

Environmental Ethics in Akyem Abuakwa: Developing the Ecological Zone through the African Worldview



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ABSTRACT

Akyem Abuakwa's geographical location puts her in a different environmental condition. Both natural and human factors have combined in causing massive environmental degradation and ecological crisis. The environmental degradation and ecological crisis call for exploration of indigenous knowledge to construct indigenous ecological orientations and environmental concerns that could be relevant to recent times. Using qualitative design, the study found out that the traditional belief among the people of Abuakwa has created the awareness that human beings are answerable to the line of ancestors for their stewardship over the non-human parts of creation-land, flora and fauna; all these belong to the ancestors. The study proposes that environmental ethics through the African worldview and bioethical African worldview would dictate a fresh environmental concern and ecological orientation for the world today. The study is relevant as it contributes to traditional environmental conservation ethics.

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INTRODUCTION

Akyem Abuakwa's¹ ecological zone puts her in a different environmental condition. The area is endowed with rich natural resources ranging from dense forest vegetation with a number of plant species, minerals such as gold and diamond, among several others. It has been observed that rapid change has bedevilled the once cherished environmental condition over the last two decades. This rapid change has both natural and human factors combined in causing environmental degradation and ecological crisis. Besides the natural factors, human activities such as surface mining, logging, sand winning, pollution of all kinds have degraded the environment creating an ecological crisis. The environmental degradation and ecological crisis call for exploration of indigenous knowledge to construct indigenous ecological orientations and environmental concerns that could be relevant to contemporary times.

This work focuses on creating environmental and ecological awareness, which is ethically based through the lenses of traditional African/Akan worldview. It further focuses on some traditional ethical theories and contemporary environmental ethics and finds out how they impact on the environmental debate in Akyem Abuakwa. This paper looks at environmental ethics from African perspective, environmental ethics through traditional religious philosophy of the people and also through the African moral world. Recommendations are made on ways by which environmental ethics through African/Akan worldview could be harnessed to conserve and protect the environmental resources within the study unit.

A brief geographical description of Akyem Abuakwa

Akyem Abuakwa, the largest sub-division of the three Akyem divisions is an Akan community that can be found in the Eastern Region of Ghana and lies within Tropical Rain Forest with several river valleys, deep loamy soil, abundant flora and fauna. The forest has been traditionally regarded as an abode of ancestral spirits that provide protection, success

¹ Akyem Abuakwa, an Akan community is a traditional state and can be located in the Eastern region of Ghana; S. Asiedu-Amoako, M.K. Ntiemoah and V.S.

Gedzi. 'Environmental Degradation: A challenge to traditional leadership at Akyem Abuakwa in the Eastern Region of Ghana'. *American Journal of Indigenous Studies*, 1, (2016) A1- A13.

and progress to the Ofori Panin stool and the people of the Traditional area. The land is watered by River *Birim*, *Densu*, *Supon*, and several other small rivers and streams. The area has long been recognized as an important national reserve because its mountains contain the head-waters of three river systems—the *Ayensu*, *Densu* and *Birim*, that serve as a source of drinking water to a large number of people in some parts of Southern Ghana.

• *The Climate*

The entire area lies within the West Semi-Equatorial Zone and is characterized by two main rainfall seasons occurring in June and October. The first rainy season usually starts from May to June and the second from September to October. The mean annual rainfall is between 125mm and 175mm. The dry season starts from November and ends around late February. Temperatures are found to be fairly uniform ranging from 26°C in August and 30°C in March. Relative humidity is generally high throughout the year, ranging between 20% - 80% in the wet season.²

Akyem Abuakwa's ecological zone lies within the Tropics where it experiences Tropical weather that is never moderate but extreme. There is either too much or too little of rain. There is also too much heat which creates the 'incubator effect' in biological activities leading to hazards: the flourishing of life forms hostile conditions to humankind – disease carrying mosquitoes, tsetse flies, sun flies and other flies. There are also different forms of parasites, microbes and fungi attacking and killing people.³

Description of Akyem Abuakwa Ecological Zone and Environmental Ethics

The people of Akyem Abuakwa need to make many decisions concerning the environment in order to preserve it for current indigenes and the future generations. For instance;

- i. Should surface mining along the *Birim* valley be allowed without questioning?
- ii. Should cocoa farms be destroyed by surface mining operators?
- iii. What environmental obligations should be kept for future generations?
- iv. Is it right for humans to cause the extinction of species for the convenience of humanity?
- v. Will these human activities be morally permissible or even required in Akyem Abuakwa?

Environmental Ethics defined

The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (S.E.P) defines environmental ethics as the discipline in philosophy that studies the moral relationship of human beings to, and also the value and moral status of the environment and its non-human contents.⁴ The Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conservation also defines it as a search for moral values and ethical principles in human relation with the natural world.⁵ Environmental ethics exerts influence on a large range of disciplines that include, environmental laws, environmental sociology, eco-theology, ecological economics, ecology, eco-feminism and environmental geography.

The Emergence of Environmental Ethics

The emergence of environmental ethics as a new sub-discipline of philosophy in the early 1970s posed a challenge to traditional anthropocentrism. This raised two critical moral questions.

First, it quizzed the assumed moral superiority of human-beings to members of other species on earth. Richard Young, for example saw all forms of anthropocentrism as perversion. He notes that, all forms of anthropocentrism thought are ultimately derived from humanity's rebellion in the Garden of Eden. According to Young, when Adam asserted his independence from God, the seeds of secular thoughts were born, and the human race became autonomous. The theocentrism that controlled the thinking of the prelapsarian race was exchanged for anthropocentrism. Humans were now the central figure on the stage, and everything revolved around them.⁶

Second, the new sub-discipline of philosophy examined the possibility of the rational arguments for assigning intrinsic value to the natural environment and its non-human contents. The practical purpose of environmental ethics then is to provide moral grounds for social policies aimed at protecting the earth's environment and remedying environmental degradation. This paper focuses on some traditional ethical theories and contemporary environmental ethics and finds out how they impact on the environmental debate in Akyem Abuakwa.

Third, does nature have right? If nature has no right, then man has no moral obligation towards it, and the whole discourse on environmental ethics is a dead issue. This discussion points to the fact that nature has right. The need to

² Online document. Retrieved from: <http://asma.gov.gh/index.php/climate/>. Accessed September 25, 2020.

³ Emmanuel A. Obeng. 'Healing The Groaning Creation in Africa' in Mary Getui N., and Obeng, E. A, (eds.), *Theology of Reconstruction*, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2003): 19.

⁴ Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy. 'Environmental Ethics'. First published Jun 3, 2002; substantive revision Jul 21, 2015.

⁵ Chris Park. *Oxford Dictionary of Environment and Conservation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶ Richard Young A, *Healing The Earth, A Theocentric Perspective On Environmental Problems and Their Solution*. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994): 122.

rethink and reconstruct an understanding of nature is an imperative one. Rights accorded nature means justice, ethical correctness or what is in consonance with the rules of law or the principle of morality. Indeed, assigning rights to nature would give nature a moral status and would place a moral obligation on humans to respect those rights.

Understanding African Values and Ethics

Values are underlying fundamental beliefs and assumptions that determine behaviour. In Africa, these beliefs and assumption often remain unchanged even after there has been a religious conversion. Thus, many societies in Africa may have converted to Christianity or Islam but still cling to traditional beliefs and assumptions that determine how they act morally. It is therefore critical to know and appreciate the role of values in the study of moral action.⁷ African values and ethics are not necessarily Christian, but they are the general principles that have shaped African behaviour. If one does not understand them, one will inevitably draw some wrong conclusions. Richardson observes that:

Unlike modern Western ethics, African thought does not regard ethics as a separate discipline, because morality is indistinguishable from the rest of African social life. To set out to discover and understand African ethics via abstract moral principle is to embark on a journey of frustration.⁸

Instead, to determine what constitute moral behaviour, one has to observe and reflect upon the social life of the people—their rituals, customs, practices, events and relationships.⁹ Sources of knowledge of African ethics are thus not written records but embedded in customs and the rich African oral tradition. It must be admitted that it is sometimes difficult to understand and interpret traditions correctly. But there are ways in which this can be done. Bolaji Idowu presents some helpful hints:

First it is necessary to listen carefully and get at the inner meaning. Secondly, it is also necessary to remember that the African situation is one in which life is not divided artificially into the sacred and the secular, that it is one in which reality is regarded as one, and in which the things of earth (material things and man's daily involvements) have meaning only in terms of the heavenly (the spiritual, reckoning with the Transcendent and that part of man which has links with the super sensible world). Thirdly, a doctrine is not necessarily unhistorical or merely imaginary simply because it is mythological.¹⁰

African customs and oral traditions should be interpreted within their own context. Ethical principles and rules of conduct that have been preserved over the years in the various customs and traditions in African societies, provide explanations of the reasons, motivations, values and purpose of behaviour. These, according to Idowu, supply the moral code and indicate what the people must do to live ethically.¹¹

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research according to Uwe is to approach the worlds 'out there' with the intention to understand, describe, and sometimes explain social phenomena 'from the inside' perspective.¹² Using qualitative design, specifically purposive sampling approach, sources of data for the interpretation and analysis of this study are drawn from two main sources. Firstly, fieldwork through observation and one-on-one interviews with specific informants who are natives and traditional leaders in the selected study area, were purposively selected due to their expertise on Indigenous Knowledge Values and Environment. Secondly, materials such as articles, books, unpublished theses and the uses of internet sources were considered as secondary data. The mode of analysis is mainly descriptive.

Framework Principles

A framework principle is a supporting truth or general laws used as a theory underlying the discourse. As part of this paper, some principles underlying African worldview is discussed. The following, therefore define and inform the framework for environmental ethics through the African Worldview:

- i. Ethics through African Worldview
- ii. Ethics through the Bioethical African World
- iii. Ethics through the African Moral World
- iv. Ethics through Traditional Philosophy of Religion¹³

⁷ Samuel W. Kunhiyop. *African Christian Ethics*. (Nairobi: Word Alive Publishers, 2008): 5.

⁸ Richardson Neville. "Can Christian Ethics find its Way, and Itself in Africa"? *Journal of Theology for South Africa*, 95 (1996): 37

⁹ Neville. "Can Christian Ethics find its Way, and Itself in Africa"? 37.

¹⁰ Bolaji Idowu. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. (Orbis Books, 1975): 42.

¹¹ Idowu. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 42.

¹² Flick Uwe. 'Doing Qualitative Data Collection – Charting the Routes' in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection*, ed. Uwe Flick. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018): 4-5.

¹³ Thoughts and Ideas borrowed from "Advancing an Environmental Ethics Through the African World-View." Proceedings of the 1st International Technology, Education and Environmental Conference held at Omoku, Nigeria. Published by African Society for Scientific Research (ASSR), 2011.

Environmental Ethics through the African Worldview

Saleem defines worldview as a value system, a cosmology, an interpretive framework, a perceptual framework and a view of the world and life within one's beliefs.¹⁴

K. A. Busia, a renowned Ghanaian Professor of Sociology has observed people's worldview as their concept of the supernatural, of nature, of man, and society, and of the way in which these concepts form a system that gives meaning to people's lives and actions.¹⁵

The African Worldview presents God as the Creator of all natural phenomena. The African spirituality creates respect for animals, forest, rocks, mountains and rivers. It gives explanation as to why certain places are revered as sacred spaces and certain activities tabooed. The African worldview holds that natural phenomena have spirits that define relationship between humans and nature. Conservation values have grown out of the awareness that the natural resources are part of that which ordinary humans do not have control. Consequently, Africans do not temper with what they do not understand or control. To advance environmental ethics is to articulate a view of the good and bad that is anchored or derived from the environment; one that defends the environment since the environment provides the bases for such a theory. Without the environment the formulation and advancement of any theory would be doubtful if not impossible. Environmental ethics is one in which the environment achieves a space in the notion of the good and the bad; one in which the environment is understood to be a moral agent; one that can offend or be offended and for this reason cannot be allowed to be a non-moral agent.¹⁶ Again, environmental ethics should be able to specify what should be expected from the environment and what should be given to the environment. Ethics as a body of knowledge studies not just what is good but what should be good and why. In this part of the world (Africa), the Earth furnishes the continent with all it needs and Africans perform rituals and ceremonies at sacred places. For this reason, it is very important to advance environmental ethics through an African Worldview.

Environmental Ethics through the Bioethics African World.

African thought and culture holds a theory of life which is considerably humanistic and biotic. Humanistic in the sense that humans live in mutual obligation to nature. Biotic in the sense of a natural assemblage of plants and animals living in the same environment and are mutually sustaining and independent. The indigenous people of Akyem Abuakwa have a deep reverential attitude towards life. Hence in every important life stage, there are rituals and celebrations. The concern for the earth and for that matter the environment is very central to the life and thought of the people; indeed, in the primal thought of the African, nature has spirit (Life). It is this Panvitalist conception of nature that defines and informs the African's ethical attitude to nature. In the African thought, life is seen as having the ability to generate itself (perpetuity). The African environment then becomes an animate object that has life and power.¹⁷ So the earth has life and power. The African environment has worth far beyond economic value. It has religious, cultural, and social significance. Environmental ethics through bioethics gear towards seeking social arrangements that promote the wellbeing of humans and at the same time, preserve the natural environment both now and in the future. Hence all forms of life are important and everything is connected to everything else. The African Ethical code promotes inter-connectedness and interdependent system. Every individual creature be it human, flora, fauna and the inanimate form part of this complex and integrated ecosystem. What occurs in one ecosystem can have manifold and diverse consequences on other interrelated ecosystem across the entire spectrum. That is why there is a need for an African ethical standard to guide and protect one another.

Environmental Ethics through Akan Moral World.

Akan concept of communalism finds concrete expression in the moral life of the indigenous people of Akyem Abuakwa—morality is the basis of communalism. This is to the extent, a philosophy of human-centeredness. Moral and ethical education are geared towards creating the awareness of moral enforcement mechanism such as curses, public opinion, ostracism, supernatural rewards and punishment.

Hence, an action is deemed right in so far as it promotes a shared identity among the people based on good will. Similarly, an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and leads to encourage alienation and ill-will. There is a shared identity and 'goodwill' within the African moral world. The Akan moral world tends to defend back principles; and so what is moral is what connects lives together. Life is beautiful when there is a shared identity and 'goodwill'. Nature should therefore not be an object of exploitation. Well thought out ethical principles should protect all life forms. Thus it is totally wrong and contrary to the Akan environmental world if the source of ill-will and discord find their

¹⁴ Raja M. Ali Saleem. "Religious Values and Worldviews". *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. (2019) :4. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1158.

¹⁵ Kofi A. Busia. "The African Worldview". Paper presented at Christianity and African Culture, Accra, Gold Coast, May 2nd – 6th, 1955): 3

¹⁶ Lawrence O. Ugwuanyi. "Advancing an Environmental Ethics Through the African World-view". *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 2 (4), (2011): 5.

¹⁷ Emmanuel Asante. "He Who Possesses the Land Possesses Divinity, Spirituality and the Land from Biblical and African Perspective" *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*. 6 no 1-2, (2001):25.

roots in the resources of the environment because by doing so, the environment is negatively affected and becomes a destructive moral agent.

In the indigenous setting policemen and women were not the point of enforcing moral laws, rather ancestral spirits and deities enforced moral laws thus creating Akan ethical rules. Kudajie notes that the social structure itself contributes a great deal both to formulate ethical ideas and the setting up of moral standards, as well as the actual enforcement of morality shared by the community¹⁸

Ethics through Abuakwa Traditional Religious Philosophy.

The traditional religion of the people of Akyem Abuakwa is a religio-cultural manifestation specific to the indigenous Abuakwa people. This is so, due to fact that, it emanates from the way the people perceived the world around them. The religion shapes the people's understanding of realities and guides beliefs and practices of the Abuakwa people. Its code and precepts are written in the heart of the people because it has no written documents. The indigenous Abuakwa religion is preserved through myths, legends, songs, dance, sculpture and language.¹⁹ Akyem Abuakwa traditional philosophy of religion is communal in nature and the individual becomes a part of it by belonging to a particular community. Everyone in the community is expected to participate in the rituals and festivals. It is impossible for the individual to disassociate him/herself from the community, rituals, festivals, worship and sacrifices. Again, individuals in the society are expected to conform to the religious rules and regulations for the good and well-being of everyone in the community. Through Akan traditional philosophy of religion, the indigenous people of Akyem Abuakwa have evolved and developed environmental ethics to protect and preserve the local environment and ecology. The Akyem Abuakwa traditional concept of land ownership as expressed by Danquah enjoins the living to manage and conserve the environment for future generations while they have to account for their stewardship to the ancestors. Such a concept shaped and defined the people's attitude to protect the environment.²⁰ Hence, the Abuakwa people through their relationship with nature usually clothed in religion, which resulted in reverent attitude towards nature become caretakers of their environment. They have indeed evolved, developed and acquired relevant environmental ethics to protect and preserve their environment. The people of Akyem Abuakwa have developed a body of environmental laws and regulations to regulate their relationship with the environment.²¹ First, the Traditional philosophy and concept of land is that the land belongs to a vast family of whom many are dead, a few are living and countless hosts are still unborn.²²

Secondly, belief in Ancestors provides insight into environmental ethics. Ancestors are regarded as members of the family because they partake in the decision making, protect and watch over members of their living families and serve as guides of morality and sources of blessing to their living members. Ancestors are called to protect individuals and family properties especially family lands.

Thirdly, Spirits are everywhere – in persons, trees, rivers, animals, rocks, mountains and some personal effects. Such places and objects are usually regarded as holy and are treated as such. The ever-present spirits help maintain moral values of the people. These spirits in many ways act as moral agents of the society because they abhor crimes like adultery, stealing, cheating and suicide.²³ The Spirit Ancestors punish the living if they pollute rivers and sacred spaces.

Fourthly, the relationship between human life and the natural world is clearly seen in the connection between totems and taboos. This relationship contains a code that differentiates the moral from immoral way for an individual or community. Totems and taboos clarify for all to see those elements in human attitudes and behaviour towards the environment that enhance life and those that do not. In Akyem Abuakwa for example, there are days of rest known as taboo – days during which the land is expected to rest. Each locality has its days of rest. In the same way, some rivers and streams had specific days during which people should not fetch water from them.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Field evidence clearly indicates that the biophysical environment that has served as the life support system has been tempered with by human activities such as bush fires, poor farming methods, clearing of watersheds, sand winning and harvesting of firewood. Human activities have resulted in land degradation resulting in large areas exposed to erosion, salinization and contamination. The loss from such land degradation is enormous and it includes the following: the rich top soil, biodiversity, medicinal plants and above all the pollution of the River *Birim* and its tributaries and the

¹⁸ Joshua N. Kudajie. 'How Morality Was Enforced in Ga- Adangme Society'. In E.A. Adebola, (ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa* (Ibadan, insert name of publisher and date): 170-176.

¹⁹ Daniel S. Amlalo., et al. *Biodiversity Conservation: Traditional Knowledge and Modern Concepts*. (Accra: E.P. A,1998): XVII.

²⁰ Akwasi Abayie-Boaten. 'Traditional Conservation Practices-Ghana's Examples'. In Amlalo, Atsiatorne and Fiati (eds), *Biodiversity Conservation*, (Accra: E.P.A, 1999) :1-3.

²¹ Akwasi Abayie-Boaten, Notes On Akwasidae: A Traditional Festival of Asante, *Research Review Supplement*. No.6 (1993).

²² George Banneh. 'Towards Sustainable Development: An African Perspective'. *Geografisk Tidsskrift*.90,(1990):1-4.

²³ Esther Umara. Spirit Worship Among the Gbagvi People of Kaduna State, (B.A, Unpublished Thesis Submitted to The Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, 2006).

desacralization of *Birim* ecological basin.

Evidence from the study area further shows that several sites show gullies, trenches, and removal of top soil such that these places are unsuitable for crop cultivation. Nana Banchie of Asiakwa described deforestation in the area as follows:

The miners brought their heavy machines to remove the cocoa trees, the big trees and all plants. They turned the soil upside down, dug huge trenches and all the rivers that served as boundaries have been diverted such that one cannot identify his or her boundaries to repossess the land after the miners had gone.²⁴

Deforestation is environmentally unhealthy because it decreases the number of trees that hold large concentration of carbon dioxide and other gasses in the atmosphere. Mining as human activity devastates the land, causes soil degradation, destroys water and air quality of the site. The Ghana states of Environment Report (GSER) 2004 States:

Small Scale and illegal artisanal mining (galamsey) have made serious adverse impacts on the environment. They leave behind them unsafe excavations which render high quality arable land unsuitable for cultivation. Illegal artisanal miners are nuisance as they further disturb claimed sites of the big mining companies. Several communities have their sources of water polluted by the activities of small scale miners. There is the threat of mercury pollution of water bodies in illegal artisanal mining.²⁵

- **Land concept**

The Land/Earth is a well-known deity among the Akyem Abuakwa people. Thursday is the day set aside for observance. No one broke the soil on this day in the past. Infringement on this rule was punished by death.²⁶ The land is revered because she has the power of fertility and that living or dying human depends upon her.

- **Environmental Rights**

Does the land as a Deity have any rights? Or is human absolute right to the environment beyond what is necessary to support human's basic needs? What then is the justifiable to demand from the environment/land as a result of human's relationship with the environment? Can the land or environment enjoy justice? Traditional environmental laws are safeguarded by the Ancestral Spirits that policed the environment. The ancestors are usually called upon to protect family lands and property. Who should the environment be accountable to? Should it be humans, God or the environment itself? Indigenous philosophy and concept do not permit humans to have absolute right over the environment or the land. What duties have Humans towards the Environment and Vice Versa? Are humans part of the environment totally independent of and excluded when the rights and ecojustice or environmental ethics were conceived?

- **Cosmological Kinship with Nature:**

The people of Akyem Abuakwa demonstrate cosmological Kinship with nature. As earth dwellers, human lives are in constant relationship with the sun, the moon and the atmosphere that surrounds the earth. On earth, other creations are neighbours to man – the plants, animals, mountain and rivers, some too small for eyes to behold and others much larger than man is.²⁷ The people of Akyem Abuakwa like all other Akan societies in Ghana, believe that land, water, animals, and plants are not just creations, but that they have their place within the sanctity of nature. That is, in the life and thought of the Akan people, any created entity that plays a crucial role in the very survival of humans is viewed as sacred.²⁸

Indigenous Spirituality does not make the human person the centre of all things. Rather the human person sees the plants, animals, mountains and rivers as true neighbours with constant interactions. One is not encouraged to abuse or take advantage over his/her neighbour. Each neighbour has his/her own rights; that all forms of life are important and everything is interconnected. The people apply nature to their daily living. Hence the people of Akyem Abuakwa have instituted traditional laws that form ethics to protect their environment.

The study discovered some consequences of breaking the environmental laws in Akyem Abuakwa's traditional setting. The traditional society has established well tested structures to enforce environmental laws. Kudadjie observes that the social structure itself contributes a great deal both to the formulation of ethical ideas and the setting up of moral standards, as well as the actual enforcement of the morality shared by the community.²⁹

²⁴ Nana Banchie is an elderly traditional statesman in Akyem Abuakwa. He hails from Asiakwa, one of the principal states in the study domain and wields much respect throughout the Area due to his contributions to chieftaincy matters and other traditional leadership roles.

²⁵ The Ghana State of the Environment Report, (2004): 25.

²⁶ Robert S. Rattray. *Ashanti*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923):125.

²⁷ Mercy A. Oduyaye. *Beads and Strands*, (Yaounde: Regnum Africa, 2003): 46

²⁸ Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye. 'Indigenous Ways of Creating Environmental Awareness: A Case Study from Berekum Traditional Area, Ghana'. *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. 8.1 (2014) 46-63.

²⁹ Joshua N. Kudadjie. "How Morality Was Enforced in Ga Adangme Society. In E.A. Adebola, (ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa*. (1983): 171-172.

• **Determination of Morality and Ethics**

To the question of what factors determine morality and ethics within the traditional setting, the following were mentioned by respondents:

- i. Values and norms enshrined in the people's custom and traditions.
- ii. Religious beliefs, practices and established taboos.
- iii. The concept of 'we feeling' and the desire for group solidarity.
- iv. The experiences of the people, common sense and the conscience of the individual.
- v. The influence of proverbs, wise- sayings, folk tales and *Ananse* stories some of which reflect the custom, experiences and religious ideas of the people.
- vi. A strong desire or expectation to do the right and avoid wrong towards the environment.
- vii. Williamson noted that in the olden times there were no police men and there was no need of them because the traditional gods and deities were the policemen. In those days, the customs and the traditional ways of life sanctioned by the spirit ancestors and the gods provided the framework of the Akan ethical code.³⁰ By that the gods and the spirit – ancestors were the policemen that protected the family lands and property.
- viii. People invoked curses from the spirit-ancestors and the gods to enforce morality. Any abuse of land, the rivers, the forests and groves, killing of animals and birds was more likely to be met with punishment in the form of death, diseases like blindness, impotence and paralysis. The traditional belief among the people of Abuakwa is that human beings are answerable to the line of ancestors for their stewardship over the non-human parts of creation -- land, flora and fauna since all these belong to the ancestors.

Nana Banchie, a sub-chief of Asiakwa argues that the ancestors sit in court to judge the activities of the living. Therefore, any Chief, family heads or any family member who mismanages the properties of the ancestors or destroys rivers and streams that play a central role in traditional worship is called to the court of the ancestors to account for his or her stewardship. Many traditional leaders in Akyem Abuakwa have been invited to the land of the ancestors through unusual circumstances within the last ten years. Barima Asare Asiamah of Ankaase who died in 2014 is cited to buttress the traditional belief system among the people. Again, Okyeame Atta from Asiakwa, the Chief of Osino among several others have all died in mysterious circumstances.

• **Challenges to Developing Environmental Ethics through African Worldview**

In a Spiritual environment where the people worship and venerate everything under the earth, between the earth and heavens and in the heavens above, various methods are employed to restrict the utilization of certain natural resources as a way of conserving the environment³¹. However, socio-economics, political and religious factors have all combined to challenge the development of environmental ethics through the African worldview. The result is that several communities have experienced environmental degradation and pollution. The fear and reverence for traditional gods/deities coupled with respect for traditional systems that worked perfectly well no longer hold. Punishment by the gods/deities for contravention of traditional laws worked.³² However, there is currently a phenomenon of widespread deforestation, soil erosion and water pollution of the major rivers in Akyem Abuakwa caused by human activities. Traditional laws for sustainable use have completely been ignored or rejected by some people who are either Christians or Muslims or Modernists. They feign ignorance of the principles for preservation in the community and therefore, ignore the taboos that protect the forest, rivers, animal and other natural objects.

Modernity and modernists thoughts have worked out in all fronts in cutting the link that bind out people in two dramatic ways: in the first place by demystifying the bond of the people and secondly, by providing other resources for sustaining human life. Other challenges to a sustainable environment includes the following: population increase, pressure from other religions and urbanization.

• **Population increase**

Population growth is a major problem facing environmental conservation in Akyem Abuakwa. All the district assemblies have experienced high population growth since 2010. Pressure on the land in the areas around Atiwa, Begoro and Abomosu Forest Reserves have increased. The high population density depends on the forest for timber, firewood, and other forest resources for living. The high population therefore, is a threat to the conservation of the forests and rivers especially the River *Birim*.

³⁰ Sydney G. Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*. (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1955): 109.

³¹ Oduyuye. *Beads and Strands*, 46.

³² Kudadjie. How Morality was enforced in Ga-Adangme Society, 170-173.

- **Pressure from other Religions**

In Akyem Abuakwa, one can mention more than hundreds of other religions with different brands and shades of Christianity and Islam. The operations of these religious bodies have drastically affected African Traditional Religion. As conversion took place, the people were forced to relinquish their indigenous practices and belief systems. This has resulted partly in changing the African worldview into either European or Arabic worldview. However, despite the influence of Christianity and Islam, some Africans have held on to their traditional belief and practices whereas, other have embraced enculturation.

- **Urbanization**

Urbanization has generally detached people from their traditional roots. Most young people have migrated from their towns and villages to Akyem Abuakwa areas in search of employment. Many of the youths are engaged in mining and lumbering. The migration to these mining and forest communities has led people to struggle for space and that has put much pressure on the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found out that there is potency in the indigenous conservational practices that could be harnessed to address contemporary environmental concerns in Ghana by both traditional leaders and government agencies responsible for environmental protection. Again, Chiefs, family heads and other members of the community must protect natural resources and see them as the very survival of humans. Furthermore, traditional knowledge about environmental conservation must be integrated into inter-disciplinary projects dealing with the link between culture, the environment and development in areas such as the manufacturing of the natural resources and the conservation of biodiversity in Akyem Abuakwa by all stakeholders.

CONCLUSION

Advancing environmental ethics through the African worldview is the only way to explain how religion and cultural resources can be employed to conserve and protect the environment and allow the earth to continuously play its mothership role and to enhance biodiversity. Again, advancing environmental ethics through the African worldview is to point to environmental challenges of modernity. The indigenous worldview provides ethical values and beliefs that guide the moral actions of the people. It ensures that the people live in a relationship of mutual obligation with nature and that human activities do not unnecessarily cause environmental abuse and destruction. The idea is to sensitize the people on the importance of environmental ethics for all the indigenes and, perhaps more importantly, for the future of Akyem Abuakwa's ecological zone as the home of Abuakwa people. The neglect of environmental ethics means environmental degradation and ecological crisis in Akyem Abuakwa. All hands must therefore be on deck to ensure that environmental ethics is properly integrated into all spheres of life.

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