Meat Consumption Culture in Ethiopia

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Abstract

The consumption of animal flesh food in Ethiopia has associated with cultural practices. Meat plays pivotal and vital parts in special occasions and its cultural symbolic weight is markedly greater than that accorded to most other food. Processing and cooking of poultry is a gender based duty and has socio-cultural roles. Ethiopians are dependent on limited types of animals for meats due to the taboo associated culturally. Moreover, the consumption of meat and meat products has a very tidy association with religious beliefs, and are influenced by religions. The main religions of Ethiopia have their own peculiar doctrines of setting the feeding habits and customs of their followers. They influence meat products consumption through dictating the source animals that should be used or not be used for food, and scheduling the days of the years in periodical permeation and restriction of consumptions which in turn influences the pattern of meat consumption in the country. In Ethiopia, a cow or an ox is commonly butchered for the sole purpose of selling within the community. In special occasions, people have a cultural ceremony of slaughtering cow or ox and sharing among the group, called Kircha, which is a very common option of the people in rural area where access of meat is challenging frequently.

Key words: meat, consumption culture, Ethiopia

Introduction

The food practices of humans are determined by values, attitudes, beliefs, and environmental and religious circumstances; all of which are the products of tradition, culture, and contacts (Onuorah and Ayo, 2003). Knowledge and culture affect the intake of a particular food (Asp, 1999). The success in understanding the culture of other countries or ethnic groups lies in understanding their rituals in food consumption customs (Nam et al., 2010). In developing countries, culture plays a crucial role in determining food patterns (Lahsaeizadeh, 2001). According to Kebede (2010), cultural diversity is the unique feature of Ethiopia; the country’s population composed of about 80 ethnic groups whose cultures are diverse one another. Each ethnic group has its own culture manifested to the widely practiced diet (national foods), way of living, celebrations, dressing and dances at the cities and the cultural fabric intertwining is still continuing (Kebede, 2010).

It was indicated by Twigg (1984) that almost all cultures build their principal meal around meat. Meat has social significance in family gatherings, making friendships, prestige by offering dinners etc. (MAPP, 1994). In Ethiopia, there are occasions in which meat plays pivotal and vital parts and its cultural symbolic weight is markedly greater than that accorded to most other foods. These include holidays, initiation rites and visitations by important guests (Kifleyesus, 2007). On feasting days and social ceremonies of Ethiopia, according to Bea (1993), meat products are eaten and the stews are also made mainly from chicken, beef, lamb and mutton.

Meat and poultry consumptions in Ethiopia have associated peculiar cultural practices, for instance: the peoples use the oldest and cultural preservation of meat and prepare traditional dishes from meat, processing and cooking of poultry is a gender based duty and has socio-cultural roles, meat by-products are utilized for preparation of traditional dishes, and the peoples are dependent on limited types of source of animals for meats due to the taboo culturally associated.

It is a fact that the share of meat in the human diet has been closely related with a life style, wealth, habits, reli-
gious beliefs and human awareness. Fashion, marketing and advertising also play a considerable part. Of all, cultural and religious considerations have always played, and still play, a significant role in the preparation and consumption of meat products (Borowski, 2007). Religious-beliefs shape also the social behaviors where differences in religious affiliations tend to influence the way people live, the choices they make, the food they eat, and with whom they associate (Kim et al., 2004).

The population of Ethiopia is diverse in religious beliefs: Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and Islam are the major religions, traditional animist religions being practiced by many ethnic groups, and minority of followers of other Christian denominations is existing (United Nations, 2004). Varying in their beliefs, Ethiopia’s religions have a significant role to play on consumption of meat and meat products by setting the feeding habits and customs of the people which in turn influences the pattern of meat consumption in the country. Therefore, this review will consider various factors, mainly religious and their beliefs, which have a considerable effects on consumption of food of animal origin in Ethiopia, positively or the negatively.

Factors Affecting the Meat Consumption Culture

Religion

The consumption of animal products and more specifically meat and meat products is most strictly regulated in cases where religious considerations prevail (Shatenstein and Ghadirian, 1997). It was posited by Sheikh and Thomas (1994) that the religious groups to which people belong will determine food practices according to their religion. Differences in religious affiliations tend to influence the way people live, the choices they make, what they eat and whom they associate with; the beliefs play significant parts in sculpting social behavior (Kim et al., 2004) and are inbuilt to dictate what a person can eat and what he cannot (Onuorah et al., 2003). The consumption of meat and meat products in Ethiopia has very tidy association with religious beliefs, and are influenced by religions.

In Ethiopia, according to CSA (2004), Christians generally represent 62.8% of the population: 43.5% Orthodox Christians, 18.6% Protestant and 0.7% Catholic. Muslims are 33.9% of the population. The Animist, the traditional beliefs, accounts for the rest 2.6%. Because these main religions of Ethiopia have their own peculiar doctrines in detecting the feeding pattern of their followers, it will be critical to understand the situation of animals flesh food consumption in relation to the religious influences. The influences of these Ethiopian mainly religions on the peoples’ meat products consumption can be illustrated into two ways; the beliefs dictate the source animals that should be used or not be used for food, and schedule the days of the years in periodical permeation and restriction of meat products consumptions.

The Coptic Orthodox Church, the dominant religious sect, has been dictating many food customs in Ethiopia since the fourth century (Bea, 1993). According to the belief of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Christians, the faithful must abstain from eating meat and dairy products to attain forgiveness of sins committed during the year, and undergo a rigorous schedule of prayers and atonement (Teklehaimanot, 2005). Therefore, followers do not eat meat and dairy products (i.e. egg, butter, milk, and cheese) on fasting days such as Wednesdays and Fridays except the 50 days running from Easter, the Fast of the Prophets, the fast of Nineveh, Lent, the Fast of the Apostles and the fast of the Holy Virgin Mary (Teklehaimanot, 2005). The Ethiopian Orthodox Christians follow fasts in a way similar to other Orthodox Christians but with a frequency of approximately 250 days in a year (Rakesh and Tafesse, 2010). This religious influence along with the poor national economy results in the low per capita meat consumption (Table 1).

The three Ethiopia’s Christian sects such as Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic, 62.8% of the total population, have the same ritual process for animal slaughtering, which is, slaughtering the animals in the name of “trinity”: the name of “Father God, Son Jesus and the Holy Sprit”. Whereas, Muslim’s ritual slaughtering entails that the animal is killed in God’s name, “Allah”. Based on these differences only existing in ritual animals slaughtering between Christians and Muslims, the municipals abattoirs and slaughter house facilities in most of the Ethiopia’s cities and towns are constructed and provide service by targeting of the Muslims and the Christians.

On the fasting days of Orthodox Christian followers,

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Per capita meat consumption (kg)</th>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>2005</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>8.5</td>
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