Neologizing Akan Indigenous Ecological Proverbs and Wise-sayings for Earth-keeping among Akan Christians of Ghana

Abstract

All over the world, environmental noxiousness has caused the emission of greenhouse gasses, climate change and diseases that threaten human and non-human survival. Ghana has had her fair share in this global onslaught. Although there has been several political interventions, the current global environmental performance rankings according to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) 2022, grades Ghana at 170th out of the 180 nations assessed and 45th out of the 46 nations in the sub-Saharan Africa, scoring only 27.7. This pathetic development, formed the basis of this study; which advocates for the need to turn to Indigenous Ecological Knowledge systems (IEKs) for a response. This paper made use of qualitative method. It used interviews as the primary data collection instrument. The secondary data was collected from Akan proverbs derived from oral and written literature. The study affirms that in the past, some Akan axioms were used to prompt the natives about the essence of protecting and conserving nature. This article has neologized eleven new proverbs and wise-sayings that are ecologically ennobled and could be viable to be harnessed for earth-keeping among the Akan of Ghana.

Keywords: Akan, earth-keeping, Akan Christians, proverbs and wise-sayings

Introduction

The idea of the modern world, being understood to be global and glocal has ramifications on the ecological crisis across the world. Hence, ecological crisis today, is a global problem. Ghana's ecological story in the 4th Republic has been in a sad state. Awuah-Nyamekye (2009:251), confirms that "the way Ghanaians interact with the environment in recent times, is very appalling; they just care a little about how to relate with the environment in a sustainable way." Many seem to have forgotten that "life is environment and environment is life" (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009:251). This attitude could be attributed to the human struggle for survival and the modern tendencies of scrambling for wealth and possessions. The nation experiences on a daily basis, littering, improper disposal of sewage, water pollution, air pollution, deforestation, illegal mining (galamsey), destruction of wetlands, etcetera. The global environmental performance outlook of Ghana has not been encouraging. In 2018, for instance, Ghana was tagged by the World Health Organization (WHO) as one of the dirtiest countries in the world, second to open defecation (Appiah-Sekyere & Oppong 2018). Environmental performance rankings according to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) in 2020 ranked Ghana at 39th out of the 46 nations in the sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Emerson, et al, 2020). That of 2022, graded Ghana at 170th out of the 180 nations assessed and 45th out of the 46 nations in the sub-Saharan Africa, scoring only 27.7 (Wendling, et al, 2022).

Interventions such as the provision of waste bins, National Sanitation Day (communal cleaning on the 1st Saturday of every month), sensitization adverts on sanitation in the print and audio/visual media, and many other interventions that have been initiated by governments over the years (Boamah, 2015), have not yielded much (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009). Culture and religion are two major areas that seem to have been ignored in the fight against environmental indiscipline in Ghana (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009). This paper seeks to harness Akan Indigenous Ecological Knowledge System (IEKs) to respond to the ecological crisis in Ghana. The specific IEKs that this paper focuses on are Akan Indigenous Ecological Proverbs and Wise-sayings.

Method

The goal of this paper is to analyze Akan philosophical thought on human-earth interactions. The study employs qualitative method resulting to phenomenological approach. This method and approach were used in order to seek a deepened understanding about why the Akan behave the way they do toward the natural environment (earth). The approach was suitable because it afforded the researchers the opportunity to analyze the experiences, worldviews, perspectives and aspirations of the population sampled, regarding the nexus that exists between human and the natural environment. Akan oral traditions on human-earth relations such as proverbs and wise-sayings which depict their worldviews and beliefs were collected and critically reviewed in order to establish an Akan worldview of human-earth relationships. The research philosophy of this paper is structuralism, which describes the knowledge of human and nature life that is concerned about relationship rather than individual objects (Rubel & Rosman, 1996). The main research instrument was interview and the sampling technique was purposive. In all, eight chiefs who doubled as farmers and two experts in Akan culture, language and history, from Manhyia Palace (the traditional seat of government in the Asante Kingdom), formed the population for this study. With the help of a tape recorder, the data from the interview were transcribed, sorted and analysed thematically. Aside from this, Akan proverbs and wise-sayings were reviewed. At the end, an attempt was made to neologize eleven (11) new Akan ecological proverbs and wise-sayings. These newly created maxims have been highlighted in the text. The Akan proverbs and wise-sayings were rendered in their original Akan/Twi forms and were followed by their literal translations to English. All Akan maxims used in their original forms have been italicised in the work and their English translations are presented in inverted commas.

Akan

The word "Akan," refers to both the people and their language (Agyekum, 2019). Akan consists of over thirty (30) groups, with the majority of them located in different parts of Ghana, especially in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Asante, Akyem, Fante, Bono, Denkyira, Assin, Twifo, Heman, Wasa, Sehwi, Aowin, Bawule in La Cote d'Ivoire, Anyin, Kwawu, Nzema, Akuapem, and many others are examples of Akan groups (Twumasi-Ankrah, 2023). The Akan are the largest ethnic group and occupy the greater part of southern Ghana and their member groups are found in all the sixteen regions in the country (Agyekum, 2013). All Akan groups speak Twi with slight dialectical variations. At the literary level, Twi, like many other languages, is full of figurative expressions. One is considered a good orator among the Akan if his or her speech is usually spiced with appropriate proverbs and wise-sayings. This is affirmed by Antwi et al. (2020:424) that "a Ghanaian chief or linguist for instance, is said to be wise if he or she is able to speak in proverbs, most of which are derived from nature and daily experiences."

Akan Christians

The 2021 population census undertaken, indicates that out of the 30.8 million Ghanaians (Darko, 2021), Christians constitute the largest religious group, having 71.3 percent of the population.[1] Since Akan forms the largest ethnic group in Ghana, one could assume that the Christian population might be more dominated by Akan than any other ethnic group in Ghana.[2] "Akan Christians," refers to Christians who trace their origins from the Akan ethnic extraction.

[1] https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/ghana-population

[2] The reports on both the 2010 and 2021 Population and Housing Census in Ghana have not put forth detailed data on the breakdown of ethnic groups in Christianity except to say that Christianity is the largest religion in Ghana and likewise, Akan being the largest ethnic group in Ghana.

One can categorize Akan Christians into Westernized and "Akanized Akan Christians." "Westernized Akan Christians," refers to those whose religio-cultural worldview and practices have been influenced massively by the western culture and worldviews which were concealed in the type of Christianity the Akan received from the European missionaries. These Westernized Akan Christians like their European missionaries consider most of the Akan indigenous beliefs and practices such as taboos to be pagan that must be ruthlessly done away with. Oduro (2018) asserts that due to some bizarre information about Africans as being heathen, savages, barbarous and uncivilized, some western missionaries adopted a mission policy of first, civilizing Africans before Christianising them. Boaheng (2018), is of a similar view and confirms that the missionaries classified Africa as a dangerous place and its people as savages, uncivilized and superstitious who had no religion and spirituality; and as a result, they treated anything pre-Christian in Africa as either harmful or at best, valueless and considered African primal religion to be inconsistent with the Christian gospel. He added that in Ghana, "Christian Akan were forbidden to participate in the rites of ancestor worship. Converts were not allowed to observe the ceremonies related to festivals…since they were considered unchristian" (Boaheng, 2018:216). By this, Akan converts have alienate themselves from their own communities and culture by rejecting their own indigenous beliefs and practices (Busia, 1967). However, as noted by Adubofour (2001:1), "in spite of the adaptation to foreign elements that have entered the Akan world, the world outlook of people in general remains intact." He explains that the persistent nature of Akan beliefs and practices is supported by the Akan saying that, *amammrɛ, yɛnto ntwene anaa sɛ, amammerɛ yɛntoto no ase*, that is to say, "culture should not be discarded but must be honoured" (Adubofour, 2001:1). For this reason, though the indigenous religion has proven to be hospitable to Christianity, it has not been discarded by many of the people. In Akan communities, some people believe that they can be fully Akan and at the same time fully Christians. This is avowed by Boaheng (2018) that during the western missionary enterprise in Ghana, some Akan people chose to remain "Christians" outside the church. That implied that they had accepted the Christ, preached to them but had refused to sheepishly submit to the western cultural practices that the missionaries attempted to force through their throat. Hence, some of them completely stayed out of the missionary church or were not regular attendees after their conversion. Some of the elite and charismatic among them broke away to form what was expected to be an Africanized or for the sake of this paper, "Akanized Christian church" known as African Initiated/Indigenous Churches (AICs).

In reality, "Akan Christians" lived in two worlds –the traditional world in which they had been raised and the Christian world in which they had been introduced. Nominalism became the order of the day for most Christian converts. They simply could not let go of their African beliefs (Boaheng, 2018). Williamson (1955:vi) confirmed this reality during a conference by the Christian Council of Gold Coast in 1955 when he said, "As every pastor in the church can testify, while majority of Christians have accepted the church in its outward forms, their inward spirit is still ruled by the attitudes and outlook of the indigenous culture. The two are kept apart, not necessarily because they belong to opposing areas of life, but because men and women desire and expect to keep them apart…it is for the church to think its way through this problem and proclaim its faith as God's word to Africa."

This confusion in Akan Christianity was exactly Busia's concern in his concluding remarks during a presentation of a paper on "Christianity and African culture." During that conference of the Christian Council of the then Gold Coast, he asked rhetorically, "Can the African be Christian only by giving up his culture, or is there a way by which Christianity can ennoble it?" (Busia, 1955). These "Akan Christians" are of the view that the Christian theology found

in the Bible was meant to positively affect their Akan cosmology (Osei-Bonsu-Safo-Kantanka, A personal interaction, 2020).

Ukpong describes this as Inculturation, which is a process of interpreting and living Christianity, which is the same as Christian faith and practice from the perspective of a given culture and a people's social and historical life experience in such a way that Christian values are made to animate the people's way of life (Anozie, 2017). This shade of Christianity among some Akan can only be described as an "Akanized Christianity," whereby a section of the Akan, though, have accepted and professed Christianity but practise their Christian faith in light of Akan cultural practices and belief systems. This is in keeping with Iheanacho's observation on the "Africanisation" of Christianity. To him, Africanisation implies a progressive appreciation of a religious thought in a new context. "In this sense, it incorporates indigenous religious thought and practices into African Christianity. In this regard, Christianity and traditional religion have been engaged in a continuous dialectical interlock of mutual exchange and creative appropriation" (2021:4).

This hybrid system seems common in all religions, where one observes intersecting and intermingling of different religious persuasions operating in a cultural space. Asamoah-Gyadu (2005) in describing the ministry of William Wade Harris, a man accredited to be the foremost pioneer in Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, indicates that after Harris' conversion, his ministry was characterised by faith in the material symbols of traditional religiosity, which culminated in the manifestation of divine power through dramatic conversions, healing, prophecies, and deliverance from evil spirits. In the words of Akoto (2018:43), "Harris believed that traditional symbols should not be thrown out but must be used as a springboard for ministry in order to foster a contextualized religiosity which constitutes the use of personal cultural experience and the symbols of Christianity." It has been observed that "in Africa for instance, places where this interlacing and adaptation between Christianity and Traditional Religion happened, the European missionary enterprise thrived" (Oduro, 2018:94).

Some scholars especially, western theologians, however, consider this hybrid phenomenon as syncretism. Ariarajah (1999) identifies syncretism as one of the three classical fears of missionary enterprise. Kinnamon and Cope (1997) point out that there is danger in attempting to translate the Christian message for a cultural setting or an approach to faiths and ideologies with which Christians are in dialogue partnership, they may go too far and compromise the authenticity of Christian faith and life. They add that there is danger in interpreting a living faith not in its own terms but in terms of another faith or ideology (Kinnamon & Cope, 1997). Conteh (2014) is surprised to observe that many Christians in Africa who show concern about syncretistic elements in the church are the very people who blend African Religion with Christian practices. To him, neither Christianity nor Islam can honestly claim complete immunity from syncretism (Conteh, 2014).

Akan Christians especially, kings, queens, chiefs, and traditional leaders who are part of the Christian church, see nothing wrong in calling on ancestors when praying during durbars and community gatherings. They equate this with the idea of "heroes of faith" (Heb. 11:1ff) in the Bible as well as the fact that Christians are encouraged to call on the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" when praying. To them, these only confirm the Akan worldview of the interrelationship between the living and the departed members (ancestors) of the community. To the "Akanized Akan Christians," since Christ is the greatest ancestor in the family of God (the Church), should believers recognize the "communion of saints" in the book of Hebrews, the "hall of fame," and then theologizing about Christology of ancestors in Africa should not

be difficult (Edu-Bekoe, 2018). In addition, there is archaeological evidence that shows that the ancient Israelites deposited food near the tombs of their venerated dead (Conteh, 2014).

Explaining the reason why there is the phenomenon of the Akanisation and Africanisation of Christianity, Edu-Bekoe (2018) puts forth emphatically that no group of Africans can totally cut itself from its cultural roots and remain African in whatever religion; and converting to Christianity may not denote the total cultural conversion of the African. Hence, in the AICs, one sees an attempt to Africanize Christianity, and in this exercise, there is evidence of a fusion of elements of both traditional culture and Christianity, which removes the feeling of strangeness many an African feels at the missionary-led churches (Oduro, 2018).

The missionaries failed to satisfy the spiritual need of the Akan. The western mission-related church by and large, is still an alien institution because it failed to properly contextualize its worship in the life and institutions of the Akan people in that, the Christian church denominationally implanted from the west, has substantially retained its original forms and expressed itself in western modes. Missionaries clearly set out to establish not an Akan church, but the church they represented in their homeland. The polity and organization, the liturgies and devotional expressions, the discipline and instruction, and the total outlook derive directly from the parent missionary societies and churches supporting them. The Christianity of the Akan area proves to be the denominational Christianity of the west (Som & Asenso, 2020).

One could not agree more with Kalenga Matembele, a Zairean priest, cited by Oduro (2018:95) thus:

> If the Church has been in Africa at all, one could observe only her shadows but not her reality. There are no 'local churches,' but just a replica of the European church mimicking European lifestyle. The missionaries could not distinguish between what was suitable for export and what was not and they blindly brought to Africans the whole burden of their customs, their laws, their rites, their priestly caste instead of new life and new hope…Now that Africa has been Christianized, Christianity must be Africanized.

Clearly, the early European missionaries to Africa were inconsistent in their Christian mission in Africa. They appeared to be comfortable in holding unto their own socio-cultural views even on foreign lands but were uncomfortable in allowing their new-found Christian friends to keep their culture on their own local milieu. To a large extent, they succeeded in Europeanizing some Africans but failed to Christianize them. Thus, to attempt to rid of the African worldview from the African in order to Christianize him, only resulted in contradictions in the Christianity bequeathed to the African. This implies that Akan Christians find themselves in a state of dilemma and practise their Christianity in a state of confusion.

The Proverb Genre

Proverbs and wise-sayings have existed from time immemorial in all cultures across the globe (Syzdykov, 2014). Aphorisms (proverbs and wise-sayings) play significant role in the daily discourses of indigenous Africans, both in formal and informal ways (Brookman-Amissah, 1986). "The definition of the proverb genre has bothered scholars of paraemiology for a long time" (Madumulla, 1998-2001:257). Attempting to provide an exact definition for proverbs, is a difficult and an almost impossible task (Finnegan, 1970). However, Ferguson's (1983) definition of a proverb as a succinct and memorable statement that contains advice, a warning

or prediction, or an analytical observation, its form, being usually terse, figurative, rich in metaphor and most often poetic, is quite classic. To Madumulla (1998-2001), a proverb is an expression which contains a general truth, or what one can refer to as universal truth. According to Kofi Agyekum (2017), proverbs are brief sayings that embody general truths or principles and ways of life of a people. The general truths are based on people's past experiences, philosophy, perception, ideology, socio-cultural concepts and worldview. To Syzdykov (2014), proverbs and sayings are pearls of folk wisdom. Kanu (2015), from an African point of view, relates that African proverbs are the wisdom and experience of the African people, usually of several ages, gathered and summed up in one expression. They spring from the people and represent the voice of the people and express the interpretation of their beliefs, principles of life and conduct. "Proverbs in Africa are wise philosophical expressions, generally short and sometimes very funny yet make the language rich, picturesque, and express hidden or obvious wisdom" (Addo, 2001). It expresses the moral attitudes of a given culture, and reflects the hopes, achievements and failings of a people (Kanu, 2015). He adds that "the centrality of proverbs in African oral tradition is manifested in the frequency of its use by Africans in conversations, speeches, instructions, judgment, drama, arguments, storytelling, and in fun making" (Kanu, 2015:4).

Gibbs and Beitel (1995) view proverbs as familiar, fixed, sentential expressions that express well-known truths, social norms, or moral concerns. It is important to indicate quickly that these expressions exhibit general syntactic and semantic forms, whereby the use of the imperative mood or the subjunctive present tense is very common in proverbs. It can be observed that a large number of proverbs are direct comparisons of unlike things (metaphors). Metaphor is a figure of speech or a literacy device that compares two things without the use of "as" or "like" or is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared to one another without the use of "as" or "like." It shows indirectly that one thing is like another or is a substitute of the other. Examples of metaphorical proverbs are: "Life is war," "the fish rots from the head first," "Time is money," and "charity begins at home" etcetera. A few proverbs may emanate from personification. Examples of proverbs based on personification are: "when a palm tree lowers its branches, it is aware of what the earth has communicated to it," "the earth has retorted a person," "misery loves company" etcetera.

Proverbs and wise-sayings are usually found to be full of exaggerations. A proverb that exaggerates is termed as "hyperbole." For instance, "it's easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Sometimes, it contains paradox. Paradox describes a seemingly contradictory statement which when investigated may prove to be true. For example, "quality is better than mere quantity," "all animals are equal but some are more equal than others." There is also the presence of meter, as in the proverb, "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink," rhyme, as in "haste makes waste," or a slant rhyme, such as in "a stitch in time saves nine," alliteration, which is a device in which a number of words, having the same first consonant sound, occur close together in a series. It is a figure of speech which involves the repetition of consonant sound at the beginning of statements. It is mostly used in poetry. Although alliteration involves the repetition of letters, it is most importantly about the repetition of sounds. Alliteration occurs when a series of words for a roll or close together have the same first consonant sound. Alliteration can be seen in the following statements: "Live and let live," "Home sweet home," assonance, which describes the repetition of a vowel sound across a line of text. For example, "a rolling stone gathers no moss," "in between trees" and parallelism, that denotes, using similar words, clauses, phrases, sentence structure, or other grammatical elements to emphasize similar ideas in a statement. For

instance, “a penny saved is a penny earned,” “slowly, the muddy pool becomes a river and slowly, the woman’s illness becomes her death” and so on” (Gibbs & Beitel, 1995)

Akan Philosophical Application of Proverbs

The use of proverbs in Africa is mainly an oral art which serves as a rhetorical device to add spice to speech and human discourse but more importantly, as a means of conserving and conveying the society's traditions, institutions, values, and culture (Brookman-Amissah, 1986). Among the Akan, “most important virtues are either couched in proverbs or expressed in the form of a folk-tale with a moral to it” (Antwi, et al, 2020:419). Proverbial sayings and phraseologies are knotty statements and are viewed as vehicles for communicating and transporting change of behaviour and attitude of people on personal level or among groups (Agyemang, et al, 2015). In Africa, “proverbs are craftily developed short epigrammatic expressions, created by the ingenious forebears, enshrined with valuable epistemologies that ensure social cohesion in communities by regulating the moral values of the people handed down from one generation to another generation” (Adom, 2016:129). People’s use of proverbs reveals their appreciation of the human realities of various happenings in an objective manner that elucidates the ecosphere. Thus, one could say that wisdom is attainable through daily experience in the created order and that the accumulation of human experience could amount to wisdom (Antwi, et al, 2020).

In recent times, studies on proverbs have shifted from simple compilation of proverbs to applying them to other disciplines (Owu-Ewie, 2019). Largely, available literature on Akan Indigenous Ecological Knowledge systems (IEKs), also termed as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), especially, proverbs and wise-sayings, have concentrated on the identification, collection and an analysis of their significance as indigenous resource for earth-keeping. For instance, in their work, “An Ecocritical Analysis of Akan Proverbs in *Death on Trial*,” Asamoah et al. (2019; 110), posit that the Ghanaian society needs to draw lessons from its cultural values and communal environmental life to ensure environmental sustainability. They add that the use of proverbs by the Asantes[3] of Akan indicates that “they believe in the promotion of sustainability and balance in co-existence of humans, animals and plants in one cosmic sphere” (Asamoah, et al, 2019; 110). This view is corroborated by Kim et al. (2017; 14), who see the usefulness of traditional TEK related proverbs as a means of inculcating ecoliteracy in citizens. Thus, “several proverbs reveal deep notions of ecological connectivity, and of the interrelationship between ecological and social systems in Korea” (Kim et al, 2017; 11).

Adom (2016) in his work, “The Philosophical Epistemologies of Asante Proverbs on Ghana’s Biodiversity Conservation,” sampled Twenty-Six (26) existing Asante proverbs which in his opinion, could be harnessed as didactic lessons to conscientize the natives on the need to conserve and protect the environment. However, a critical look at the proverbs sampled, indicates that only few of them have ecological content at the literary level, except that as he rightly stated that their “philosophical underwriting can help change the attitudinal patterns of individuals, advising the conservation bodies on how to develop their conservation strategies and policies while charging those in authority as well as members of the general public on how to conserve the biodiversity resources in the environment. It also advocates for the shunning of ill or negative behavioural patterns that are the prime causes of the biodiversity depletion in

[3] Asantes are a sub-group of the Akan. They constitute the largest Akan group in Ghana. Largely, they are found in the southern part of Ghana, specifically, in the Ashanti Religion. “Otumfuo,” is the title of the king of Asante and “Manhyia Palace,” is the traditional seat of government of the Asantes.

Ghana" (Adom, 2016:131). Adom's work contains fewer ecologically inclined Akan maxims probably because Akan aphorisms that are ecologically predisposed, are relatively few. This would call for a neologism of new ones that are more ecologically infused to augment the existing ones in order to contribute effectively towards the indigenous environmental education in Akan communities and Ghana as a whole.

Some Existing Akan Indigenous Ecological Proverbs and Wise-sayings

Akan Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems (IEKs) are part of the Akan Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which describe Akan wise-sayings, proverbs, songs, folklore, totems, symbols, and taboos that are environmentally oriented, meant to shape the environmental consciousness of the people. This paper samples some Akan wise-sayings and proverbs which establish the interconnectedness that exists between humans and the earth and can enhance environmental conservation. This is vital in the sense that one's "ability to manage the environment and to create harmony within one's environment and the society, stems from one's possession of wisdom" (Antwi, et al, 2020).

One of the ways Africans express their philosophical thoughts is through their proverbs and wise-sayings. African philosophy is thus encountered largely in proverbs, wise-sayings, folktales, poetry, legends and folklores. Naturally, proverbs can be elucidated repeatedly, in the course of time and in diverse circumstances. Kaplan attests that proverbs are thought-provoking in the sense that they do not just make use of global ideas that describe human existence, such as the biological system about the life processes of human beings, but also, they differ in such a way that seems to replicate the particularities of the culture of particular groups (Kaplan, 2002). In many native communities, rich indigenous knowledge and certain behavioural codes are transmitted from generation to generation via proverbs. This is a common practice in many African societies particularly, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Kaplan, 2002).

To Seebaway (2017), a proverb is a common indigenous wise-saying that churns out knowledge, reality, ethic, and native worldviews, formulated in a somewhat permanent manner which is transmitted across generations. Seebaway's depiction of a proverb seems to capture to a large extent the common features of Akan proverbs and wise-sayings. For instance, the Akan state: *asase kotokuo, obiara bɛkɔ mu bi*, (Appiah, et al, n.d) literally, "earth's bag, everyone must enter it," meaning, that all humans are mortals and are susceptible to die and be buried in the earth one day, *Asase nkyiri funu,* (Appiah, et al, n.d) literally, "the earth does not abhor a corpse," meaning, death is natural and the earth is human's home at the end of life. This explains why among the Akan, the dead are buried in the ground. This worldview is in keeping with the statement of the narrator of the creation story as recorded in Genesis 3:19 which states: "human is from the ground and returns to the ground."

Some of the environmentally oriented proverbs and wise-sayings among the Akan are as follows: *Asase so yɛ hye a, namɔn na ɛka* (Appiah, et al, n.d) that is, "if the earth surface is hot, the foot reveals it," meaning, if one is in constant touch with a thing, the person gets to know its nature. The interconnectedness between humans and the earth helps humans to feel the heat and hurt of the earth. The heat is due to global warming, greenhouse effects, and climate change (Okyere, 2011). To the Akan, the hurt of the earth is attributed to the gross disregard for environmental taboos and belief systems. *Asase dɔre fi a na yɛfrɛ no esie,* (Appiah, et al, n.d) literally, "if the earth piles up dirt, human calls it an anthill." Anthills are

normally found and allowed in the wild but are not allowed in the dwelling places of humans since they become abodes for snakes and insects. This implies that when humans litter and dispose of domestic waste indiscriminately, the immediate habitable environment becomes a breeding ground for harmful creatures. *Baabi a yɛdidi no yɛnsɛe hɔ*, literally, "no one destroys where he gets his livelihood from." This clearly implies that the Akan do not encourage environmental abuse and destruction of the environment on which they depend. *Wo ne asase yɛ aka a, wonnidi apɔtɔyewa mu*, literally, "if one begrudges the earth, he cannot have access to earthenware to eat from." In typical Akan traditional communities, the people use beautifully made earthenware to cook and dish out meals. This proverb teaches how related and dependent human is to the ground. The Akan understanding of human's dependence on the ground is so inevitable that the people are taught to keep a good and cordial relationship with it. Their awareness of the fact that the earth is the main source of production of food and livelihood for human, makes them come to a conclusion that a person disregards the earth at his own peril.

All of this is to say that Akan philosophical outlook about the earth, generated proverbs and wise-sayings that were ecologically germane. The ecological proverbs and wise-sayings were central in the Akan environmental education. However, with elements of modern Akan community, new environmental challenges and the reality of paradigm shifts towards their indigenous worldviews, there may be the need for the formulation of new aphorisms to augment the existing ones to help mitigate the modern environmental onslaught in Akan communities.

Neologizing Akan Ecological Proverbs and Wise-sayings for Earth-keeping

Neologism is the act of inventing a word or phrase in a language (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 2010). To Liu and Liu (2014), it refers to those derivatives that are newly coined. Indeed, proverbs do not fall out of the sky and are not products of a supernatural being but are intentionally or unintentionally coined by an individual as and when necessary (Syzdykov, 2014). Having analysed the existing Akan proverbs and wise-sayings on human-earth relations, this paper attempts to create some more environmentally related Akan proverbs and wise-sayings to sensitize the conscience of contemporary Akan society on the need to take care of the environment. This novelty is premised on Wiafe-Akenten's work, in which she reveals that sometimes proficient Akan speakers create their own proverbs and or wise-sayings instead of relying on the existing ones (Wiafe-Akenten, 2021). Yankah, also affirms that native Akan speakers sometimes formulate their own proverbs and wise-sayings when they are in dire need of phrases that can help articulate exactly what they intend to put forth (Yankah, 1986). However, inasmuch as the grammatical rules governing the Akan dialects allow for neologism, one needs to ensure that the proverb or wise-saying to be devised, contains some of the essential qualities, inherent in Akan proverbs and can be meaningful to the indigenous speakers (Agyekum, 2011). This is exactly what this paper attempts to do. It seeks to neologize proverbs and or wise-sayings that can cogently articulate the Akan worldview on human-earth relations.

Akan proverbs and wise-sayings emerge from everyday life experiences of the people, that is why the Akan state, "*sɛ asɛm mmaeɛ a, yɛmmu bɛ,*" literally, "proverbs emerge as and when issues occur," implying that proverbs and wise-sayings are occasioned by events (Safo-Kantanka, personal interaction, 2020). Akan proverbs and wise-sayings evolve with the people; and they are full of ideas about God, humans, the environment, and their interrelations. It is

against this backdrop that this papers endeavours to contribute to the knowledge in paraemiology by creating new axioms to add to the existing Akan ecologically oriented proverbs and wise-sayings that can appeal to the conscience of Akan Christians on the need to protect and conserve the environment.

According to Safo-Kantanka (A personal interaction at the Manhyia Palace, 2020), Akan proverbs are grouped into two: There is *ɛbɛ turodoo* and *nkeka bɛ,* that is, "true proverbs" or metaphorical ones and "direct statements" respectively (Madumulla, 1998-2001). For example, to Safo-Kantanka (A personal interaction, 2020), the Akan philosophical saying proposed in this work, ***onipa nua ɛno ara ne asase***, "the earth is human's relative," can be categorized under *nkeka bɛ,* "direct or clear statement." However, one would observe that this neologized maxim, depicts a metaphorical feature required of a good adage. Here, human and earth, though unlike, are directly compared with each other. Given how related human is to the earth among Akan, one could state that the earth is a relative to human. The relationship between them seems so mutual and inseparable that one could describe it as kinship. Thus, to the Akan, the earth and humans are kinsmen. Lumanze (2021), affirms that "human is believed to have a sense of kinship with nature." This view is corroborated by Kanu and Ndubisi (2022), that "African proverbs present nature as a part of the life of the human person, in the sense that neglecting the environment will have consequences on the life of the human person." This worldview would create strong grounds for advocating for environmental conservation and protection among Akan.

Aside from the religious factors that drive the Akan ecological philosophy, there are also economic reasons why they value the earth/land. Thus, well-articulated wise-sayings that would promote indigenous conservation ideas could be pragmatic. It is in this vein that this paper neologises thus, ***asase a yɛdidi so no yɛnsɛe no,*** "do not destroy the land from which you get your livelihood." This paper asserts that one of the reasons why Akan people revere the earth is the fact that it is their main collective source of sustenance and livelihood. It would therefore be unthinkable for a community member or an alien to be allowed to do anything that is capable of damaging the collective life and well-being of the Akan community.

To the Akan, the earth is sacred. The reason why the earth is sacred is that they believe that the Supreme Being manifests himself in it. They also believe that the earth is a gift bequeathed to them by their ancestors who though dead, yet, live among them constantly. Thus, the saying, ***nnipa nsɛe asase,*** "human should not destroy the earth," could serve as one of the injunctions pointing clearly, to the fact that the living has no right whatsoever to destroy or desecrate the earth. Anyone that does that, does it at his/her own risk. This underscores why it is a taboo among the Akan to destroy the environment. The view can be supported by the saying, ***ɔdasani a osɛe asase no ɔbɔ mmusuo,*** "it is a taboo for a human being to destroy the land."

From the Akan perspective, any attempt at destroying the environment is *mmusuo*, "a taboo." Therefore anyone that abuses the environment, violates community norms; and appropriate sanctions may be meted out to the culprit. Likewise, ***onipa nua ne asase, na mmusubɔfoɔ na ɔsɛe ne nua,*** "the earth is human's relative; a person that destroys his relative is accursed." The Akan encourage and live a communal life. Their family system is formed along bloodlines and they trace their lineage to one ancestor. People belonging to the same ancient ancestor or ancestress come together to form a family, *abusua.* The Akan endeavour to keep and preserve the continuation of their family. As a result, bloodshed among kinsmen is a serious violation, tantamount to the ex-communication of the offender.

Another wise-saying proposed by this paper is, ***asase dehyepɔn ne onipa***, "human is earth's most valued kinsman." This Akan maxim, is rendered in such a way that the earth is personified, capable of having human as a valued kinsman. The Akan hold a belief that all special members (royals) such as kings, queens, princes and princesses and entities such as clans, gods, ancestors etcetera must be served with all their needs. Humans might be the earth's most cherished relative (Mbiti, 1991; Lumanze, 2021) that is why it endeavours to provide in abundance all of the human needs, ranging from food, shelter, clothing, water, transportation, oxygen, minerals and many more. The idea of human responsibility toward the environment in the wise-saying, ***Ɔdomankomadesohwɛfoɔ ne nyamesuroni,*** "he/who takes care of what's God's is devout to God," could be uncontestably palpable.

Taking the religious nature of Africans in general and Akan in particular, one would assume that they have reverent fear for God. With that in mind, a religious Akan person would be expected to take good care of sacred entities which include the earth. People that do so would obviously be known as highly religious, God-fearing and good. The indigenous Akan may not find it difficult to appreciate the saying, ***asase sɛɛɛ ne wiase sɛɛɛ na ɛnam,*** "destruction of the environment or land, leads to the destruction of the world." This is in keeping with the saying, "when the last tree dies the last man will die." In addition, since the Akan believe that the earth/environment is a living entity that feels and talks and can accept or reject a particular person's affinity, neologizing a proverb or wise-saying, ***sɛ asase po wo a wonni daberɛ anaa sɛ, sɛ asase po wo a na w'awieɛ aba,*** "when one is rejected by the earth, his dwellings and all that he has are lost," could be very appropriate. This can be used in reference to a people displaced by floods as a result of poor environmental cleanliness, indiscriminate disposal of waste and building on waterways. Also, ***onipa daberɛ mu ne asase,*** "the earth is human's abode," could conscientize members of Akan communities to be wary of activities of environmental destruction because such behaviour would only bring about the displacement of human settlements in their society. Every human who seeks a sleeping place looks for a peaceful environment. Akan believe that the final sleeping place for humans is in the earth. This wise-saying would conscientize the Akan to treat the earth well since it is the same earth that would provide a final peaceful place of sleep for him/her.

Another wise-saying put forth by this paper states, ***sɛ wopɛ sɛ wohwehwɛ ɔdasani akyiri kwan a, bisa n'asase,*** "from whence a person comes and his whereabouts can best be traced to his land." It has been noted that land is one of the major forms of inheritance or properties among Akan. Land defines Akan communities. Owning and having allegiance to a piece of land gives an Akan a sense of being and belonging. Therefore, the Akan would normally do everything possible to protect and preserve their land.

Conclusion

This paper has analysed the relationship between humans and the earth (physical environment) in light of some existing Akan indigenous ecological aphorisms. It has been observed that the existing Akan proverbs and wise-sayings were devised to express and preserve the tangible and intangible kinship realities, inherent in human-earth relations. And that the maxims were essential in promoting environmental protection and conservation consciousness among the indigenous Akan. For the awareness of modern society, new environmental concerns and possible paradigm shifts regarding indigenous beliefs and cultural norms, this paper has attempted to neologize some more environmentally infused Akan proverbs and wise-sayings to arouse the conscience of contemporary Akan society on the need to protect and conserve the environment. The main contribution of this paper is found in the Akan indigenous ecological

proverbs and wise-sayings neologized such as: ***asase dehyepɔn ne onipa***, "human is earth's most valued kinsman," ***asase sɛeɛ ne wiase sɛeɛ na ɛnam,*** "destruction of the environment or land, leads to the destruction of the world," ***onipa nua ɛno ara ne asase***, "the earth is human's relative," ***asase a yɛdidi so no yɛnsɛe no,*** "do not destroy the land from which you get your livelihood," ***onipa nua ne asase, na mmusubɔfoɔ na ɔsɛe ne nua,*** "the earth is human's relative; a person that destroys his relative is accursed," and ***Ɔdomankomadesohwɛfoɔ ne nyamesuroni,*** "he/who takes care of what's God's is devout to God" etcetera.

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