



Nkrabea and Hyebre in African Philosophy of Life

Edward Agboada¹  & Michael Kwadwo Ntiamoah¹ 

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi – Ghana.

ABSTRACT

The concepts of *nkrabea* and *hyebre* in Africa's philosophy of life present very distinctive nomenclature and epistemology of how it applies within the socioreligiocultural cosmology. As a challenge to normative definition, the epistemology of the African philosophical context engenders new nomenclatures that hitherto were rejected by the hegemonic frameworks of Western paradigmatic nomenclature. The African philosophy of life which is formed by a very distinct socioreligioculture and framed by fascination and experience of the supernatural does not fail to recognise the existence of vast dimensions and active spiritual cosmology. If there is anything conceived with such an aura of reverence, it is life, beyond biological classification and, experiences such as the ability to think, feel, or be aware of one's existence. Life is "energy" (spiritual force) which provides every element its function or purpose and *nkrabea* and *hyebre* are the function or purpose predetermined for every element. The objective of the study was to find out the meaning of *nkrabea* and *hyebre* and how they apply to the African philosophy of life. The study used a qualitative research method. Data was gathered from journals, articles, and library materials. Ethical responsibilities defined a set of principles and protocols that guided the study. The study concluded that the concepts of *nkrabea*, and *hyebre* are conceptualised within the African philosophy of life and present critical nomenclatures on the function, or purpose of life within the context of human destiny and inform new epistemology. Its belief provides a perspective that informs the idea that nothing is purposeless.

Correspondence

Edward Agboada

Email: agboadaedwards@gmail.com

Publication History

Received: 22nd November, 2023

Accepted: 13th February, 2024

Published online:

1st March, 2024

Keywords: *Nkrabea*, *Hyebre*, *Cosmology*, *Spirituality*, *Philosophy*

INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent that possesses a variety of concepts that describe and define a distinctive socioreligiocultural context and rationalisation within its cosmology, i.e., life, living, and dimensions of the physical and spiritual universe; a universe consisting in active spirituality and dynamics of complex beliefs, myths, and legends. Markham once remarked, "Africa is mystic, it is wild; a sweltering inferno; photographer's paradise, hunter's *valhalla*, and escapist's *utopia*."¹ This quote reflects the captivating nature of Africa, highlighting its mystique, and the unique experiences it provides those who escape into its beauty and culture. A chunk of research highlights some of the philosophies that provide "context" and "expression" to its cosmology and worldviews. Brown observed two schools of thought that emerged;

The first held the view that Africa's socioreligioculture and cosmology provide distinct ontology and praxis which has formed the basis of certain perceptions about everything in the physical and spiritual cosmology including life and everything connected with it.

The second remained overly critical and prejudicial of socioreligiocultural and cosmological ontology that formed the basis for its philosophical nomenclature as not competitive and

¹ Markham cited in Nicoletta Brazzelli, "A View of Africa from the Sky: Beryl Markham and the Female Gaze," *Culture* 21 (2008): 365–80.

without the capacity to provide a legitimate basis for philosophical formulations and nomenclatures.²

For Ekanem, unfortunately, such critiques were anchored in gross prejudicial perceptions about African socioreligiocultural cosmology, on one side and on the other side, that African philosophy should conform to the same standard of Western philosophy.³ They accused it of being ethnocentric or heterogenic, lacking universalisability.

Against such rhetorics Wiredu and Bodunrin's response is classic; they argued that there is nothing as "cultural universals" and that so-called Western philosophic ontology was not formed in a vacuum; a certain "context" formed its ontology and praxis.⁴ In an attempt to answer the question "Is there something as African philosophy? Onyewuenyi highlights several factors that proved the existence and engagement of such an activity as "*phileous sophia*" in Africa independent of hegemonic Western philosophical nomenclatures and that there is absolutely no reason why African philosophy should follow same protocols as Western philosophy or that it should be examined based on same parameters since each is informed by different socioreligiocultural realities.⁵ This study attempts to examine how Africans have conceived and perceive life within its socioreligiocultural cosmology to decipher the particularities, and specificity of socioreligiocultural nomenclatures that have informed its views and perceptions (physical or spiritual) of life, the nature of life and structure of life. This is done by first, identifying what constituted the cosmology of Africa, the spirituality of the cosmology, particularity, or specificity of socioreligiocultural parameters of philosophical ontologies and nomenclatures, and then, a conceptualisation of the meaning or essence of life in its socioreligiocultural context. Two aspects of the philosophy of life, which give both context and expression to the philosophy of life, *nkrabea* and *hyebre* are particularly the focus and highlight of this study.

A Socioreligiocultural Cosmology

The idea that there exists a socioreligioculture and cosmological reality that provides a legitimate and competitive basis for philosophical nomenclatures in different societies is not a fabrication polemic conjecture. In the introduction to cosmology, Ryden refers to several cosmogonies i.e., quantum, homogeneous and theoretical.⁶ Liddle highlights the physical and spiritual (metaphysical) cosmological as two concepts that provide contexts and content for its study.⁷ For Udefi, in Africa, there is a socioreligiocosmological ontology that gives expression to the way people conceive the worlds in which they live.⁸ It forms the basis of assumptions that constitute their cosmology (world) as African.

According to Christensen "African cosmology" as a concept has two nuances; first, it refers to the cosmic physical and spiritual realities of the African people, and second, it refers to the way Africans conceive and perceive their world which is constituted by a certain traditio-cultural, socio-economic, and religious mindset.⁹ According to Costa, the traditio-cultural informs respect for the institution of traditions, culture and rulership which gives the people not just "identity" but a source of pride expressed through music, dance, art, cuisine, and fashion and is also the repository of indigenous knowledge often contained in myths, legends, parables and metaphors or folktales.¹⁰

According to Mawuko-Yevugah and Attipoe, kinship, or rulership, provided the legal framework. In many African societies, it is kingship that provides the umbrella under which all families are united.¹¹ Royalty, therefore is conceived with prestige and reverence because within its institution resided the physical and spiritual membership of the family. The socio-religious is informed by strong social and religious structures that form the basis of family systems, and religiosity or spirituality of the society. Idang posits that society in African

² Lee M Brown, *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ Francis E Ekanem, "On the Ontology of African Philosophy," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 1, no. 1 (2012): 54–58.

⁴ Kwasi Wiredu, "Are There Cultural Universals?," *The African Philosophy Reader*, 1998, 31–39; Peter O Bodunrin, "The Question of African Philosophy," *Philosophy* 56, no. 216 (1981): 161–79.

⁵ Innocent Onyewuenyi, "Is There an African Philosophy?," *Journal of African Studies* 3, no. 4 (1976): 513.

⁶ Barbara Ryden, *Introduction to Cosmology* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁷ Andrew Liddle, *An Introduction to Modern Cosmology* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015).

⁸ Amaechi Udefi, "Philosophy, Mythology and an African Cosmological System," *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 22, no. 1 (2012): 114–26.

⁹ James B Christensen, "African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples" (JSTOR, 1955), 1313-1315.

¹⁰ Anthony A Costa, "Chieftaincy and Civilisation: African Structures of Government and Colonial Administration in South Africa," *African Studies* 59, no. 1 (2000): 13–43.

¹¹ Lord Mawuko-Yevugah and Harry Anthony Attipoe, "Chieftaincy and Traditional Authority in Modern Democratic Ghana," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 3 (2021): 319–35.

socioreligiiculture is complex and comprises elaborate clan or family membership and ensures continuity, development, ethics, and a sense of moral responsibility.¹²

Every individual is responsible for the goodness of others. No individual's action is to bring calamity or misfortune to the other. The concept "*ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (I am because you are) emphasises the interconnectedness of all people and the idea that humanity is tied to relationships with others, highlights the importance of working together, supporting each other, and fostering a sense of unity within the community. Dogbe asserts that it is within this context that Africans have developed a worldview that establishes a foundation that promotes the values of empathy, community, and mutual support and encourages people to be compassionate, and mindful of how their actions can affect others.¹³

Spirituality of the Socioreligiicultural Cosmology

Kanu argues that African cosmology is a "dual" cosmology; physical and metaphysical (spiritual). The physical cosmology consists in the corporeal or geographic features of the ecological system i.e., mountains, rivers, plants, animals, and humans. The metaphysical consists of an active spiritual realm made up of gods, spirits, ancestors, deities etc. One of the many reasons every element in the African cosmology is perceived with respect and veneration. They are regarded as possible means of access or contact with spiritual cosmology. Others are also perceived as possessed by spirits whose energy can be used for purposes such as healing, protection etc. The rationale behind the active presence of spiritism in rural Africa consists in the use of elements i.e., bones (skeletons), internal organs and animal skin, etc, for divination, necromancy, black magic, etc.¹⁴

Xaba, Harrison and Collins posit that this is the basis for traditional healthcare systems which are as old as human beings themselves.¹⁵ Ekeke and Chike observed a whole ecology and hierarchy of divinities (gods, spirits, deities) and ancestors who pervade the indigenous socioreligiicultural cosmology.¹⁶ At the top of the hierarchy is the "Supreme" being. In selected cultures such as the Ga (Ghana, West Africa) the "Supreme" being is "sexless" that is, he or she has no gender. He is neither male nor female; therefore, his name is *Ataa Naa Nyɔnyɔ* (father, mother, God). In others, he is considered as a male, and his femininity is considered as an attribute rather than his personhood. Thus Kasambala argues that how he is called reflects the fascination of his power and might.¹⁷

The Akan call him *Onyankopɔn* and *Twereduampɔn* emphasising his "dependability," the Ewe's call him *Sogbolisa*, *Kitikata*, or *Adanuwotor* emphasising that "what he cannot do does not exist"; he is capable of anything and everything. In Yoruba, he is called *Olorun*, or *Olodumarun* emphasising that he is lord and creator god. Ekpat observed however, that in the literature he is described generally as "incomparable" and "all-powerful" - he has no equal, the head of the hierarchy or pantheons of gods, divinities, and spirits.¹⁸ In every spiritual activity such as libation, prayer, and divination, he is the first mentioned. The second, who is considered the feminine counterpart of the "Supreme" being is the "earth" goddess (*Asaase Yaa*) who symbolises the Earth's nurturing and life-giving qualities.

Welbourn is of the view that the "Supreme" being, is a cluster of divinities, gods, spirits, and sacred ancestors who function as mercenaries or servants of the "Supreme" being and assist in the protection, control, and sustenance of the universe.¹⁹ Their authority is assigned by the "Supreme" being. Their habitation is not restricted to either realm. They have access to both the physical and spiritual realms as long as it is required to perform a task. There is also a cluster of "spirits" although divine, their divinity is "diminutive," who serve as mercenaries to the gods and higher divinities. In other words, they can be described as "lower" divinities and have close association or contact with human beings. They inhabit physical elements i.e., mountains, rocks, rivers, forests, plants, etc. They can be consulted for various reasons and purposes. They are made up of "benevolent" and "malevolent" (or wicked) spirits.

¹² Gabriel E Idang, "African Culture and Values," *Phronimon* 16, no. 2 (2015): 97–111.

¹³ Korsi Dogbe, "Concept of Community and Community Support Systems in Africa," *Anthropos*, no. H. 5./6 (1980): 781–98.

¹⁴ Anthony Kanu, Ikechukwu. "The dimensions of African cosmology." *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 2, no. 2 (2013): 533-555.

¹⁵ Thokozani Xaba, "Marginalized Medical Practice: The Marginalization and Transformation Of," *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* 3 (2007): 317; Ira E Harrison and Collins O Airhihenbuwa, "Traditional Medicine in Africa: Past, Present, and Future," *Health and Health Care in Developing Countries: Sociological Perspectives*, 1993, 122–34.

¹⁶ Emeka C Ekeke and Chike A Ekeopara, "God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology," *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2010): 209–18.

¹⁷ Amon Eddie Kasambala, "The Impact of an African Spirituality and Cosmology on God-Images in Africa: A Challenge to Practical Theology and Pastoral Ministry," 2005.

¹⁸ AniediAbasi Okon Ekpat, "Concepts of God, Divinities, Ancestors, and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Thought: Conceptual Analysis," in *Phenomenological Approaches to Religion and Spirituality* (IGI Global, 2021), 18–43.

¹⁹ F B Welbourn, "God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity" (JSTOR, 1974), 140-142.

According to Ephirim-Donkor, the cluster of sacred ancestors are clans, tribes, or family members who lived exemplary lives and left good legacies that posterity can refer to to educate others.²⁰ Doumbia and Naomi further add that, what is more important is that, it took more than dying at an old age for one to be admitted into the world of sacred ancestors, there had to be impeccability of character, and dedication to family, clan or community development, and growth.

The Socioreligiocultural Philosophy of Life

Africa has a unique way of looking at the world. The “lenses” through which it “conceives” and “perceives” the world which are its “philosophical rationalities” have been formed out of fascination and experiences of the supernatural. The principles of these rationalities include interconnectedness of all things; the sacred and spiritual nature of life; collective or individual identity; the collective or inclusive nature of family; and the value of interpersonal relations. For Carroll, they are not just unique, but pertinent to Africa’s indigenous socioreligiocultural cosmology, encompassing the basis of philosophical rationalisations that provide distinctive context for the examination of issues within Africa’s thought with a tapestry of philosophical ontologies and praxis.²¹ If there is anything conceived with the aura of sacredness and reverence, then it is “life,” considered precious and priceless.

Its definition is surrounded by an aura of spirituality and sacredness beyond simplistic biological or philosophical definitions such as growth, reproduction, response to stimuli, metabolism, and homeostasis. It is beyond consciousness or subjective experiences such as the ability to think, feel, perceive, and be aware of one’s existence. Agada is of the view that life is conceived generally as “energy” that which resides in every “element” and causes them to function.²² In Africa’s cosmology, therefore, every element is believed to possess a “life-form.” For instance, there is a “form of life” in lakes, plants, mountains, rocks, and humans, etc however these “life-forms” differ from one life-form to another. This is what assigns each “life-form” (element) a “purpose” and “function” in the physical or spiritual space. Just as has been alluded to earlier, this concept of “life-forms” is the basis of the “sacredness” or “reverence” for every “element”.

Notwithstanding the differences in “life-forms,” there is a sense of “superiority” of the life-form of humans which is conceived as the crown of all life-forms. The concept of “life-forms” which is also conceived as “state” is not static, it changes. This means there is a possibility of one life-form being in one state at one time and changing into another at another time. “Rebirth” or “reincarnation” which is critical to Africa’s philosophy of life as a cycle; a cycle of birth, death and rebirth is the only means that provides the means through which this happens. The concept has it that unlike “reincarnation”, there can be rebirth of one life-form when removed particularly from the physical space but not necessarily in the same life-form as previous. While “reincarnation” can be the total (thus complete) rebirth of a life-form or partial (thus aspect) of a life-form, “rebirth” is always all the time total or complete.

It is important, however, to emphasise that, either “rebirth” or reincarnation” does not occur automatically. According to Okolie the concept of life in Africa’s cosmology is such that, a life-form when removed from the physical space can be rebirthed but such depends on complex factors described as the “nature” or “merit” of a life-form that has attained satisfactory standard of purpose or function.²³ Riesman posits that various factors determine whether a life-form when removed can be “rebirth” but two are important.²⁴ The first is in the case where a life-form is unable to satisfactorily attain its function or purpose due to accidental removal. It is sometimes, allowed to be rebirthed to come and complete that purpose or assignment. The second is when a life-form functions satisfactorily, it is counted as a merit and a privilege for rebirth in another life-form, often in what is considered a higher life-form.

This belief is the reason for the concept of gradation of life-forms. For instance, when a life-form has attained a satisfactory function or purpose but is removed, when it is rebirthed because of the merit of the satisfactory function or purpose in the previous life-form, its rebirth happens in a higher life-form. This concept of life; its gradation, satisfactory standard function, or failure of which can cause a life-form when removed from the physical space to be rebirth in a lower life-form has engendered a system of moral principles. One has

²⁰ Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

²¹ Karanja Keita Carroll, “An Introduction to African-Centered Sociology: Worldview, Epistemology, and Social Theory,” *Critical Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2014): 257–70.

²² Ada Agada, “The African Vital Force Theory of Meaning in Life,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (2020): 100–112.

²³ Charles Nkem Okolie, “Living as a Person until Death: An African Ethical Perspective on Meaning in Life,” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (2020): 208–18.

²⁴ Paul Riesman, “The Person and the Life Cycle in African Social Life and Thought,” *African Studies Review* 29, no. 2 (1986): 71–138.

to live a responsible life, and maintain a satisfactory standard of function for a life-form before they can be rebirth in the continuous cycle of life or be reincarnated.

Concept of Person (personhood)

The second concept of life which dovetails into the concept of personhood is life as the *mogya* (blood) which when removed (spilled) or stopped flowing causes a person to cease to live. There is however, a nexus between “life” and “living,” “person” and “personhood. If “life” is a biological construct, “living” is a social (provenance [characteristic feature]) of life. But for Afriyie being “human” (*Onipa*) has a distinct ontology and complexity. *Onipayo* (personhood) on the other hand is a complex concept revolving around the question of what it means to be a person or what criteria define personhood.²⁵ John Locke believes a person is described as a “thinking being who can reason, reflect and consider itself as itself.”²⁶ In other words, “to be a person is to possess the capacity of reasoning and consciousness of oneself.

Therefore, characteristics such as self-awareness, rationality, and capacity for subjective experiences i.e., thoughts, feelings, etc, making decisions, exercising one's will freely, and participating in social relationships have been considered criteria. Notwithstanding, there is a distinctive perspective in African socioreligiocultural philosophy about personhood. According to Oyeshile two philosophical ontologies describe “*Onipa*” (human/person); the “*tripartite*” and the “*pentachotomistic*.”²⁷ For Gyekye man is “*tripartite*” (made up of three elements), the *Okra* (soul) *Sunsum/honhom* (spirit) and *Honam/Nipadua* (body).²⁸ The *Okra* (soul) is given by *Onyankopon* (the supreme being/God) for Akesson the *Okra* (soul) is therefore, the “eternal” aspect of *Onipa* (Man/Woman) and carrier of *nkrabea* (destiny).²⁹

Gyekye and Wiredu are of the view that the *Okra* (soul) is the *adwenboa* (conscience) since it emanates from *Onyankopon* (the supreme being/God) and possesses *papa* (goodness [goodness]) and is indestructible.³⁰ It is the only part of *Onipa* (a person) that goes through the three cycles of life; birth, death, and rebirth. The *Okra* (soul) from *Onyankopon* (the supreme being/God), the *Sunsum/honhom* (spirit) which is the individual spirit of a person is what is nurtured to become the *adwenboa* (conscience) through a social process. Based on this, some moral ethicists, argue that, first, every *Onipa* (Man/Woman) fundamentally has *papaye* (goodness) in them, because of the *Okra* (soul) which comes from *Onyankopon* (the supreme being), second, the propensity of evil is the result of a failure to manage dynamics of the functions of the *sunsum/honhom* (spirit) formed by association or interaction with the environment through a social structure.

This is why there is a saying, ‘If you want to change a person, change the social process.’ The social process is very critical to the formation of the right character. This is one of the reasons why in Africa nurturing a person (child) is considered the responsibility of the entire family or community instead of the father or mother. An elaborate social structure is established to ensure the right nurturing of children. Beginning with the “elders” who are supposed to set the right examples, counsel, and guide children on the right path to proper moral standards. According to Wiredu in addition to the *Okra* (soul), *Sunsum/Honhom* (spirit) and *Honam/Nipadua* (body) there is the *Mogya* (blood) and *Ntoro* (a spiritual-genetic aspect of the father) responsible for the caste (lineage) of the person.³¹

It is through this that the genetics of the mother and father are transferred to the child i.e., acquiring some physical features or mannerisms of parents etc. The *Sunsum/Honhom* (spirit) is the basis of one’s “personality”; distinctive characteristics that determine who a person is within the four major temperamental categories i.e., melancholic, phlegmatic, sanguine, and choleric or the two; introvert and extrovert. The *Honam/Nipadua* (body) is the material component of the person, perishable after the *Okra* (soul) has left. It is formed by the fusion of the *mogya* (*semen*) of the father and *nkosoa* (egg) of the mother.

Nkrabea and *Hyebr*

As has been alluded to earlier in the concept of “life” and “personhood”, there is *Botae* “purpose” or “function” for every “element” in the physical or spiritual space. Life is not conceived only in the context of the capacity

²⁵ Ernestina Afriyie, “A Comparative Study of Akan and Biblical Concepts of a Human Being: A Study to Illustrate a Method of Cross-Cultural Evangelism” (2000).

²⁶ John Locke, “Human Understanding,” *Routledge Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*, 1700, 32.

²⁷ Olatunji A Oyeshile, “Towards an African Concept of a Person: Person in Yoruba, Akan and Igbo Thoughts,” *Fiorita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 34 (2002): 1–2.

²⁸ Kwame Gyekye, “The Akan Concept of a Person,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1978): 277–87.

²⁹ Sam K Akesson, “The Akan Concept of the Soul,” *African Affairs* 64, no. 257 (1965): 280–91.

³⁰ Gyekye, “The Akan Concept of a Person”; Kwasi Wiredu, “The Akan Concept of Mind,” *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 3, no. 15 (1983): 7.

³¹ Wiredu, “The Akan Concept of Mind.”

to grow, reproduce, and respond to stimuli, metabolism, or homeostasis. It is beyond the capacity to think, feel, or perceive. The type of “life” conceived in Africa’s cosmology and which is acknowledged in the indigenous socioreligioculture and traditions, is that which is conceived as “life-form” (energy). This is defined differently for every “element” in creation. In *Onipa* this is conceived within the context of the capacity to grow, reproduce, respond to stimuli, metabolise, and homeostasis. In the larger context of the concept, it is “energy” (life-force) the ability to “function”. This provides an expression for *nkrabea* (destiny) in the African socioreligiocultural cosmology.

The concept of “life” as “energy” producing different “life-forms” with distinctive functions, is what provides context for *nkrabea* (destiny). The belief in *nkrabea* (destiny) distinctive “purpose” or “function” of everything in creation informs a belief that nothing is purposeless. This is why, “elders” will always go for *abesa* (inquire) about every phenomenon or child born to know about their *nkrabea* (destiny). It is the knowledge of *nkrabea* that reveals what taboos surround an element, a phenomenon, or a child and determines how they should be nurtured or how to appropriately respond. This is one of the reasons behind the “names” of people. It is believed that people are born for specific functions, “destinies” (*nkrabea*) which inform the kind of name they are to be given, and what kind of things they may be prohibited from or allowed to engage in.

Before a child is born, the elders will go and inquire from the “oracle” (*deity*) or *nananom* (ancestors) about their *nkrabea*. It is expected that each person walks in the path of their *nkrabea* and attain the satisfactory standard of its function or purpose before they can stop the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and be admitted into the world of sacred ancestors. Danquah distinguishes between *nkrabea* and *hyebre*.³² According to him, *nkrabea*, is *wo kra bia* (literally, the path for your soul). It is the purpose, function, or reason for which a “life-form” is created. It is believed that *nkrabea* can be stolen, destroyed, or twisted. When this happens, the individual loses their sense of purpose in life. *Nkrabea* is therefore protected with various rituals and rights. *Hyebre* on the other hand translates into *ɔhye brɛ* meaning *ɛbrɛ a wahye* (appointed time or season) a time determined within which a certain thing must happen or should be done.

The idea is that *nkrabea* is the destiny (nature of life determined for a person) and *hyebre* is the appointed times and seasons within which certain things are supposed to happen. Now the thing about *nkrabea* (destiny) is that it is believed to be the only thing that can first, stop a “life-form” from repeatedly going through the cycle of life; birth, death, and rebirth. Second, it is the satisfactory attainment of its function or purpose that can give merit to a lower “life-form” to be rebirth in a higher “life-form”. Failure to attain a satisfactory function or purpose can also mean, two things. First, the life-form can be “rebirth” (reincarnate) in case of accidental termination to complete its function, and second, in the case of abuse of the function of a life-form or failure to attain satisfactory standard of function, as a punishment, a higher life-form can be “rebirth” in a lower “life-form.”

The concept of life as a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is supposed to terminate when a person (a life-form) has attained moral uprightness or the required standard of life that qualifies them to be admitted into the world of sacred ancestors. “Rebirth” is therefore, first, an opportunity to attain satisfactory functions to which a life-form is assigned, second, a punishment for failure to attain the satisfactory standard of function a life-form is assigned or abuse of those functions.

CONCLUSION

The concepts of *nkrabea*, and *hyebre* present critical ideas on the “function”, or “purpose” of life within the context of human destiny and inform new epistemology. Concepts such as “person,” “personhood” and “life” are reconceptualised to emphasise distinctive ontology and praxis that focus on comprehensive nomenclature. Conceived within Africa’s philosophy of life as a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, the concept of “life” (*nkwa*) provides a dynamic that considers not only the traditional definition of life or those things that constitute life such as the capacity to grow, reproduce, response to stimuli, metabolism, or homeostasis but as “energy” (a life-form) that resides in all “things” (elements) such as rivers, mountains, trees, animals, and humans and causes them to function according to their purpose. This understanding gives expression to why Africans regard every element with sacredness and reverence.

The concept of *Okra* as the spiritual “energy” or “life-form” which resides in every element, and enables them to function in according to their purpose presents an open discourse on the concept of “life” in African philosophy. This kind of understanding acknowledges that there are forms of life beyond the limited description and definition based on the capacity to grow, reproduce, respond to stimuli, metabolise, or homeostasis. The idea that, “life” is a continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth until a “life” (a person) riches the satisfactory standard of function or purpose required to be admitted into the world of sacred ancestors provides an

³² Joseph Boakye Danquah, “Gold Coast: Akan Laws and Customs and the Akim Abuakwa Constitution,” 1928.

explanation for and meaning of life. The ultimate objective of life is to be admitted into the world of sacred ancestors. Until that time, birth, death, and rebirth are considered either a punishment or opportunity for a “life-form” to complete its function or attain the standard of satisfactory function required to terminate the cycle.

The idea that, the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth terminates after a “life-form” has functioned satisfactorily according to standard motivates people to seek their purpose and live according to the standard of satisfaction required. Again, the idea that, life is a “gradation” made up of different levels of “life-forms” (higher or lower) and that, each level up or lower is determined by how people function satisfactorily according to the state of their “life-form” create in people a sense of responsible living and function. Most importantly, the idea that every *Onipa* possesses what is described as a propensity to natural goodness due to the *Okra* (soul) which emanates from *Onyankopon* (the supreme being) who possesses goodness as an attribute presents a challenge to the question of the origin of evil in people. Ultimately, every life has a function or purpose conceived in the concept of *nkrabea* (destiny) which determines the limits of the functions or meaning of their individual life.

Because it is believed that, *nkrabea* (destiny) can be stolen, delayed, or twisted, people are careful to protect, or nurture it. There exist various rituals for that purpose. This is where the social processes of nurture, family, or community responsibility toward character formation come out as important factors. Starting with *abesa* (inquiring) about the *nkrabea* of a child, the kind of name, nurture, or environment that is needed to ensure they are brought up in the way that will enable them to function according to their *nkrabea* (destiny). Sometimes, elders even inquire if the child is “*reincarnated*” or “*rebirthed*”. It doesn’t take a single person to ensure that the *nkrabea* destiny of a person is protected. It takes the whole community of the living and dead (ancestors). *Hyebre* gives a qualitative evaluation of the progress of *nkrabea*. It is the factor that ensures that within the *nkrabea* those things which have been predetermined to happen according to times and seasons appointed unto them.

The interplay of *nkrabea* and *hyebre* informs intentional social process and nurturing strategy. What this means is that people are careful to ensure that those things appointed to happen to maintain the course of *nkrabea* happen. When those things, are identified as not happening or delayed, it reminds the elders, or individuals to become mindful of their function or purpose and how to make sure that they attain satisfactory standards of functions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Afriyie, Ernestina. “A Comparative Study of Akan and Biblical Concepts of a Human Being: A Study to Illustrate a Method of Cross-Cultural Evangelism,” 2000.
- Agada, Ada. “The African Vital Force Theory of Meaning in Life.” *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (2020): 100–112.
- Akesson, Sam K. “The Akan Concept of the Soul.” *African Affairs* 64, no. 257 (1965): 280–91.
- Bodunrin, Peter O. “The Question of African Philosophy.” *Philosophy* 56, no. 216 (1981): 161–79.
- Brazzelli, Nicoletta. “A View of Africa from the Sky: Beryl Markham and the Female Gaze.” *Culture* 21 (2008): 365–80.
- Brown, Lee M. *African Philosophy: New and Traditional Perspectives*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Carroll, Karanja Keita. “An Introduction to African-Centered Sociology: Worldview, Epistemology, and Social Theory.” *Critical Sociology* 40, no. 2 (2014): 257–70.
- Christensen, James B. “African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples.” JSTOR, 1955.
- Costa, Anthony A. “Chieftaincy and Civilisation: African Structures of Government and Colonial Administration in South Africa.” *African Studies* 59, no. 1 (2000): 13–43.
- Danquah, Joseph Boakye. “Gold Coast: Akan Laws and Customs and the Akim Abuakwa Constitution,” 1928.
- Dogbe, Korsi. “Concept of Community and Community Support Systems in Africa.” *Anthropos*, no. H. 5/6 (1980): 781–98.
- Ekanem, Francis E. “On the Ontology of African Philosophy.” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 1, no. 1 (2012): 54–58.
- Ekeke, Emeka C, and Chike A Ekeopara. “God, Divinities and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Ontology.” *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2010): 209–18.
- Ekpatt, AniediAbasi Okon. “Concepts of God, Divinities, Ancestors, and Spirits in African Traditional Religious Thought: Conceptual Analysis.” In *Phenomenological Approaches to Religion and Spirituality*, 18–43. IGI Global, 2021.
- Ephirim-Donkor, Anthony. *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.
- Gyekye, Kwame. “The Akan Concept of a Person.” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1978):

277–87.

- Harrison, Ira E, and Collins O Airhihenbuwa. "Traditional Medicine in Africa: Past, Present, and Future." *Health and Health Care in Developing Countries: Sociological Perspectives*, 1993, 122–34.
- Idang, Gabriel E. "African Culture and Values." *Phronimon* 16, no. 2 (2015): 97–111.
- Kasambala, Amon Eddie. "The Impact of an African Spirituality and Cosmology on God-Images in Africa: A Challenge to Practical Theology and Pastoral Ministry," 2005.
- Liddle, Andrew. *An Introduction to Modern Cosmology*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.
- Locke, John. "Human Understanding." *Routledge Contemporary Readings in Philosophy*, 1700, 32.
- Mawuko-Yevugah, Lord, and Harry Anthony Attipoe. "Chieftaincy and Traditional Authority in Modern Democratic Ghana." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 40, no. 3 (2021): 319–35.
- Okolie, Charles Nkem. "Living as a Person until Death: An African Ethical Perspective on Meaning in Life." *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 2 (2020): 208–18.
- Onyewuenyi, Innocent. "Is There an African Philosophy?" *Journal of African Studies* 3, no. 4 (1976): 513.
- Oyeshile, Olatunji A. "Towards an African Concept of a Person: Person in Yoruba, Akan and Igbo Thoughts." *Fiorita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 34 (2002): 1–2.
- Riesman, Paul. "The Person and the Life Cycle in African Social Life and Thought." *African Studies Review* 29, no. 2 (1986): 71–138.
- Ryden, Barbara. *Introduction to Cosmology*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Udefi, Amaechi. "Philosophy, Mythology and an African Cosmological System." *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 22, no. 1 (2012): 114–26.
- Welbourn, F B. "God in Africa: Conceptions of God in African Traditional Religion and Christianity." JSTOR, 1974.
- Wiredu, Kwasi. "Are There Cultural Universals?" *The African Philosophy Reader*, 1998, 31–39.
- . "The Akan Concept of Mind." *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 3, no. 15 (1983): 7.
- Xaba, Thokozani. "Marginalized Medical Practice: The Marginalization and Transformation Of." *Another Knowledge Is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies* 3 (2007): 317.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Edward Agboada is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi Ghana. is an Ordained Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Until recently he was a Senior Lecturer at the Ramseyer Training Centre, (Abetifi, Ghana) where he taught courses in World Religions, Islamic Studies, Christian-Muslim relations, interfaith dialogue, Cross-Cultural Missions, New Religious Movements, Homiletic (Practice of Preaching), and studies in African Traditional Religions.

Michael Kwadwo Ntiamoah is a Lecturer at the Department of Religion and Human Development, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. He has research interests in Comparative Religion, Religious Diversity in Ghana, Religion and Chieftaincy/ African Culture, Akan Indigenous Religion and Environment, African Indigenous Religion and Social Order.