



An Analysis of Ephraim Amu's *Yen Ara Asase Ni* to Address Environmental Crisis in the Ghanaian Context

Daniel Yeboah Laryea¹ 

¹ Department of Systematic and Historical Theology, University of Pretoria, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

This research analysed the cultural, religious and environmental importance of the renowned composition of the first stanza of Owura Ephraim Amu, *Yen Ara Asase Ni* (This is Our Own Land), in the contemporary Ghanaian setting. The objective was to examine how Amu's song, grounded in African theology and nationalism, expresses a vision of communal stewardship of land that remains vital in the face of the growing environmental crisis in Ghana. The study utilised a thematic analysis of the lyrics of the song, supported by an examination of environmental literature pertaining to land degradation, illicit mining, deforestation, and water pollution in Ghana. The findings indicate that *Yen Ara Asase Ni* resonates well when interpreted in an environmental context. *Nimdee ntraso*, *nkotokrane ne apesemenkomenya* were identified as the negative attitudes affecting our land. The study draws attention to how the song's message might influence love for the environment in contemporary Ghanaian society. The study recommends that the song *Yen ara asaase ni* be intentionally incorporated into environmental awareness campaigns, religious gatherings, and educational programmes to inspire a deeper sense of ecological responsibility and national pride. This study, therefore, contributes to scholarly discussion on environmentalism by presenting *Yen Ara Asaase Ni* as a cultural archive of ecological wisdom. Hence, by analysing the song and especially some key words in the Twi expression, the study shows how environmental values and a communal responsibility for the land are embedded in some Ghanaian patriotic songs. The study further adds to how Ghanaian musical traditions can be used to address pressing environmental concerns in contemporary times, therefore, bridging the gap between Ghana's oral heritage to contemporary environmental consciousness.

Correspondence

Daniel Yeboah Laryea

Email:

revdaniellaryea@gmail.com

Publication History

Received: 30th May, 2025

Accepted: 2nd September, 2025

Published online:
28th October, 2025

To Cite this Article:

Laryea, Daniel Yeboah. "An Analysis of Ephraim Amu's *Yen Ara Asase Ni* to Address Environmental Crisis in the Ghanaian Context." *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 11, no.10(2025): 515 - 526.

<https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.202511102>.

Keywords: *environment, nimdee ntraso, nkotokrane, apesemenkomenya*

INTRODUCTION

On 13th September, 1899 at Peki Avetile in the Volta Region of the Gold Coast (Ghana), Ephraim Amu was born to Stephen Amu Yao, popularly known as Papa Stefano and Sarah Akoram Amma. His father was a drummer and a wood carver who later stopped all these traditional activities that were earning him a living and converted to the Christian faith.¹ He began his formal education at Bremen Mission School in Peki-Avetile in 1906 and continued his middle school education at Peki-Blengo in 1912. It can be said that Amu's Christian education was influenced by missionary activities, as Christian faith

¹ Philip T. Laryea, *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian (1899-1995)* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2012), 9.

and education were intrinsically linked. In 1916, he enrolled in the Basel Mission Seminary at Abetifi, Kwahu, where he trained as a catechist and teacher. After training, he left for Peki-Blengo, where he practised for some time before being transferred to Akropong.²

Amu, as an oral theologian, represented Christianity as a non-Western endeavor, something which later gained traction among scholars. Asamoah-Gyadu shares that Owura Amu not only mused about the legacy of the image of Christianity as a Western religion, but rather did something about it in his life and works, especially in Twi and Ewe languages. Hence, through the vehicle of language, Ephraim Amu celebrated some Africans and African personalities and the gospel.³

Although Ephraim Amu's *Yen Ara Asase Ni* has been celebrated in Ghana as a patriotic song, scholars have examined it in the light of nationalism, nation building, its musical composition, among others. However, little or no attention has been paid to its potential to address ecological issues. Due to this notable absence of engaging its linguistic analysis in relation to its environmental themes, especially Ghana's environmental challenges, the study addresses this gap by framing the song within Ghana's environmental woes.

The study's objective, therefore, investigates *Yen Ara Asase Ni* within an ecological lens and how it resonates with the contemporary environmental crisis in Ghana. By adopting a qualitative research approach, selected Twi expressions of the song are analysed, supported by a contextual review of Ghana's environmental crisis, such as deforestation, illegal mining, and pollution, among others.

The study begins with a general overview of Amu's *Yen Ara Asase Ni*, indicating how it has over time become an unofficial anthem in Ghana and interpreting it as a call to address the pressing environmental challenges in Ghana, such as illegal mining. It further indicates how Amu skillfully connects the past, the present and the future in the song. It is again interpreted through the care of creation by the nananom in the institution of environmental taboos and shows how it summons all and sundry to ecological responsibility for the land in the phrase, *Adu me ne wo nso so se yebeye bi atoa so*. At the core of the study is an analysis of the three main vices identified by Amu as harmful to the land: *Nimdeɛ ntraso*, *nkotokrane*, and *ape semen komenya* (misuse of knowledge, stubbornness, and selfishness, respectively). In response, the study recommends love, shared by the young and adults alike, as a guiding ethic for collective ecological action.

A General Overview of Ephraim Amu's *Yen ara asase ni*

The distinguished Ghanaian composer and teacher, Owura Amu, composed *Yen ara asase ni* in 1929. The state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) airs a short choral tune at the end of each day of broadcasting, and almost anyone who has attained primary education knows how to sing this song. It has become the unofficial national anthem of the country, and some are calling for it to become the official national anthem. It was first written by Amu in the Ewe language, titled *Amewo dzife nyigba*, and later, to reach the wider Akan group, Amu translated it into Twi, *Yen ara asase ni*.⁴ The song was in response to a request from one of Amu's former students, who was working as a primary school teacher, who according to Amu, wanted something African to commemorate Empire Day.⁵ The following table presents *Yen ara asase ni* and its translation in English.

² Kofi Agawu, "The Amu Legacy: Ephraim Amu 1899-1995," *Journal of the International African Institute* 66, no. 2 (April 7, 1996): 274, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972000082437>.

³ Johnson Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, "O'er Heathen Lands Afar: Missionary Hymnody and Ephraim Amu's Mussions in the Context of Christianity as a Non-Western Endeavour," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 20, no. 1 (2017): 43-45.

⁴ Agawu, "The Amu Legacy: Ephraim Amu 1899-1995," 274.

⁵ Laryea, *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian (1899-1995)*, 44-45.

Table 1: The Twi and English translation of the first stanza of Ephraim Amu's *Yen ara asase ni*.

Twi	English
<i>Yen ara asase ni, Eʔe abɔdenden ma yen Mogya na nananom hwie gui, nya de too hɔ ma yen</i>	This is our own land; it is precious to us Blood did our forefathers shed to obtain it for us.
<i>Adu me ne wo nso so se yebeye bi atoa so Nimdee 'traso nkokrane ne apesemenkomenya Adi yen bra mo dem ma yen asase ho dɔ atom se</i>	It is the turn of me and you to continue Mere knowledge, cunning and selfishness have destroyed our life and has affected our love for our land
Chorus <i>ɔman no se ebe ye yie oo ɔman no se enye ye oo Eʔe sennahɔ se ɔmanfo bra na ekyere</i>	Whether our nation will prosper or whether it will not prosper It is an established fact that this depends on the conduct of her people

Adapted from Philip T. Laryea's translation.

Source: Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 200-201.

The Triangulation (trinity) of *Yen ara asase ni*

Amenuti Narmer, while comparing Ghana's official national anthem (God bless our homeland Ghana) to Ephraim Amu's unofficial national anthem, *Yen ara asase ni* (This is our own land), claimed that aside from its Christian appeal, the official national anthem is largely devoid of any respect for the ancestors. It lacks the zeal with which Ghanaians must proceed as a nation in constructing a holistic nation that honours their forefathers and mothers (the ancestors), reflects the present (a priceless heritage), and secures the transmission of a great tradition to future generations (the future).⁶

However, Amu's own connects our beloved nation (This is our own land, it is precious to us-this represents the present) to our revered and honoured history (Blood did our forefathers shed to obtain it for us-this represents the past), as well as the future (It is the turn of me and you to continue-this represents the future). Thus, Amu completes the triangle of our existence and memory in four lines. He brilliantly and uniquely connects the past, the present and the future.⁷

***Yen ara asase ni* and its call to address Ghana's environmental degradation**

Ghana's environmental crisis includes, air and water pollution, agricultural land degradation, deforestation, illicit mining, overfishing, coastal erosion, and flooding.⁸ Among the various forms of environmental degradation, the most widely discussed and profoundly threatening is the issue of "illegal mining" popularly known as *galamsey* in Ghana. In their research, E. A. Obeng *et al.*, identified illegal mining as the source of environmental problems, namely water pollution, deforestation, poor soil fertility, and limited access to land for agricultural output.⁹ An online video depicting the devastating effects of illegal mining in Ghana featured the patriotic song *Yen ara asaase ni* playing in the background, depicting the extent of the damage inflicted on the nation's lands. Hitherto, rivers that were clean and drunk by animals and humans, and also used for irrigation purposes on farms, have now been destroyed with chemicals and highly contaminated for human consumption. This comes as a result of the *chanfangs* (floating contraptions used by *galamsey* operators to wash the ore during mining) used on the water bodies in the mining process. All the rivers,

⁶ Amenuti Narmer, "Amu's Ghana National Anthem versus Gbeho's Sunday School Song," 2025, accessed 5th March, 2025. <https://grandmotherafrica.com/amus-ghana-national-anthem-versus-gbehos-sunday-school-song/>.

⁷ Narmer, "Amu's Ghana National Anthem versus Gbeho's Sunday School Song."

⁸ World Bank Group, *Ghana: Country Environmental Analysis*. (Washington DC: The WorldBank, 2020), xix.

⁹ Elizabeth Asantewaa Obeng *et al.*, "Impact of Illegal Mining Activities on Forest Ecosystem Services: Local Communities' Attitudes and Willingness to Participate in Restoration Activities in Ghana," *Heliyon* 5, no. 10 (2019), 1.

including Bonsa, Ankobra, Offin, Birim, Subile in Nkroful, Pra, Tano, Esuoso Stream, and Abbey Lagoon are very dirty. Worse still, most of these lands are not reclaimed after their legal or illegal use.¹⁰

Akyems in Ghana pride themselves on saying, *Meye Akyenkwa a menom Birem*, which means “I am Akyem-born who drinks from the river Birem.” Today, we cannot enthusiastically state this proverb due to the high turbidity of the river. While appealing to the Chiefs in the Akyem area, Darko Asante said;

“When I was at Prempeh College and coming home during the holidays, the trains from Kumase used to stop at Anyinam, in Akyem Abuakwa. That was the longest stop. Why? All the train’s passengers wanted to drink water there! Water from the river, Birem Abenaa. Today, when I go to Anyinam or any of the Akyem towns where I have family, I drink sachet water [“Pure Water”]. I have to drink “Pure water” at Kwabeng. I drink “Pure Water” at Apinamang. I drink “Pure Water” at Abomosu! For Birem Abenaa, whose purity once made the Akyems boast proudly: “Meye Akyenkwa a menom Birem” (“I am an Akyem who drinks water from Birem River!”) has become a mud-filled, discoloured trickle of water.”¹¹

Agriculture also remains one primary driver that destroys the *asase* (land).¹² The condition is worse in the Northern sector of Ghana, i.e. Upper West, Upper East, Savannah and even Brong Ahafo and Ashanti regions in the south. The state in the Northern parts of Ghana can even be qualified as “desertification.”¹³

The first line of Amu’s song, *Yen ara asase ni* connotes several forms of ideals. Laryea notes, for instance, that *Yen ara asase ni* expresses communal ownership of the land. By using “*yen*”, which means “we” or “us”, reference was being made not only to the living but also to the living dead and the yet-to-be. However, Amu spoke to the living to whom this sense of ownership was made.¹⁴

Amu calls on the present generation to see how valuable the land is, ‘*eye aboɔdenne ma yen*’. Thus, the advice given by Amu in this song was not only relevant to his generation but also extended far beyond him to future generations. The first line, *Yen ara asase ni, eye aboɔdenne ma yen*, therefore, echoes environmental themes for the present generation, considering the fast rate at which the African environment, and for that matter, Ghana, is rapidly being challenged.

***Mogya na nananom hwie gui nya de too ho maa yen* [Blood our forefathers shed to obtain for us].**

Amu recounts how Ghanaians acquired this possession on the second and third lines. It was won with the blood our ancestors shed for us. This was the inspiration behind the selection of ‘red’ as one of the colours on the national flag of Ghana to represent the blood of our forebears.¹⁵ These lines resonate well with a line in the Ghana National Pledge written by Philip Gbeho,¹⁶ “Our heritage, won for us through the blood and toil of our fathers.” It can be argued that Amu spoke of a time far beyond him to the near past during the fight for independence. Fred Agyemang described Amu as a “revolutionist in the modern political sense.”¹⁷ However, his own was done through his strong resolve, which added to “the Awakening and Rediscovery of African culture and dignity.”¹⁸ This was done through his composition of indigenous songs in local melody in the early days of established mission churches.¹⁹

¹⁰ Elizabeth. Vaah, “Yen Ara Asase Ni.,” YouTube Video, April 26, 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXfOTJgVkdC&t=4s>.

¹¹ Cameron Duodu, “Beneath The Veneer of Ghana’s Cultural Magnificence,” GBC, 2018, gbcghanaonline.com/news/kudos-kofi-darko-asante-youve-burst-through-the-culture-of-indifference/2018/.

¹² World Bank Group, *Ghana: Country Environmental Analysis*, xxiv.

¹³ World Bank Group, *Ghana: Country Environmental Analysis*, 65.

¹⁴ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 201.

¹⁵ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 201.

¹⁶ The National anthem of Ghana is also attributed to Philip Gbeho. He is the same person who wrote the National pledge which is mostly said after the National anthem of Ghana has been sang. All government basic schools in Ghana recite the national pledge as well as the National Anthem.

¹⁷ Fred Agyemang, *Amu, the African: A Study in Vision and Courage* (Asempa Publishers, Christian Council of Ghana, 1988), 60.

¹⁸ Agyemang, *Amu the African*, 61.

¹⁹ Agyemang, *Amu the African*, 62.

“*Mogya*” (blood) can represent the hard work which our *nananom* (forebears or our mothers and fathers) contributed to inculcating various laws, norms, values and practices in the Ghanaian culture, especially in the preservation of the environment. For instance, the Akan statement *me bere me mogya ani ayɛ adwuma* (I am eagerly working hard). Thus, here, *mogya* does not literally translate blood, but ‘hard work’. This is very similar to Genesis 3:19, *Wubesiam w’anim fifiri ansa na woanya aduan adi* (by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food...). *Fifiri* (sweat) here represents judicious work on the part of Adam.

Nananom, on the other hand, is derived from two Akan words, *nana* and *nom*. *Nana* is a noun that can be translated as grandchild, grandparent, or ancestor.²⁰ The *nom* is a word that makes it plural. Therefore, the use of *nananom* in context means that Amu is referring collectively to our ancestors (foreparents, forefathers, foremothers, or forebears).²¹ Therefore, the heritage of the forebears was not one gained on a silver platter.

Conservation of creation by *nananom*

Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye advocates how the *nananom* of the Akan ethnic group conserved creation through taboos, totemism, sacred groves and *sasa* to ensure the conservation of creation. He believes it is time to find a lasting solution to environmental problems in Ghana using both scientific strategies and our indigenous culture.²² Other scholars, such as Mante, Hourdequin, Abate and Bauckham, all agree that science has a crucial role to play in the conservation of creation or in the fight against nature’s destruction.²³

Forests are considered a crucial natural resource for humankind; therefore, the *nananom*, guided by their religion and culture, instituted specific measures to protect their forests to ensure their sustainable use.²⁴ The Twi-speaking Akan term for sacred grove is *kwaye yennɔ* (a forest that no one is allowed to clear).²⁵ Such lands have existed among various communities up to now. Recently, some individuals have desecrated the forests and have even moved to log trees from such sacred forests. Traditional rulers have often blamed this menace on certain Christian beliefs which consider such restrictions as ‘*abosomsem*’ (fetishism). The groves are protected by local taboos, norms and belief systems in the rural communities. Failure to comply with the taboos and norms could result in ill luck, diseases, death or social sanctions. It is believed that such forests contain the spirits of the ancestors and the gods and other spiritual beings. Furthermore, large tracts of land are also reserved as burial sites for royals (*nsamanpow mu*), and people are prevented from entering such places except those who are permitted by their laws.²⁶

Adu me ne wo nso so se yɛbɛye bi atoa so (It is the turn of me and you to continue)

In this line of the song, Amu believes that our forebears have done their part by securing the land for us through their blood and toil; now it is up to us to build on their accomplishments.²⁷ Why is it our turn to continue the good work of our forebears? It is to enable a sustainable future for the unborn. Mbiti submits that Africans are particularly attached to the land because it embodies both their *Zamani* and *Sasa*.²⁸ Land is thought to belong to a large family, of which many are deceased, a few are alive, and countless hosts are yet to be born.²⁹ For the ‘yet to be born’, the ancestors tried their best to preserve the environment.

²⁰ Paul A Kotey, “*Nana*” in *Concise Dictionary: Twi-English, English-Twi*, (No Title) (New York: Hippocrene, 2007), 94.

²¹ Kotey, “*Nana*” in *Concise Dictionary: Twi-English, English-Twi*, 94.

²² Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, “Salvaging Nature: The Akan Religio-Cultural Perspective,” *Worldviews* 13, no. 3 (2009): 251–82.

²³ J. O. Y. Mante, *Africa Theological and Philosophical Root of Our Ecological Crisis* (Accra: Son Life Press, 2004), 167; Marion Hourdequin, *Environmental Ethics: From Theory to Practice* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024), 143-149; Randall S Abate, *Climate Change and the Voiceless: Protecting Future Generations, Wildlife, and Natural Resources* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 46.

²⁴ Awuah-Nyamekye, “*Salvaging Nature*,” 259.

²⁵ Awuah-Nyamekye, “*Salvaging Nature*,” 259.

²⁶ Awuah-Nyamekye, “*Salvaging Nature*,” 259.

²⁷ Laryea, *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 201.

²⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 26. The term *Zamani* refers to the past and *Sasa* refers to the future of a people.

²⁹ Kojo Amanor, *Land, Labour and the Family in Southern Ghana: A Critique of Land Policy under Neo-Liberalisation* (Nordic Africa Institute, 2001), 25.

What is the right thing to do? This is a question that lies at the heart of truth-centred environmental ethics, which appears to have been central to the thinking of Ghanaian forebears as they formulated various laws to protect the environment. The Ghanaian case of sustainability cannot be defined without recourse to other non-human species. The *nananom* did consider non-human species and thus can be said to be holistic in nature. Therefore, the question is: What is the right thing to do? involves the various environmental taboos, norms, values and laws to protect the environment.

Environmental Taboos and Sustainable Future

As posited earlier, *nananom* enacted some environmental taboos that preserved nature as well as biodiversity. According to the elders, breaking any of these taboos will bring the wrath of the gods, particularly *Asase Yaa*, the earth goddess, and *Maame Wata*, the goddess of the sea.³⁰ Traditional African peasants realised that the destruction of extensive forest areas would harm future generations, disturb ecosystems, and reduce access to crucial resources such as food, medicine, clean water, and air, critical to the survival of both people and animals.³¹ The critical thing to remember is that *nananom* were concerned about the environment before environmental consciousness gained traction. As Neequaye ably posits, the elders of African communities will only declare something in the community or the ecological environment as a special taboo if they believe its extinction or elimination would have disastrous consequences for the society and its inhabitants, as well as their relationship with the gods and ancestors.³²

More so, the environmental taboos, as well as other indigenous taboos, “are ...both open and overridable, they are open to supplementation as well as modification, deletion, and reinterpretation to suit new contexts.”³³ Joseph Osei advises that the Ghana National House of Chiefs, as well as corresponding traditional organisations in other parts of Africa and the developing world, should be tasked with establishing or re-examining and reapplying certain traditional taboos which can contribute to sustainable development.³⁴ Some will relegate the importance of taboos in modern society and think of them as irrelevant. However, it can be seen especially with the Akans that modern Akan societies still hold on dearly to taboos. Hence, they must be well explained to current citizens. Their importance should not be discredited at all.

To this end, Osei agrees with Agyarkwa when he shares that if personal explanations of taboos are used as stepping stones to scientific or Western methods, it is simpler for African students who are habituated to personal explanations of taboos to understand scientific explanations of phenomena. In other words, traditional taboos can be employed to bridge the epistemic gap between traditional and Western or scientific methods to enable development.³⁵

Taboos in Ghana, especially in particular communities, can be critically analysed and modified with scientific and religious perspectives to facilitate sustainable development. The elders made taboos to respond to certain situations in their days. Therefore, new phenomena alien to the *nananom* (forebears) can be addressed with new taboos instated. This includes some issues that have received a lot of attention today, such as *galamsey*, which is detrimental both to both the workers and their surroundings. Thus, enacting taboos with a technological twist is crucial. These can then be taught gradually in basic and secondary schools to drive home their importance. It will suffice to conclude here in the words of Osei;

While it is undeniable that taboos have been marginalised for so long in development discourse, the Akan Philosopher reminds us in the spirit of **Sankofaism** that “It is not a taboo to go back for values one has forgotten or left in the past.” Rediscovering and enhancing the value of taboos might well be

³⁰ Joseph Osei, “The Value of African Taboos for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development,” *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 8, no. 3 (2006), 47.

³¹ Osei, “The value of African taboos,” 47.

³² George K. Neequaye, “African Ethics Of Responsibility: Overcoming The Blame Syndrome In African Communalism,” *Quest Journals, Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* 6, no. 12 (2018), 40.

³³ Osei, “The value of African taboos,” 58.

³⁴ Osei, “The value of African taboos,” 58.

³⁵ Osei, “The value of African taboos,” 58.

returning to “the stone which the builders had rejected” in the course of securing biodiversity and constructing authentic and sustainable development in Africa.³⁶

Yen ara asase ni and negative attitudes affecting the land

Amu suggests three negative attitudes that affect the land. They are *Nimdee ntraso*, *nkotokrane ne apesemenkomenya* (mere knowledge, cunning and selfishness, respectively). Laryea advances that *Nimdee ntraso* translates as “knowledge that has gone beyond limits, to extremes, or is in excess.” He alludes to L.A. Boadi, who believed that when Amu said *Nimdee ntraso*, he meant unusual claims to knowing, claims that go beyond natural limitations and that such statements are invariably accompanied by “arrogance and petty haughtiness.”³⁷ *Nimdee ntraso*, according to Laryea, therefore, means ‘brain knowledge acquired only for its own sake.’ This information does not transfer to industry (the application of the hand) or character transformation (impact the heart).³⁸ Another word for *nimdee ntraso* is *suatra* (claiming to know more than those you are learning from). It is not only for those who have studied books but also for those who have acquired knowledge through informal means. *Suatra* is derived from two Akan words, *sua*, which means learning or studying to gain knowledge and *tra*, which translates as ‘exceed’. It is always in relation to a false claim to knowledge, as Boadi translates it, “claiming to know more than those you are learning from.”³⁹

Nimdee ntraso and the Disenchantment of Nature

Nimdee ntraso or *suatra* is seen in the disenchantment of nature by many. Although Lynn J. White laying the blame of environmental malaise at the feet of Christians is not entirely true, it can be argued that some Christians have contributed to disenchanting nature and the environment at large. In Ghana’s Boabeng Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, traditional taboos that conserved the forest were challenged in the 1970s by the rise of a Christian sect, whose members hunted the sacred monkeys to undermine indigenous beliefs and assert Christian dominance. This shift weakened customary conservation practices.⁴⁰ Similarly, in Nigeria’s Awka-South region, Christianisation has eroded local taboos that once protected woods and streams, leading to environmental degradation.⁴¹ Alison M. Howell tells a story in the research she conducted. Her very words will be apt;

On one occasion, a Christian begged me to buy him a chainsaw. The only trees close to his home were regarded as sacred and it was forbidden to cut them. He told me he did not fear them and a chainsaw would enable him to cut them down quickly. He could then make charcoal without having to walk far into the bush, he no longer associated the trees with anything spiritual, nor did he consider it his responsibility as a Christian to manage God’s creation.⁴²

The total bias of Christians towards their faith and the inability to uphold the salient ideal of traditional values, which were enshrined to conserve wildlife, can be described as *nimdee ntraso*, *suatra* or ‘excess knowledge’. This calls for a ‘re-enchantment’ of nature, which has been disenchanted by some Christians and modern humanity. Various responses that support this perspective can be understood through discussions on dominion theology in Genesis 1:26–28, as well as the concept of proper stewardship of nature. Ghanaian Christians, for that matter, should acknowledge such wisdom of their forebears who instituted values in the communities to ensure sustenance for future generations. The Christian Council of Ghana, Catholic Bishops Conference Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, among others, should lead in adding their voices to the re-enchantment of nature through taboos, values and various laws made to govern nature by the *nananom*. While science-related institutions add their voices behind these positive ideals, religion will

³⁶ Osei, “The value of African taboos,” 59.

³⁷ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

³⁸ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

³⁹ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

⁴⁰ Emmanuel Yeboah-Asiamah, “Theory and Practice of Governance Collaboration: Institutional Assessment in Collaborative Natural Resource Governance” (Stellenbosch University, 2018), 177.

⁴¹ Yeboah-Asiamah, “Theory and Practice,” 178.

⁴² Allison M. Howell, “African Spirituality and Christian Ministry: ‘Discerning the Signs of the Times’ in Our Environment and Community,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 20, no. 1 (2007), 17.

also play its part by removing the varied negative connotations some Christians have assigned to the wisdom of our ancestors.

***Nkotonkranne* (sophistry) amidst environmental concerns**

Nkotokranne means “cunning or clever deception”.⁴³ Boadi translates it as “sophistry [or] the employment of deliberately specious and invalid argument in discussions of serious matters affecting the state.”⁴⁴ Gyamfi Tenkorang asserted the etymology of the word *nkotokranne* as *nkoto* (bowing or squatting before) and *nkrane* (soldier ants). Thus, *nkotonkranne* means ‘someone who is a snake under grass’ or a pretender. He further states that such a person is *comme ci comme ça* (a French word that is commonly used in Akan conversations and translates, ‘like this like that’ or ‘neither good nor bad’).⁴⁵ Kate Aboagyewaa also indicates that *nkotonkranne* is *obi a ɔbo asem gu* (a person who deliberately makes light of a good or serious conversation/argument).⁴⁶ The views of Boadi and Aboagyewaa are very similar, as a person who has this vice usually makes light of serious discussions about a particular community or the *ɔman* (nation). This same individual can engage in economic and helpful activity but causes harm equally to himself/herself or society (i.e. neither good nor bad or *comme ci comme ça*). Amu states *nkotonkranne* to be part of the evils that destroy the land. Unfortunately, this vice finds its way into Ghanaian attitudes towards the environment. Poor farmers, illegal miners, scrap dealers, among others, dabble in clever ways or act ‘cleverly’ in their responses to severe environmental issues to reduce the possibilities for solutions to critical issues affecting the environment.

Howell drew attention to research carried out by Christopher Affum Nyarko in 2015 on Christian and Traditional Responses to Illegal Mining in Ghana. In his study, he indicated how seven illegal miners, all of whom claimed to be Christians, believed that “God had given the planet and everything on it to humankind to use, and he will not prevent us from enjoying what he has created.” Traditional taboos, they believe, should not deter humans from exploiting the earth’s natural riches for a living. When asked, “What can your local Assembly do to bring galamsey under control in your community?”, one church elder responded, “How can we preach against galamsey when the principal financier of our church building project is a galamseyer?” He also stated that the same individual supplied the majority of the funds utilised to purchase musical equipment for the church.⁴⁷

A glance at the responses of some fishermen also indicates their unpreparedness to desist from their act of destroying the water bodies and the fish and other species in the sea. Olu, a fisherman at Funko in Ghana, shares how unprepared he was to desist from using banned fishing methods in the country. He indicated that the government has ordered them not to use dynamite for fishing, but large fishing vessels have invaded their territory by using unusual methods to catch untargated fish. Furthermore, they swoop through and demolish their cast nets. If one is not lucky, they also ruin the canoe. According to Olu, since the government has given these ships a *carte blanche* to operate, they will also resort to the chemicals since that is their only means of competition.⁴⁸

One danger of *nkotonkranne* from the discussions above is its hindrance to development. One ceases to look for other options for survival and always offers responses to rule out any effort to seek other alternatives or perhaps embrace other equal opportunities to improve their situations. *Nkotonkranne* causes one to be wise in their own eyes while posing harm to themselves and others. Misonu Amu (daughter of Amu), in an interview, revealed that *nkotonkranne* is usually seen among the leaders and stakeholders who are supposed to help in the various activities causing harm to the nation, but behave as if everything is well or nothing bad is happening at all.⁴⁹

⁴³ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

⁴⁴ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mr. William Gyamfi Tenkorang, a Ghanaian Language lecturer and a Chief examiner of Colleges of Education Ghanaian Language Examinations on 3rd April, 2025.

⁴⁶ An interview with Kate Aboagyewaa of the Agyenua Palace, New Abirem in the Eastern Region of Ghana on 29th March, 2025.

⁴⁷ Howell, “African Spirituality and Christian Ministry,” 17-18.

⁴⁸ Mary Ama Bawa, Ghana: Fish poisoning in Ghana, survival of the lawless. Accessed from <https://earthjournalism.net/stories/ghana-fish-poisoning-in-ghana-survival-of-the-lawless> on 30th March, 2025.

⁴⁹ A personal interview with Dr. Misonu Amu on 16th April, 2022. Interview conducted via phone call.

***Apesemenkomenya* (Selfishness) and environmental crisis**

Apesemenkomenya or selfishness is the third evil Amu notes that hampers the development of the *ɔman*. Laryea, quoting Christaller, graphically captures *apesemenkomenya* in its linguistic composition as ‘a liking [*apese*] that one [*me*] alone [*nko*] gets [*nya*] a thing’.⁵⁰ He advances that “idiomatically, *apesemenkomenya* means ‘self-interest’ or ‘selfishness’. It is these negative attitudes that, according to Amu, ‘*Adi yen bra mu dem ma yen asase ho dɔ atom se*’ (have damaged our lives and have resulted in the loss of love for our land).”⁵¹

A sermon preached by Amu in 1958 on Matthew 25:14-30, titled ‘The Third Servant’ described selfishness as a disease that causes a person to become blind to the needs and rights of others and the truths about oneself.⁵² According to Amu, the third servant who buried the money he had received from the master and freed himself from the compulsion of hard work is not just a lazy person but also a selfish man.⁵³ Selfishness can therefore be described as self-interest at the expense of others.

Apesemenkomenya can be seen in 1Kings 21:1-26, where Ahab, King of Israel and his wife acted selfishly and wickedly by taking the land that did not belong to them. Here, Naboth strongly defended his ancestral inheritance. In other words, Naboth insisted that, *Yen ara asase ni* (this is our own land) and there was no way he would trade it to another person. Ahab represents the selfish people in society who wish to have everything to themselves because they have the means to acquire it, even if it will deprive a whole generation of their source of livelihood. Michael A. Eschelbach *et al.* ask these questions in relation to Ahab requesting the land for a vegetable garden because it was near him. “Did the king of Israel live in want of vegetables? Did he really want to do gardening himself? Was there no land available for him?”⁵⁴

His selfishness allowed him to take the land that does not belong to him.⁵⁵ This story is very evident in the present. Citizens use every means possible to take possession of portions of land and use them to their own benefit, depriving many of their rights. Misonu Amu shared that she observes this plight of *apesemenkomenya* in Ghana by most elite in the society. She indicated that such people keep so many cars in their mansions, although they use only one at a time. Such people, especially among politicians, are seen to amass wealth for themselves while the masses live in poverty. *Apesemenkomenya* is a major hindrance to the progress of the nation of Ghana.⁵⁶

Concerted efforts and the love of nature

Amu’s *Yen ara asase ni* is almost timeless and relevant to all generations. Although environmental concerns have been raised many times in the country, the situation seems not to improve. It will not take the efforts of the government alone, but the *ɔmanfo* (the citizens/people), which includes the religious leaders. There must be collaborative efforts of Christians, Muslims and traditionalists who form the highest percentage of the religious bodies in the country to fight against the destruction meted out to the environment. These religious bodies must fully be on board and lead the effort to raise on environmental issues among their groups, especially given their love for nature.

Misonu Amu indicated that any time they travelled with their father, he would tell them, “Don’t sleep in the car, be admiring nature.” Due to their father’s love for nature, he will always engage in backyard farming and encourage all his neighbours to also do the same, and even when he was leaving Akropong, he had made up his mind to enter into farming before the appointment at Achimota College came in handy. Additionally, while they stayed in Legon, because he started farming, all their immediate neighbours did the same as they were inspired by the example of Amu.⁵⁷ Amu’s love for

⁵⁰ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

⁵¹ Laryea, Ephraim Amu: *Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 202.

⁵² Philip T. Laryea, *Patriotism and Nation Building: Perspectives from the Life and Utterances of Ephraim Amu* (African Books Collective, 2017), 202.

⁵³ Laryea, *Patriotism and Nation Building*, 202.

⁵⁴ Michael A Eschelbach, Curtis P Giese, and Paul Puffe, *Called to Be God’s People: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 315.

⁵⁵ Eschelbach, Giese, and Puffe, *Called to Be God’s People: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 315.

⁵⁶ A personal interview with Dr. Misonu Amu on 16th April, 2022. Interview conducted via phone call.

⁵⁷ A personal interview with Dr. Misonu Amu on 16th April, 2022. Interview conducted via phone call. This assertion by Misonu is also corroborated by Agyeaman. See, Agyeaman, *Amu the African*, 99.

nature is also upheld by Amu himself on “Aggrey Memorial Day”. Laryea writes; “he who has to live his daily life among plants, taking tender care of them, watching and studying them, acquires the most important of the highest spiritual qualities which he can hardly acquire by any other means: Love in the broadest sense and all its other attributes, full acknowledgement of God, and complete dependence on his will.”⁵⁸ In other words, caring for nature has a spiritual dimension. This is also not alien to the African environment, where “there is a symbiotic relationship between nature and human persons which plays out not only in the physical realm, but in the spiritual sphere as well.”⁵⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

For a sustainable future, there must be an inculcation of the environmental value of love among all, especially the younger ones. Developing a love for the environment will help restore it or reverse its present deterioration. This attitude can be made possible through the home, school, churches, mosques, communities and by governmental and nongovernmental organisations.

Amu’s song *Yen Ara Asaase Ni*, when sung in the spirit of love for God’s creation, has the potential to reorient the minds of Ghanaian citizens toward preserving and protecting the environment for present and future generations. Therefore, it is recommended that this song be intentionally incorporated into environmental awareness campaigns, religious gatherings, and educational programs to inspire a deeper sense of ecological responsibility and national pride.

CONCLUSION

Owura Ephraim Amu’s *Yen ara asase ni* is a timeless reminder that connects Ghana’s past, present, and future. Amu’s invocation of the sacrifices made by our forebears should inspire contemporary society to renew its stewardship of the environment. As environmental challenges in Ghana intensify, his song calls on all citizens to unite to protect and preserve a sustainable environment for generations to come.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abate, Randall S. *Climate Change and the Voiceless: Protecting Future Generations, Wildlife, and Natural Resources*. Cambridge University Press, 2020.
- Agawu, Kofi. “The Amu Legacy: Ephraim Amu 1899-1995.” *Journal of the International African Institute* 66, no. 2 (April 7, 1996): 274–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972000082437>.
- Agyemang, Fred. *Amu, the African: A Study in Vision and Courage*. Asempa Publishers, Christian Council of Ghana, 1988.
- Amanor, Kojo. *Land, Labour and the Family in Southern Ghana: A Critique of Land Policy under Neo-Liberalisation*. Nordic Africa Institute, 2001.
- Asamoah-Gyadu, Johnson Kwabena. “O’er Heathen Lands Afar: Missionary Hymnody and Ephraim Amu’s Musings in the Context of Christianity as a Non-Western Endeavour.” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 20, no. 1 (2017): 43–45.
- Awuah-Nyamekye, Samuel. “Salvaging Nature: The Akan Religio-Cultural Perspective.” *Worldviews* 13, no. 3 (2009): 251–82.
- Duodu, Cameron. “Beneath The Veneer of Ghana’s Cultural Magnificence.” GBC, 2018. gbcghanaonline.com/news/kudos-kofi-darko-asante-youve-burst-through-the-culture-of-indifference/2018/.
- Eschelbach, Michael A, Curtis P Giese, and Paul Puffe. *Called to Be God’s People: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. Vol. 1. Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006.
- Hourdequin, Marion. *Environmental Ethics: From Theory to Practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2024.
- Howell, Allison M. “African Spirituality and Christian Ministry: ‘Discerning the Signs of the Times’ in Our Environment and Community.” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 20, no. 1 (2007).
- Kotey, Paul A. “Nana” in *Concise Dictionary: Twi-English, English-Twi*. (No Title). New York:

⁵⁸ Laryea, *Patriotism and Nation Building*, 62.

⁵⁹ Laryea, *Patriotism and Nation Building*, 62.

Hippocrene, 2007.

Laryea, Philip T. *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian (1899-1995)*. Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2012.

———. *Patriotism and Nation Building: Perspectives from the Life and Utterances of Ephraim Amu*. African Books Collective, 2017.

Mante, J. O. Y. *Africa Theological and Philosophical Root of Our Ecological Crisis*. Accra: Son Life Press, 2004.

Mbiti, John S. *African Religion and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.

Narmer, Amenuti. "Amu's Ghana National Anthem versus Gbeho's Sunday School Song," 2025. <https://grandmotherafrica.com/amus-ghana-national-anthem-versus-gbehos-sunday-school-song/>.

Neequaye, George K. "African Ethics Of Responsibility: Overcoming The Blame Syndrome In African Communalism." *Quest Journals, Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science* 6, no. 12 (2018).

Obeng, Elizabeth Asantewaa, Kwame Antwi Oduro, Beatrice Darko Obiri, Haruna Abukari, Reginald Tang Guuroh, Gloria Djaney Djagbletey, Joseph Appiah-Korang, and Mark Appiah. "Impact of Illegal Mining Activities on Forest Ecosystem Services: Local Communities' Attitudes and Willingness to Participate in Restoration Activities in Ghana." *Heliyon* 5, no. 10 (2019).

Osei, Joseph. "The Value of African Taboos for Biodiversity and Sustainable Development." *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 8, no. 3 (2006).

Vaah, Elizabeth. "Yɛn Ara Asase Ni. ." YouTube Video, April 26, 2025. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXfOTJgVkDc&t=4s>.

World Bank Group. *Ghana: Country Environmental Analysis*. Washington DC: The WorldBank, 2020.

Yeboah-Asiamah, Emmanuel. "Theory and Practice of Governance Collaboration: Institutional Assessment in Collaborative Natural Resource Governance." Stellenbosch University, 2018.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Daniel Yeboah Laryea is a PhD student at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He holds a Master of Theology and a Master of Divinity, both from Trinity Theological Seminary, Accra. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in Land Economy from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Laryea's research interests include Dogmatics and Christian Ethics, Environmental Ethics, and African Christianity, among others. He is a Reverend Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and currently oversees the PCG congregations in South Africa.