephant are religiously forbidden from

consumption. As a result, they have been sanctioned by the chief from destruction. The eating of these animals nullifies an individual's 'symbolic state of purity'. In this light, the chief through its taboos ensure animals are sustainable. That is, killing and eating of animals are governed by taboos that ensure that these animals are harvested rightly. The authority of the chief to ensure antelopes are hunted sustainably and that totems are not killed reveals the ability of local people to manage resources in their environment. Yet, due to the creation of the Mole National Park, they are often separated from these resources, a situation that often leads to livelihood constraints and conflicts.

4.2.3 Sacred plants

Sacred plants also fall within the defining qualities of sacred groves. In Ghana, such sacred or fetish groves are very common. Most of them were founded as a result of the need for protection from ancestral spirits who are believed to be part of their spiritual cosmology (Boaten 1997; Gordon 1992). According to Dorm-Adzobu et al (1991,4) communities use objects such as trees, stones, streams, mountains, and even manmade objects to symbolise the gods or spirit allocating special dwellings for them as well. Livelihood activities like farming, hunting and felling of trees for fuel wood and other uses are totally forbidden. For example, in the Malshegu community in the northern region of Ghana, there is a one hectare sacred grove that has been preserved for nearly 300 years (Dorm-Adzobu et al 1991). The preservation of this sacred grove has been successful as a result of the established and enforced land use rules and practices that were designed to safeguard the abode of the Malshegu god called kpalevorgu (Dorm-Adzobu et al 1991). Also in the western region of Ghana is the Sefwi Wiaso sacred grove. Hens (2006, 3) remarked that, "it is a classic example of a tropical virgin forest where activities are limited to burial and collection of medicinal plants with permission."

In Larabanga, the baobab tree is a sacred tree that has been sanctioned by the chief and Imam from destruction because it embodies the spirit of the founder of the community. The blessed tree is a baobab plant. As indicated in chapter two, the blessed tree is a gift from Allah. The founder of the community asked that he should be buried beside the mosque when he dies. He also added that after three to four months after his burial a tree will germinate over his grave, that tree is a blessed tree. Every year the leaves of the tree should be harvested and shared among the twelve clans in the community. This blessed tree has therefore become an integral part of the life-world of the people. Most members of the community find it difficult to live far from the tree. Currently, people do not wait for the harvest time in September before eating from the blessed tree. Essentially to the people, the tree is a gift of life, therefore taking that regularly one remains in constant relationship with Allah while keeping his or her body pure, healthy and strong. The baobab tree also contributes to an individual's symbolic state of purity. The chief regulates the harvesting of the leaves of the baobab tree. It is therefore a huge offence to be found cutting any branch of the tree or damaging it any way. Once again, the chief's taboos on the baobab tree and other plants that will be discussed in chapter five shares light on various ways by which the people of Larabanga conserve the plant species in their environment.

4.2.4 Respect

The relationship between the chief and his people is organised around respect. This respect is accorded to the chief and further accorded to elderly people in the community. Showing respect is done through greeting which is a bodily activity. In other words, it is centred on kinaesthesia, the sense of movement. Members of the community are socialised from childhood to embody this sensory code for respect. According to my key informant:

I grew up knowing that whatever I do must be accepted to the chief of our village and all elderly people. All my friends know that as well. For me I don't remember my mother mentioning to me you don't do this or that. Observing what the elderly do and say I grew up to be like them.

Respect (*derema*) in Larabanga is imbued in bodily movement and posture. Members greet or show respects to their chief and elderly by bending down and holding their knee. In addition, children cannot stand anyhow, let's say with their hand in their pocket or throw their hands about when talking to the elderly. Almost always, children should have their hands at their back and never talk back when the elderly is talking. These body movements and postures signify the difference between a respectful child and a disrespectful child. In other words, in Larabanga, respect as a moral is coded sensorial. I related very well with my key informant when he explained to me that it is their way of life. Drawing on my own lived experience when I was growing up as a child, my parent always spanked me or my sibling simply because we are being spoken to and our body movement, position or technique is not in agreement with what they considered right. The essence of respect and the chief sitting on skin of animal lies in their connection between the body and the environments. By sitting on an animal skin, the chief signifies that his position is divine. Also the essence of bending in greeting lies in the fact that the chief and elderly are privileged to have been accepted in the land first by Allah, for that matter, such a person serve as a link between them and Allah. By bending or standing with your hands at you back, one is accepting the blessings of the elder and recognising his or her status. In this sense we see a network of relations as techniques of the body is linked with kinaesthesia to show respect to chiefs and elderly people whose authority stems from the sitting on a skin of antelope. Furthermore in showing this respect, the people obey taboos on sacred animals and plants. This can be compared to Bruno Latours' actor-network theory. However, in the case of

Larabanga, the network is only completed with the inclusion of the relations of the people to the park as well as park authorities.

4. 3 People and park relationship

Conflict between local people and park authorities is a challenge facing organisations, states and scholars concerned with people-park relationship. Some scholarly works on such conflicts are often centred on how animals fight with humans over natural resources (Sillero-Zubiri & Switzer 2001; Conover 2002; Graham et al. 2005). But as indicated by Marshal et al (2007, 3130), there are also situations where conflicts take the form of disputes between different stakeholders over management goals.

The environment of Larabanga comprises the Mole National Park. In the second chapter, I describe how an agreement was reached between the chief and the governments over the ownership of the park land. Through this agreement, the people of Larabanga transferred the ownership of the land to the government in return for development. This promise of development has not been fulfilled till today. This unfulfilled promise by the government defines the kind relationship that has developed between the people of Larabanga and the Mole National Park authorities. The relationship is characterised by anger, frustration, bitterness and confrontation. This has resulted in several conflicts between the two.

The conflict situation between the people of Larabanga and authorities of the Mole National Park involves conflict with animals and conflict with authorities. As I mentioned in the background chapter, the people of Larabanga are among other 30 villages surrounding the Mole National Park. Not only is Larabanga one of the closest but it is the gate way to the park. That is, Larabanga has the major road that leads to the park.

According to the farmers I interviewed, they initially farmed in the park area. But with the creation of the park, most of them lost their farm lands. The community has lost about 3000 acres of land to the park authorities. In addition the farmers complained of constant destruction of crops by animals like elephants, baboons, hyena, monkeys, warthogs and some species of antelope. This confirms why farmers send their children early in the morning to the farm scare off these animals that come to destroy their crops hence the use of bicycle and motorcycle in the community. What angers the farmers most is that park authorities refuse to pay compensations for losses caused by wild animals from the Park.

During my stay in the community, I did not witness any crop destruction by animals but during my safari in the Mole National Park I observed armed park watch guards chasing a hunter. Hunters of Larabanga also expressed their bitterness with the killing of some members of the community. My key informant mentioned of an instance where there was a shoot-out between staffs of the park and some youths which resulted in the death of five of the community members. Alhassan, one of the hunters I interviewed indicated that the park authorities now jailed hunters when they are caught. For example; anyone caught killing an antelope is jailed for three months to two years, also anyone caught to have killed a protected species is jailed for five years.

The women of the community also expressed their view on constant harassment they face from the wild animals. Fetching of water in Larabanga is mostly carried out by women. As I mentioned in the previous chapter (Chapter two), the only source of water in Larabanga is located almost close to the park. Grandma Ayisha mentioned of instances where women were attacked by some animal and they came home with injuries. She added that some women have also been raped by the monkeys while returning from the water fetching. According to Grandma

Ayisha, these incidences have been reported to the park authorities by the chief of the community but the park authorities since today had done nothing to compensate the victims or take them to hospital for treatment.

Other villages such as Daboya and Murugu are also upset with the park authorities. I met one elder from Murugu, a neighbouring village, who visited my key informant's family. In contrast with the Muslim community of Larabanga, his community maintains animist beliefs. This is what he said to me:

All our farmlands have been taken away from us and it is affecting our livelihood. I simple find it difficult to believe some people think protecting animal are important than we human beings. The worse of all is that our gods are in the park. These gods are very important to us because we need to offer sacrifices and prayers for their continuous protection. They need these sacrifices yet we are not being given the chance to do that. We are not happy at all and we can never be happy when our lands and gods have been taken.

In his study of the Massai people and the Tarangire National Park, Igoe indicated that "local people do not view the park as a public resource, nor do they believe that those who deny them access are interested conservation" (2004, 27). "They are rather of the school of thought that people who promoted conservation were outsiders who thought animals were more important than people and wanted to the take their lands to accommodate the animals at their expense" (2004, 27). Similarly the people of Larabanga are of the perception that human life should not be lost a result of preserving wildlife. They believe hunting is a skill that is part of culture and that animals are significant in the preservation of their culture and values. When I asked my key informant about what the chief is doing about the entire conflict situation, he said to me:

Our chief took the government to court to retrieve the land back to the community but he lost the case because he has already signed the contract that transferred the land ownership to the government. Moreover I don't see how anybody will win case against the government.

This conflict relationship between the people of Larabanga and the Mole National Park authorities is an example of how people turn to relate with aspects of their environment that are inconsistent with their values and norms. This study argues that through the daily activities of the people of Larabanga, which they perform sensorally, we tend to comprehend their relations with their environment. The people's expressions of anger, frustration, antagonism, bitterness which together culminate into conflict, tell how they relate with the park authorities.

Summary

The politics of the people of Larabanga is skin politics because the chief sits on piles of skins of the antelope. The antelope is therefore a symbol of authority. With this authority the chief make taboos to govern behavior, sacred animals and plants. With respect to this authority, the people don't break these taboos. Respect is therefore a moral or value that has been coded sensorally. This is because it involves movements and postures. In general the relationship between the park authorities and the local people is a very hostile one, full of caginess, bitterness and antagonism. Most people gave reasons like denial of access to their hunting activities, farmlands, killing of members of the community because of the animals, the raiding of the crops by the animals and the refusal to employ the youth to work in the park as the reason underneath the rancor between them and park authorities. In the next chapter, I discuss the livelihood activities of the people revealing their traditional knowledge, sensory experiences involve and forms of relationship that the people establish with their environment.

Chapter Five

Livelihood: Multi-sensory experiences and traditional knowledge

Introduction

In a study of the Massai herds men in Tanzania with regards to the effects of the establishment of the Tarangire National Park on their livelihood, Igoe (2004) conducted an oral history on their past resource management practices before the creation of the park in one village and spent time ‘truth testing’ his data with Massai elders in other villages. After undertaking this independent cross check, he remarked that, the local knowledge of the people of their environment is frequently accurate, because, the people he interviewed presented a coherent picture of the social and environmental changes taking place in their communities (Igoe 2004, 26). In this chapter, I discuss the livelihood activities of the people of Larabanga. These include farming, hunting, and gathering of fruits, nutritional and medicinal plants. The performance of these activities is embedded in rich traditional knowledge. These traditional knowledges are further noticed through the sensory experiences performed. Together, they all inform the relationship that the people have established with their environment.

5.1 Agriculture: Farming and animal husbandry

Agriculture is the main livelihood activity of majority of people of Ghana. In agriculture, the natural or environmental resources that can be found in and on the land are utilised as well as those in the sea. Agriculture involves the cultivation of plants and domestication of animals. Agriculture has become “the backbone of Ghana’s economy employing about 75% of the total population and account for more than 40% of the Gross National Product” (Okley 2004:4).

Similarly, agriculture is an integral part of the community life in Larabanga. However, farming is the main livelihood activity compared to animal husbandry. Yam, cassava, tomato, pepper, maize, and rice are some of the food items that the farmers cultivate. Both men and women are into farming. However from my experience in the community, I noticed that more Kamara men own farms than Kamara women. Children help their parents on the farm on regular basis. The Kamara farmers are very passionate about what they do. Due to strong attachment to their work, they are very knowledgeable about their land, soil, weather, commodities they produce and other important facets embedded in their work. For instance, they know how to determine the fertility and viability of their soil, which crops will do well geographically, soil erosion, when to farm a particular crop, how to maintain the general wellbeing of their farm, the vegetation, crops varieties, and appropriate cultivation methods. In the words of Abusa: *Farming is my job; I have been doing that for years. I know a lot about the land. If I am not good at what I do, why will I be considered one of the best in the village? Just look at the size of my farm.* His statement is similar to the statement from another farmer like Aunty Selina: *We farm because that is what we know and do best. Our parents mentored us over years, so we have all it takes to differentiate between soil types, crop types and others. We really know.*

The farmers in Larabanga determine the fertility of their soil using their senses of sight and touch. The farmer collects a small quantity of the soil onto his palm. He takes a very close look at the soil; that is he or she brings the soil very close to his or her eyes. In most cases, after taking a close look, the farmer easily knows if the soil is a good one or a bad one. To determine which particular item will do well in the particular soil, he rubs the soil between his fingers three times. Abusa explained to me that when feeling the soil, one needs to apply pressure. The pressure is supposed to break the soil particles into its smallest unit. On the third rub, one feels

the real texture of the soil and can tell the exact item to produce on the land. He added that, the pressure is very important because it is only when you know the level of the particles that you can determine the exact food item to engage on the land. I relied on my childhood experience to understand Abusa's assertion on differentiation of soil types with his sense of touch. Growing up as a child, on a couple of occasions that I went farming with my grandmother, I saw her felt the soil. I also recalled seeing my parents felt various soils when we worked on the family farm during a holiday in the village. Auntie Selina explained the importance of determining the soil fertility before engaging with the land:

This is what we do for a living. It is very important we don't make mistakes. If we sow wrongly, our families will be at a loss during harvest time. It is very important we know the exact land and exact food stuff so we can have enough to eat and sell. Do you see how far my farm is? It is because I felt the texture of the soil and with Allah's direction I knew yams will do well here. Even if you look at the nature of the soil carefully, no one should tell you this is a place for crops like yams and cassava.

These are vast sensory experiences that reveal the traditional knowledge of these farmers and how they are bonded with their land and farm products. Furthermore, this is what Merleau-Ponty describes as knowledge in the hands of which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort"(1962, 144). Simply put, the knowledge is embodied because it is the result of a relationship between the body and the environment. This also highlights the impact of community separation from performing their livelihood activities that bond them to their landscape. This is because, these activities are the bases of their engagement with their environment hence the accumulation of traditional knowledge which they pass on from one generation to another.

Yam, locally called *nyure* is the main commodity that most farmers produce. The cultivation of yam is very intense in Larabanga. During my stay in the community, I was struck

by the amount of yams produced in such a small community. Yam mounds dominate everywhere in the community, even the backyards of houses. According to Abusa, yam is the most difficult crop to cultivate. He explained that, the making of the *fundera* (yam mounds) is a very difficult task. The skills of the body at work and breathing techniques are very important skills in making the mounds, especially, if one wants to work for long hours. It is only in I sharing the experience of the making of yams mounds during my participation in the farming activities on Abusa's farm, that I fully comprehended its difficulty. It is a skill most members of the community have developed over years. I could not last for thirty seconds when I tried making one of the yam mounds. It is an act one perfects over a long period of time. Aunty Selina narrated her experience in acquiring these skills when she was growing up as a child:

I must say at the start it was difficult. Because of that sometimes I refuse to go to the farm. I remember being spanked by my mother several times when my body positioning or alignment and techniques are wrong. But as time passed by I improved and now I do it without knowing it involve certain skills and body positioning.



Fig 5.1 Kure (hoe for making yam mounds)



Fig 5.2 Abusa making yam mounds

To make a yam mound, one needs the *kure*. Experienced farmers like Abusa use only one hand to operate with the *kure*. Kids and fresh farmers like me, had to use our two hands to work. The farmer takes a bowing position and then with the *kure* digs out the soil in a circular style to make a small hill. The farmer breathes according to the pace at which he or she is digging. He does not dig too deep nor does he or she dig at one particular spot. As the farmer digs, he or she also gathers the dry grasses around onto the mound and uproots the fresh ones. This means fresh farmers like me cannot do both at the same time since I operate the *kure* with both hands. Abusa is able to make about fifty to seventy yam mounds in an hour. In this case, we see how children are educated to acquire the body techniques that are vital to community livelihood activity like farming. This education is only possible in the context in which the activity is performed. With regards to the establishment of the National Park, we arrive at a situation where generations to come will have no idea of these livelihood body techniques. The

reason being that, the park authorities have stopped the continuation of these activities so they can conserve plants and animals, which evidently from chapter four, it is politically and religiously being managed by the local authorities.



Fig 5.3 the researcher learning to make the *fundera* from Salia the son of Abusa

The main food in Larabanga is fufu made from yam. Every evening most families prepare yam fufu. Fufu is made by pounding boiled yam using mortar and pestle. According to my key informant, working on the farm is interesting because of the fufu prepared on the farm. He added that, the farm fufu is special and different from home fufu. The reason being that, the fufu is prepared from fresh harvested yams and the soup is prepared from freshly harvested vegetables and herbs. Clearly, we realise that even on the farm, the home condition is activated emphasizing how people tend to ‘fully dwell’ in their environment.



Fig 5.4 Making of fufu at the farm, the researcher joins in the pounding of the yam

The pounding of the fufu is a bodily activity which involves several movements. These bodily movements are very important in the fufu making process. This is because; the quality of the fufu is tied to the efficiency of the body techniques of the individual pounding the fufu. Therefore, parents ensure their children acquire these body techniques by training their bodies at early ages. With fufu being an important food to the community, the body techniques involved as defined through the Habitus, is equally important. As matter of fact, children who are not able to efficiently perform the techniques of the body involved in fufu making are considered lazy. Laziness on the other hand, is frowned upon because it not considered a moral or a value. Once again, we can see how moral sensibilities are attached to body techniques just as the case of purity and respect discussed in chapters three and four.

Still with yam cultivation, Kamara farmers produce four types of yams. These are *larbakor*, *seidubule*, *kpena* and *sakpanyina*. The people are able to differentiate between these four varieties using their senses of sight, taste and touch. My key informant indicated to me:

Our yams have a particular taste, aside that the fact that, if I see the raw yaw I can determine if it is from Larabanga or not, I can easily tell of it when it is cooked. Most of our people can easily tell. Our yams! We know them very well. I remember visiting a friend in Tamale one evening. I was served with boiled yams and tomatoes stew. After eating, I knew this is definitely from Larabanga. Upon inquiries my taste was confirmed.

When I was growing up as a young adult, I was always able to tell if a particular grain of rice was coming from my uncle's farm when I go to spend holidays in Ve-Kolenu in the Volta region of Ghana. My uncle owned a very big rice farm and I embodied the taste of the rice to the extent that, I am always right about the taste of the rice from his farm.

Other crops cultivated are cassava (*bankyi*), tomatoes, pepper and tobacco (*tara*). These items are not produced on large scale compared to the yams sold outside the community. Secondly, they are cultivated mainly for subsistence purpose. Tobacco in the other hand is cultivated by very few people for sale. It is also cultivated within the community in the backyards of houses.



Fig 5.5 Picture of the backyard tobacco farm



Fig 5.6 Processed tobaccos for sale

Furthermore, the cultivation of land in Larabanga is embedded in rich traditional knowledge and practices. Farmers practice shifting cultivation. They leave the land for about 5 to 10 years to fallow; however, the creation of the Mole National Park is making this practice difficult as most of their farmlands have been taken away. As I indicated in the previous chapter the Larabanga community has lost about 3000 acres of land to the park authorities. In practice, farmers do not completely clear their land but rather leave some vegetation standing. In addition, huge trees are left standing on the farm to serve as resting places. They also practice the slash and burn system before planting their crops. Finally, the farmers use simple farm tools like *kure* (hoes) and machetes.

Every Kamara believes that Allah blesses a farmer whose farm is located very far from the community. For that matter, most of the farmers have located their farms very far from the community. Getting to the farm is either by foot, bicycle or motorcycle. In addition, farmers

believe they can pray to Allah to send down rains on their farms only. Abusa mentioned to me that, there have been a couple of occasions where after working he prayed to Almighty Allah to send down the rains on to his farm and He did. He added that, when he got to the farm the next morning, he realised it has rained on only his farm, because, there was no rain in the community before he left to the farm and there was no sign that it has rained on his way to the farm. During my interview, Elder Hussein confirmed to me that Allah indeed sends rain to farmers who are upright (symbolic state of purity) in worshipping Him, during periods when the rains are scarce. In other words, a Kamara farmer needs to attain the 'symbolic state of purity' by constantly performing the *wonkuo* and the *won* and exhibiting the movement concerned with respect (*derema*) to have Allah send down the rains on to his farm, especially, during dry seasons. Obviously, we see the link between livelihood, religious and political activities.

Animal husbandry on the hand is practiced on a small scale in the community. The animals commonly raised include fowls, guinea fowls, ducks, sheep, goats and cattle. Every single family in the community raises one or more of these animals. These animals serve as a source of protein to balance the nutritional demands of their diets. The people are not located near the sea or lagoon hence their source of fish is external. These animals are raised on a free range with the exception of the cattle which is sometimes tied to firm structures or trees. That is, they are not confined to a particular structure but are allowed to leave with the people in the community. The animals go about fending for themselves. Strangely, every animal know its home and owner. They always return home at night to sleep in the open compound. The Kamara people are each other's keeper. In other words, members feed and take care of each other's animals when they see them around their homes. In chapter three, I discuss the concept of being-with-other during the celebration of Islamic festival; in this case we see how through the care for

other people's domestic animals, people affirm their being-with-each-other thus constitute their form of being-in-the-world. In contrast, it goes to affirm the concept of 'being-without' that characterise the relations of the people and the park authorities.

5.2 Hunting

Hunting in Ghana is a cherished economic activity even though currently it is being monitored. It used to be solely a subsistence economic activity where people hunt species of animals for their personal and family consumption. In many parts of the world today including Ghana, it has gradually transformed into a commercial activity (Pangua- Adam and Noske 2009, 74). People do not only hunt for their own consumption but also to sell for money. Looking at it from the economic lens, it brings money into the pockets of hunters and traders and most importantly, provides revenue to countries where the trade is practiced on a large scale. Also from the nutritive and cultural angles, it is supplementing sources of nutrition to communities while also serving religious and cultural purposes (Majnep and Bulmer, 1997, Dwyer and Minnegal 1991) In Ghana; hunting is an integral part of the country's social, cultural and economic ordinances

In Larabanga, hunting was the major livelihood activity that the people engaged in before the establishment of Mole National Park in 1957. It has taken a downward turn as a result of the strict rules forbidding the act by the park authorities. According to Alhassan, a majority of people gave up hunting when the park guards started killing members of the community who were caught hunting in the park. He added that, some people still hunt, but then, he believed they will stop one day. This is because the park authorities are aware and they know them. They are only waiting to lay their hands on them while hunting. I indicated in the previous chapter of a

shoot-out between park authorities and community members in which five members of the community were killed.

Baba Seidu on the other hand, indicated that some unemployed youth engage in hunting so they can sell for money to meet their daily needs. One youth intimated during the discussion session:

We resort to hunting, not because the promises attached to the creation of the park are not being fulfilled by the government. Most of us are unemployed; we want work to do but the park authorities rather prefer to employ young people from other parts of the country, leaving us. So sometimes we resort to hunting to sell so we can make ends meet.

Due to these strict measures on hunting, I could not participate in any hunting activity. I also could not get the chance to talk to anybody who was still hunting despite the strict rules. On the other hand, I spent time with some hunters who no longer hunt. In a research conducted at Takoradi in Ghana by Rowcliffe, Cowlshaw, and Meldelson (2004) in a bushmeat market, they reveal traditional knowledge of animals which the local people use to supplement their diets. They again conducted a similar study in the Jayapura region in Northeast Papua New Guinea, where they identified 19 species of birds and mammals that were hunted by local people (Pnagua-Adam and Noske 2009). Similarly, the Kamara hunters know the varieties of animal species that exist in their environment. These include antelope (*malfu*), elephant (*wowu*), bush big (*deer*), buffaloe (*mopua naafu*), monkey (*maama*) and tiger (*nyara*). Among these animals, the common animal that the hunters mentioned they bring home regularly is the antelope.

Aside the in-depth knowledge on the variety of animal species, the people of Larabanga, especially the hunters are more knowledgeable and skilled with regards to the performance of the hunt. The hunters know the various sounds of these diverse species; they know their foot prints and smell their odour. They can also tell of the proximity of animals, the

direction, where and when to find them. In addition, the hunters are able to attract some of these animals through their body movement, gestures, positioning and mimicking of their sounds and posture. More interestingly, they have various ways to trap the animals. Alhassan admitted:

For me I use all my sense in the act. I mean my ears, nose, eye, body and sometimes taste whenever I am on the field. These include the sound of the animals, the sound of the leaves, sound of the steps of animal and more. Through my nose I am able to tell if animals just past by or it is around me. To know the kind of animal takes years in the business to know. With my eye I can spot the foot print of animal and the direction it went. I can also spot the animal from afar. With the body I am able to make myself invisible to the animal or even act in a funny way just to get closer and have and good shot.



Fig 5.7 tracking the elephant through its footprints

Raman on the other hand explained how he uses his body to attract and trap most animals:

It is important to see the animal before it sees you. Immediately you realise that the animal has not seen you make yourself invisible and mimic the sound of the animal. If you are

using a gun just wait for the animal to come closer and take shot while still invisible. If you intend to trap it, get your trap ready before mimicking the animal. In this case, you make yourself invisible and repeat the mimicking until it falls into your trap. Honestly some of the animals are very smart. They will wait to see their colleague making the sound, so sometimes as you make yourself invisible, you shake the leaves in to indicate the presence of an animal.

During my safari in the Mole National Park, the tour guard used the footprints of the elephant to trace it. A group led by another tour guard took them straight to the very tree where the elephant comes to eat. Clearly, the tour guards are knowledgeable of the park and most of the knowledge is based on their sensory experiences. The tour guard on many occasions use the sounds, footprints and faeces of the animals as well as all other sensory knowledge of the whole park that they have embodied to teach and guard tourists. Some of the animals that we could not see such the hyena, the tour guard only made references to its footprint as and when we came across it. Through the work of the tour guards, I came to a clear understanding of how the hunters in Larabanga go about their work using their senses.



Fig 5.8 The elephant eating from its regular tree

According to the hunters, their job was regulated to make the activity sustainable. As I indicated in chapter three, the chief enforces taboos governing livelihood activities like hunting.

Firstly, hunters do not hunt on Fridays and during the period of the Ramadan fast. Secondly some animals are forbidden from hunting and consumption. These include the elephant, bush pig, and the monkey. In addition, hunters are not allowed to hunt young animals or animals fending for their young ones. Hunter reveres their chief, so they obey these taboos. Also eating of the monkey and the pig affects one's symbolic state of purity. Therefore, religiously and politically hunting of animals are controlled and managed. Raman lamented when I asked of the impact of the Mole National Park on their lives:

Our fathers and forefathers have lived on this land for years and they have taught us to be wise so that we do not go hungry in the future. How can we wake up and kill all the animals in the forest. Just us we depend on them they also depend on us. For me I think we can do better than the park authorities if really it is about conservation or protecting the animals. I am saying this because we know the forest more than they do. We have through our years acquired diverse experiences relating to the behaviour of most of the animals. We know it when elephant is nearby or an antelope is on the run. We smell them, we hear them and we feel them. The hunting techniques are things we did not learn from school because we never went to school, I don't even know if they can teach these in school. It all happened as we followed our parents on their hunting expeditions. They taught us how to make traps and which kind of smell or leaves can attract some particular animals. Also particular trees around which certain particular animal can be found eating or playing. How to track animal without it noticing our presence and how to feel the presence of animal.

Further on, the experiences shared by these hunters and my own experience with the tour guards highlight the degree to which sensory experiences play a great role in the hunting of wild animals in Larabanga. These sensory experiences also reveal the depth of traditional knowledge the hunters are endowed with. All the hunters lamented about impact of the Mole National Park on their inability to go hunting with their children and teach them what they learnt from their parents. These lamentations go to affirm the kind of relationship that has been established with the park authorities that I discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, there are also vast sensory experiences in the traditional knowledge of the people with regards to gathering

and picking medicinal herbs, nutrition herbs and fruits as well bitterness and anger over park authorities.

4.3 Gathering of plants and fruits

Gathering of plants and picking of fruits is another common livelihood activity that the Kamara people engage in. They have variety of plant species that they gather for nutritional and medicinal purposes. The nutritional herbs are mostly used in preparing soups to accompany the eating of local foods like *fufu*, *tuozafo*, *banku*, *omotuo*. Some are also used to prepare stews or sauce to accompany boiled rice, yam and cassava. Examples of nutritional herbs include *kpalugo*, *driyi* and *akpotromi*. Medicinal plants on the other hand are used to treat illness like malaria or fever, headaches, abdominal pains and more. Also broken legs, bruises, burns, cuts and others are mostly treated using varieties of plant species. *Yinsi*, *kumkpalaga* and *kintan* are some examples of medicinal herbs. Some fruits that are unique to the people include the following *daazi*, *piatiri*, *taama*

From my experience in the community, gathering plants for various purposes are mostly carried out by women and children. They gather these plants from their farms, on their way from farms and from the Mole National Park area. The identification of these plants is embedded with rich traditional knowledge. These traditional knowledges are performed through the senses and sometimes divinely. I indicated in the introduction of the third chapter that, religion permeates every aspect of community life. This is due to the great importance of purity, which is attained through the performance of *wonkuo* and *kuo*. This symbolic state of purity is very important for individual to be able to identify herbal plants in Larabanga. What I mean is that, the women of Larabanga have learned to identify plants species through their senses of

sight, smell, touch and taste as they attain the symbolic state of purity. Grandma Ayisha narrated her experience in acquiring the skills and knowledge to identify plant species for medication;

At very early age in life, I always follow my mother to farm and collecting of fuel wood for the family. Any time we are returning home my mother harvest several leaves of plants, stems of plants and even the roots and backs which she uses to prepare medicine for us, when we have cuts and stomach problems which cause us to vomit. I began to ask question anytime I go out with my mother just to know the differences in the plants. Basically, I do that either by feeling the texture of the leaf, smelling or tasting it. As year went by, I learnt the unique smells, taste and texture of these plants. When I go to the farm alone and I have a cut, I just put to use what I have learnt practically from my other on myself. There was one occasion I squeezed a wrong herb on to a cut I had and it worked because I could not walk far for the herb I knew. So you see, some of the herbs I learnt by divine inspiration from Allah. It is unfortunate I am too old now to take you out to the field and our children don't know all these because the government has taken our land to protect the animals in them.

Therefore, the eviction of the people from their land, to preserve it for people to visit and have pleasure or recreation, has resulted in the loss of traditional knowledge, because, women cannot take their children to plant gathering. This situation is another affirmer to the anger, frustration and other sensibilities that characterize the relationship between the people and the park authorities.

In treating wounds and illness using the herbs, she added that:

Knowing the herbs is just one aspect of it. I always pray to Almighty Allah for his direction in the application of these herbs because I believe I do the treatment and He does the healing. Over the years, I acquired knowledge of which plants can help treat a particular kind of illness.

Identifying nutritional plants according Grandma Ayisha is very easy because they see and eat this plant every day. They know the taste and smell of these plants. In other words they have embodied the taste and smell of these plants.



Fig 5.9 Dried powdered baobab leaves

On the other hand, the children in Larabanga are very knowledgeable of the fruits in the community. Fruit picking is common among the children. On several occasions I encountered children either going for fruit picking or returning from fruit picking. The children pick the ripe fruit that have fallen from the tree. Only few adults engage in fruit picking. Those who even do that, pick the fruits from their farms or on their way from the farm to the house. Most of these fruit are unique to Larabanga. I was introduced to several fruit I have never seen or tasted before. These varieties of fruit highlight the knowledge that these people have of their environment and how they depend on their environment.



Fig 5.10 Children returning from fruit picking, the fruit in the picture is locally called *daazi*

During the interview session, farmers and hunters indicated that plants that serve medicinal and nutritional purposes are forbidden from destruction by taboos governing the harvesting and use these plants in the community.

From these activities, that is farming, hunting and gathering, coupled with multi-sensory experiences embedded in the traditional knowledges, we come to a full understanding of how the people of Larabanga ‘dwell’ in their environment. The words of Torps sums up the arguments on dwelling:

An emphasis on dwelling brings out the following characteristics of the relationship between people and landscape: that there are spatially and temporally distributed task; that these are organised through variety of social practices; that relationship with what is taken to be ‘nature’ is embodied, involving a variety of senses; that there are physical components which partly constitute such ‘dwelling (2008, 12).

Summary

The people of Larabanga are very knowledgeable about what they do. They have acquired diverse traditional knowledge about their work embedded with rich sensory experience

or engagements with the environment. The farmers are able to identify their soil and farm products sensorally, hunters go about their job using their senses and women and children have knowledge of plants and fruits. These knowledges are based on their sensory engagements with these plants and fruits. Clearly, the relationship between the people, what they do, what they know and their environment is due to their embodied presence in the environment and their continuous interaction with the resources in them. As Parr (2010, 4) stated, “the environment and technologies with which we live, play and work leads to develop specific modes of bodily attention and perception”.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I demonstrated how the people of Larabanga engage in their everyday environments through particular sensory orders. I have presented these orders through the themes of religion, politics and livelihood. My hypothesis was that paying attention to the senses would provide a deeper understanding of the daily life of the people of Larabanga and their relations with their environment. The people of Larabanga just as any human being live in their environment and they learn or more specifically experience their environment through their daily activities (Parr 2010). Our senses are for that matter the conduit through which the knowledge of these experiences flows (Parr 2010). The knowledge of these experiences constitutes embodied experiences or habitus that define, shape, inform and sustain the Larabanga community from one generation to another.

The people in their Islamic practices and rituals emphasise kinesthesia, the sense of movement. The performance of *wonkuo* and *won* are activities that are bodily performed. These performances carry meanings that reflect the relationship between the people, their founder, plants and animals. The relationship is sustained by an individual always having a complete symbolic state of purity. The state is symbolic because the agency is attributed to the cleansing process and not the water or sand that is used for the exercise. Being pure in Larabanga is a moral value that has been embodied. The purity state of individuals transcends all other activities that the people do. Secondly, religiously the people emphasize the ability to hear from the *lendani* through his usual call to prayer. This hearing ability is also important as one must hear from the imam as well. Further on, people develop the ability to hear from spirit and plants. In this case, there is a sensory shift as the sense of hearing spiritually is coded differently. It is

important to note that the ability of the individual to hear from spirit and plants is tied to the sensory code for purity. In other words, to hear spiritually one needs to be pure.

This same state of purity is very important for chiefs in Larabanga. But more importantly the people again emphasise specific body techniques that are relevant. In this case the body techniques are coded sensorally to mean respect. Respect is a cherished value among the people of Larabanga. They people show respect through body movement and gestures. These gestures carry meaning and drive intrusive sensory experiences. For example, *Nzia drema* is a common statement among elders of the community signifying that they feel within them when they are accorded respect by members of the community. The symbol of authority of the chief of Larabanga is the antelope because he sits on a pile of skins of the antelope. The chief is therefore an embodiment of the qualities of the antelope which include peace, purity, harmony and sound polity. The antelope also signifies the state of the purity that is accorded to the chief. As a result the people consume the meat of the antelope as symbol of purity to show respect to the divine position of the chief. He therefore decrees the taboos that govern life in the community especially livelihood activities.

The main livelihood activities of the people of Larabanga is farming, hunting and gathering. These activities are embedded with rich traditional knowledge that they have embodied. Clearly, the people have knowledge of plant and animal which are evidenced in the strong sensory engagement through which they harness and use them. These sensory experiences further deepened our understanding of the relationship that the people have with their land, plants, and animals. This is because what they experience is what they know. The traditional knowledge on plants, animals, identification of medicinal plants, the identification of fertile soils and farm products; the habitus or the kinaesthetic tendencies involve in working the land, taboos

governing the way they go about using these resources and religious practices that inform progress and success, tells a story of how people know and depended on their environment to meet their livelihood needs.

Sensory experiences embedded in religious, political and livelihood activities and practices in Larabanga demonstrate a kind of relationship which sheds more light on the idea of separating local people from their environment or keeping them in their environment. The resources and their environment forms part of their life-world. Such understanding directs that, the creation and management of parks should take into account the bond between local people and their environment, thereby giving them some form of recognition. The case might be different in other local communities but it is all about sharing in the lived experiences of community life and practices. In such an approach, trust is built and the people feel at home, since ones' interest is to live with them to understand their forms of being-in-the-world. Conservation through the creation of parks continues to center on local communities which Berkes (2004) acknowledged is full of complexities, I therefore suggest other stakeholders should consider other approaches such as employing anthropology of the senses and phenomenology.

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