

Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana: The role of African
Traditional Religion and Culture—A case study of Berekum Traditional
Area

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the connection between traditional religio-cultural beliefs and practices and environmental problems in Ghana using Berekum Traditional Society as a case study. Its primary aim is to assess the nature and the level of the environmental crisis in Ghana, and to explore the possibility of combining indigenous and modern methods to address the current environmental problems in Ghana. The methodology of this thesis is located within the framework for conducting empirical studies in Religious Studies. The qualitative methods of collecting and analysing data are utilised, and since the scope of the study falls within the field of religion and environment, a brief history of global environmentalism and religion's entrance into attempts to address mounting global environmental problems will be provided.

It will be argued that the worldview of the Berekum people, which is underpinned by their religious mentality, has played and continues to play a key role in their local ecological practices. The traditional ways through which ecological knowledge have been and are currently imparted to the youth will be examined, together with the effectiveness of these methods within a climate of modernity and the influence of Western education and culture in the area. It will be argued that Berekum people strongly believe that indigenous ways for addressing ecological problems are still relevant, and that their methods for doing so have not been completely lost in its rural communities, or in Ghana as a whole.

Although it appears that indigenous religious beliefs and practices seem to be waning, with a greater percentage of the indigenous population in the study area having either converted to Christianity or Islam, I argue that indigenous religious beliefs and practices remain covertly active in the life and thought of the people.

Finally, I argue that neither modern (scientific) nor traditional modes of addressing current ecological problems are individually adequate, and therefore that a synergy of the two modes is necessary in order for such problems to be tackled fully. However, I will also argue that certain challenges need to be addressed before this integration can be made possible

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This research explores the connection between traditional religio-cultural practices and the ecological problems of Ghana. In my previous research (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a, 2009b) with some communities among the traditional Akan people¹ of Ghana, I discovered that many of these people's religio-cultural practices have ecological underpinnings. This contrasts with the findings of other scholars such as Alley (1998, 2000, 2002), who argues that in spite of the 'cultic' attention paid to River Ganges as the goddess Gange Ma, it is nonetheless dangerously polluted by the Indian population. Tomalin (2002) argues that 'whilst many religio-cultural traditions do have a strong connection with the natural world, elements of the natural world may be considered as sacred without any explicit consciousness about the relevance of this to an environmental crisis' (Tomalin, 2002, p. 15). For Taringa (2006), the influence of indigenous people's worldviews on human-nature relationships 'are primarily relationships with spirits and not necessarily ecological relationships with nature' (Taringa, 2006, p. 196). Valid as the above views are, I argue that they may not fully apply to all indigenous societies. It may also be noted that the above views could partly explain why policies that respect the conservation of nature in Ghana often neglect indigenous people's knowledge or worldviews concerning ecological management.

This thesis also argues that some of the Ghanaian people's religio-cultural practices can be harnessed to deal with their environmental problems. It employs qualitative methods to further research the indigenous Ghanaian people's ecological knowledge using the Berekum Traditional Area² as a case study. This thesis is not

¹ By this I mean those Akan people of Ghana who remain more or less attached to the customs and traditions of their forebears despite the influence of modernity (see the clarification of terms section for more details).

² In Ghana the term 'traditional area' is used to delineate an area where the members of the community are generally homogeneous, or share the same culture, and

prescribing a complete retreat into pre-colonial Ghanaian attitudes and practices as this would be anachronistic and also because there is historical evidence to show that an attempt to return to the pre-colonial African heritage that manifested itself in the philosophy of *Negritude*³ did not appeal to the masses in the 1960s, even when the atmosphere was highly charged against colonial domination (see Dikirr, 2005). *Negritude* did not appeal much to the masses due perhaps to the fact that its proponents could not explain in clear terms to the people what it was meant for, or perhaps the people thought it was not the right response to their needs at the time. In contemporary Ghana, the combination of Western and Christian influence, together with the effects of globalisation (particularly global capitalism) make such a transition even more untenable. I am also conscious of Dikirr's argument that 'in today's Africa, a discourse that is wholly predicated on the people's past heritage, especially their alleged spiritual and closeness to the land, will be of little value' (2005, p. 45). Rather, the main objective of this thesis is to discover what the indigenous ecological practices of Ghanaian people involve, and to examine the extent to which these indigenous ecological methods can complement or blend with modern means of conserving the environment for the benefit of the people in the study area in particular, as well as in Ghana more generally.

Even though this research focuses on African Traditional Religion, the inroads (influences) of other religions currently operating in Berekum area – most notably Christianity – cannot be ignored. Therefore, the extent to which other religions have affected the indigenous Berekum people's ecological practices will be explored. Moreover, as there is evidence of hybridity in the study area—with some Christians

are under the leadership of an *Ɔmanhene* (Paramount Chief), see clarification of terms section (p.29) for more details.

³ The major motivating force for the Negritude Movement was, according to Mafeje (1992), a protest against 'the disillusionment and resentment of the dehumanizing oppression of colonial domination and suppression of the black people' (see Mafeje 1992). Negritude was championed by African leaders and scholars such as Leopold Senghor, Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah among others. 'According to Ali Mazrui [2003], the concept of negritude, the celebration of African identity and uniqueness, was invented in Paris by the Martinique poet and philosopher, Aime Cesaire. However, its most famous proponent in Africa according to Mazrui was the founder-president of independent Senegal, Leopold Senghor' (cited in Dikirr, 2000, p.118).

in the study area combining both their Christian and indigenous religious values in their daily life activities—the extent to which hybridity (the fusing of indigenous and other religious beliefs and practices) has impacted on indigenous ecological practices with religious underpinnings will also be explored.

The existence of such hybridity seems to corroborate ter Haar and Ellis's (2004) contention that 'religious worldviews do not necessarily diminish with formal education' (2004, p. 51), and that 'plural religious allegiance is common, with individuals frequenting several religious communities at once or practising rituals regarded by the West as belonging to different or competing systems of belief, such as Christianity and Islam, or Christianity and "traditional" religion' (ibid., p. 5). And according to Aylward Shorter (1975, p. 7), 'the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook' (cited in Gathogo, 2007b, p.249). I discovered through my interviews that the most obvious motivation for the people in this study area to blend these worldviews in their practices is what I shall refer to as the 'braces and belt approach to issues'. That is, they do not want to risk adopting the wrong position, and so they tackle the relevant issues by adopting both positions. Then, if one source fails them, the other is still there as a backup. An important effect of this hybridity is that it may serve as a platform or a starting point for the integration of modern and indigenous methods for addressing contemporary ecological problems. The point here is that since many Berekum Christians accommodate some aspects of the indigenous religion, it is likely that they will not oppose the integration of some of the indigenous ecological practices which have indigenous religious underpinnings into the modern means. Hybridity is revisited in chapter 7.

1.2 Background of the study

In order to place the study in historical context, I will briefly trace the emergence of modern environmental activism. Scientists, environmentalists and concerned people have become increasingly apprehensive about the 'problems of resource depletion in combination with population growth and world hunger, problems of climate change, the extinction of species, the unsafe storage of nuclear waste, acidification, ozone

layer depletion, dehydration, the pollution of air, water and soil and natural degradation' (Postma, 2006, p.4). They feel that there is an urgent need for something to be done to address this alarming situation in order to save the world from destruction.

The history of responses to the environmental crisis is complex, but it is clear that environmental activism in the U.S.A—whose origins date back to the nineteenth century—played a major role in it. This activism resulted in the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, which sought to draw attention to the damaging impact of pesticides on humans and the environment (Dunlap and Mertig, 1991, pp. 1-3). Moreover, Cahn and Cahn (1990) claim that the Earth Day Conference organised in 1990 by the US Environmental Movement '...united more people concerned about a single cause than any other global event in history' (Cahn and Cahn, 1990, p. 17, quoted in Dunlap and Mertig, 1991, p. 1), and the publication of Lynn White's *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis* in 1967—which sought to blame Christianity for the world's environmental crisis – drew religion into the environmental debate.

Although Lynn White's thesis has been questioned by others for being overly simplistic (Johnson and Butigan, 1984; Harrison, 1999; Johnson, 2000; Attfield 1983, 2010), it is still relevant to today's debate, as confirmed by Leslie et al. (2007), who note that Lynn White's 'analysis generated a major controversy that continues and stimulated the growth of the fields of environmental ethics and ecotheology' (Leslie et al., 2007). Even Lynn White himself recognised that religion has a role to play in the solution to the environmental crisis. Indeed, he went even further, to state that 'what people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion' (White, 1967, p. 1204). Lynn White's publication is significant, for what started as a debate has now metamorphosed into an important sub-field—religion and the environment—in the academic disciplines of religious studies, theology, ethics, and the sociology of religion, among others.

One may also argue that all the above forms of environmental activism no doubt influenced the creation of environmentally based international treaties or conventions such as The Ramsar Wetlands Convention 1971; The World Heritage Convention 1972; The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species

(CITES) 1973; The Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) 1974; The Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982; The International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness the Response and Co-operation (OPRC) 1990; as well as international conferences, such as the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the Assisi Conference of the International World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 1986, and The Brundtland Commission in 1987. These culminated in the famous 'Earth Summit' (UN Conference on Environment and Development) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 1992.

These global activities have resulted in a rise in environmental consciousness, as evidenced in many publications⁴ and conferences,⁵ as well as a rise in the interest concerning the relationship between religion and the environment. This is seen in organisations such as the Alliance for Religion and Conservation (ARC) based in Manchester, UK (founded in 1995); Forum on Religion and Ecology which was announced at the United Nations in 1998 and was embedded in Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in 2006, now Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology.

Different theories have been propounded to explain the causes of and the possible solutions for the environmental crisis (Attfield, 2010). Park (2007, p. 5), for instance, contends that 'whilst the environmental problems seem to be physical, their causes and remedies can be found in the "people's attitude, values and expectations"'. This implies that the perceptions or worldviews of a people may impact on their behaviour towards environmental issues. Hence, a chapter of this thesis will be devoted to examining the worldviews of the people being studied in this thesis.

Park (2007) cites the realisation of the following three ideas as triggers for the contemporary interest in environmental issues: (a) the fact that 'most human activities affect the environment in one way or another, usually for worst', (b) the realisation that 'the environment is our basic life-support system. It provides the air

⁴ See for instance: Hays (1987), Cooper and Palmer (1998), McNeely (1999), Dodds (2000), Ellen, Parks and Bicker (2003), Menzies (2006), Burley, Helen and Haslam (2008), Ntiamoa-Baidu (1995, 2008) and Attfield (2010).

⁵ Including the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg (2002) and the Biodiversity Conference, Nagoya, Japan (2010).

we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the land we live on', and (c) the fact that 'many parts of the environment have been badly damaged by over-use or unwise use [of it]' (Park 2007, p. 5).

Then came the rise of interest in the relationship between religion and the environment, which many commentators refer to as the emergence of religious environmentalism and religious environmentalist discourse, which has resulted in a body of literature examining the relationship between religion and environment that emerged within the context of the West, but is now largely globalised. Initially, what was happening elsewhere in the world, including Africa, received little attention within this discourse, even though the poorest countries bear the brunt of climate change and its attendant effects. Tomalin (2009: 36) quotes Patz et al. (2005) as predicting that:

Although the world's poorest countries produce less greenhouse gases than the wealthier nations, it is within these regions that dramatic rise in diseases and malnutrition, as a result of climate change, are likely to have a devastating impact: "the regions with the greatest burden of climate – sensitive diseases are also the regions with the lowest capacity to adapt to new risks" (Patz et al. 2005, p. 315).

The issues of religious environmentalism in the poorest countries of the world—especially those in Africa, south of the Sahara—should have received much more attention from the developed world from the start. As Tomalin rightly points out, 'in Britain, for instance, environmental concerns are rarely survival issues, whereas in India [and in Africa too], environmental problems (such as the contamination of water supplies in urban centres or effects of rural deforestation on farming practices) are also direct life and death issues' (2009, p. 36). However, as has been noted, the debate now has a global dimension, and the role of indigenous religions in environmental conservation has been drawn into it. It is possible that scholars—particularly those from Africa, most of whom are Western trained—are responsible for extending the environmental debate to Africa. The story of religious environmentalism will not be complete if the key role played by the Assisi meeting of 1986 is not mentioned.

1.3 Assisi Declarations

The celebration of the 25th anniversary of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Assisi, Italy in 1986 recognised the relationship between religion and the environment. The meeting emphasised the idea that each religious tradition has something positive to offer its adherents in their quest to resolve the environmental problems confronting them. Therefore, under the auspices of its President, HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, the WWF and as part of the celebrations, leading members from five major world religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam—were invited to declare how their various faiths help them to care for nature. This event is today known as the ‘Assisi Declarations’⁶, and is very important within the field of religious environmentalism, because interest in the field gathered momentum from this time onwards, with the declarations leading to the creation of a network of faith groups working on ecological and developmental issues. By 1995, Baha’i, Daoism, Jainism and Sikhism had also made their declarations on nature conservation, and in the same year a new NGO called the ‘Alliance of Religions and Conservation’ (ARC), which aimed to support the growth of the network was established (Wolfensohn, 2003).

One thing that is fundamental to the declarations that were made is that they depict the histories of the world religions as defining the place of humans in nature, including how they should act toward nature. This may be why Leslie et al. (2007) claim that ‘whatever religious people consider to be sacred or spiritual is more likely to be revered, protected and conserved’ (Leslie et al., 2007; see Hagan, 1999; Nsiah, 2009).

Although indigenous peoples (including Africans) were not at the Assisi meeting, some studies argue that they have been living in harmony with nature since time immemorial (see Mbiti, 1991, p. 44). The following statement from one of my

⁶ For the actual declarations see

<http://www.arcworld.org/downloads/THE%20ASSISI%20DECLARATIONS.pdf>

key informants which became affirmed throughout my interviews reflects the traditional Berekum people's understanding of nature:

In God's creation there are things that can be used (destroyed) and others that cannot be used, so the destruction of such things constitutes a sin. Even those that can be used have the right time for their use. Anything short of this is considered as a sin in our tradition. This is to ensure that we make sustainable use of natural resources (Akumfi Ameyaw, personal communication, 7 November 2011).

Park (2007, p. 4) says 'since the 1970s, scientists have been writing about what they term the "environmental crisis" and more recently this debate has evolved. This study represents the author's contribution to this debate from the Ghanaian perspective, utilising the Berekum Traditional Area as a case study.

1.4 Statement of the problem

As stated above, this study has benefited from two of my previously published researches which were carried out in some communities among the Akan of Ghana (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a, 2009b). These studies provided an indication that indigenous religion and culture encourage the traditional Akan to live in harmony with nature. My current research builds on these earlier studies, probing further into indigenous conservation methods and the possibility of integrating some of these models into contemporary approaches to environmental practices. Those with some knowledge about the state of the environment in the pre-colonial Gold Coast (now Ghana) will appreciate the importance of this study. Ghana is experiencing indiscriminate logging, and Miller (2004) reports that the sustainable yield of forest utilisation in Ghana has been exceeded, which has led to environmental degradation (cited in Barre et al. 2008, p. 27). Ghana experiences annual bushfires, and this is compounded by illegal surface mining, bad farming practices, and the dumping of human and industrial waste into bodies of water. Current records estimate that over 90% of Ghana's high forest has been logged since the late 1940s (Tamakloe 2008), and the rate of deforestation is 5% per annum outside of reserves (Tamakloe, 2008).

The first state of Ghana's Environment Report was launched in 2004 and emphasised that:

The weather is becoming warmer with rainfall patterns fluctuating over the last 40 years, with gradual decreases in rainfall distribution in all parts of the country. It also points out that climatic variability held consequences for land use patterns especially in agricultural areas as well as the increasing rate of deforestation (Ghana News Agency [GNA], 2004).

Launching the report, Ms Christine Churcher, the then Minister of Environment and Science, said that 'the environmental impact of land degradation included reduced crop yield, reduced quantity of vegetative cover and reduced resilience of land to climatic variability' (GNA, 2004). The 130-page report dealt with issues such as atmospheric quality, land use and land cover, fresh water, forestry, the coastal and marine environment, bio-diversity, energy and human settlement (GNA, 2004). The startling revelation of the report was that 'the original forest cover was about 36% of the country's landmass, reducing to 23 % by 1972, 13.3% in 1990 and 10.2 % 2000' (GNA, 2004).

According to recent data, an average of 30% of forest areas are destroyed by fire every year (Agyarko, 2001). Intentional fires, started to reduce the ferocity of late dry season vegetation fires near the forest-savannah boundary have had a negative influence on forest regeneration, and hunters who fail to extinguish campfires are another source of unintentional fires (see Agyarko, 2001). It is estimated that more than one million cubic metres of exportable timber have been lost to fire over the past decade (The New Legon Observer, 2008, p. 3; see also Agyarko, 2001). There is the Provisional National Defence Council (P.D.N.C.) Law 229 in place to check bushfires, but this law does not have enough 'bite' to deal with bushfire offenders. Moreover, the District Environmental Management Sub-Committees (DEMC)—the main environmental bodies within the various Assemblies in Ghana—are weak, partly due to under-resourcing.

It is thus no surprise that the original forest cover, which was estimated to comprise approximately 36% of the country's land-mass, was rapidly reduced to 10.2% of land cover by 2000—that is to 2.1million hectares of Ghana's original 8.1million hectares of moist forest (Dorm-Adzobu et al., 1991). Moreover, it has been estimated that environmental degradation's cost to the economy of Ghana is

10% of its annual GDP (\$1.2 billion of its \$12 billion GDP), while water and air pollution, deforestation and desertification also continue to take their toll (GNA, 2007).

The World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme (WBSP) reported that Ghana's economy loses \$90 million annually (GHC420 million – 1.6 % of GDP) through poor sanitation (GNA, 2012). The same GNA report says that a survey carried out in 2008 on sanitation in Africa ranked Ghana 14th out of the 15 countries in West Africa and 48th out of the then 52 (now 53) countries on the continent in terms of sanitation, with the worst progress in the development of sanitation (GNA, 2008).

Governments of Ghana have made several attempts to salvage this situation, but the desired results have yet to be achieved. As has been noted, my preliminary studies among some traditional Akan people of Ghana identified that these people's indigenous ecological knowledge, which is underpinned by their religion and culture, could be of help for dealing with some of the environmental problems of today, as the mechanisms they have could be used for inspiring their adherents to live lifestyles that would promote the conservation of biodiversity.

Such mechanisms include reverence for various bodies of water and areas of land (including the protection of sacred groves) and the belief in *sasa* (the belief that some plants and animals have powerful spirits that need to be propitiated and treated with caution to avoid negative consequences), and these mechanisms are mediated by the institution of chieftaincy. This suggests that their worldviews could play a major role in improving ecological practices.

In Ghana, however, conservation policies often neglect the indigenous people's ecological knowledge or worldviews. Not only Ghanaian policy, but also many of the World Bank's interventions on sustainable development for Africa (such as the World Bank's Environment Strategy (WBES) for Africa, and the Environmental Initiative of the New Partnership for African Development) do not factor religion into their schemes. Although the Brundtland Report did recognise the potential for indigenous knowledge to play a role in sustainable development, this recognition was still 'framed within the dominant Western agenda' (McGregor, 2004). The reason for this may be due to the perception that there is no scientific basis for indigenous conservatory methods (Auwah-Nyamekye, 2009a, p. 30). Or it may be due to what Tomalin (2009, p. 2) views as being 'grounded in the modernist

assumption that religion will disappear once societies “develop” and become more like the West.’ Attuquayefio and Fobil (2005) were emphatic that many of the environmental conservation initiatives in developing countries (particularly in Africa) have not been effective because of the tendency to overlook the essential link between traditional and scientific ways of conserving the environment. Also, as Boersema and Reijnders (2009, p. 4) have argued, when it comes to solving environmental problems—which are ultimately social problems—science and scientists’ capabilities become limited. This, according to Boersema and Reijnders, is a matter that relies most importantly on funding, political will and the cooperation of stakeholders.

I have already noted that religion and culture could play a major role in the process of environmental conservation among the Akan. This is because the traditional Akan and, for that matter, traditional Ghanaians, believe that they have a deep responsibility to act as good environmental stewards, accepting personal responsibility for the environment’s wellbeing (Beavis, 1994). This also implies responsible management of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. Therefore, I argue that Ghana’s indigenous religions and cultures are potential resources, which, if well managed, could complement the government’s efforts to deal with Ghana’s contemporary environmental problems. Moreover, the abandonment and modification of theories of secularisation due to the ‘resurgence of religion’ and the increased public interest in environmental issues (see Tomalin, 2009, p. 2; Haynes, 2007, p. 1) makes this study important. It is against this background that I have decided to use Berekum Traditional Area as a case study to investigate how indigenous religion and culture can be used to address some of the environmental problems of Ghana. Berekum Traditional Area was selected for the following reasons:

- i) Being a member of the traditional area and being aware of the state of its environment the past three decades, I know that an urgent investigation is needed to ascertain what has gone amiss, and to see how this environmental degradation can be curbed there.
- ii) It exhibits the two major types of landscape in Ghana, as it is located in the transitional zone between the savannah and the forest zones. This will enable a greater generalisation of the findings to Ghana as a whole.

iii) There are few studies on the environmental situation in Berekum despite the reality that the rate of environmental degradation in the area is quite alarming (see the study area section for details).

A preliminary survey of the literature on environmental degradation in the Berekum Municipal Assembly revealed that there is little literature in this area, and I have yet to find any research that deals with religion and environment in Berekum. All that I have been able to find is the modicum of information on the district which appears on the net with the title: 'Ghana District: A repository of all districts in the republic of Ghana' and a little information in Blay et al. (2003, p. 2, 12) regarding the Pamu-Berekum forest; and the Municipal Assembly's Survey, which touches tangentially on some of the environmental issues in the area. This study contends that the reason that there is so little information on the environmental situation in Berekum is grounded in the fact that sensitive areas, such as high levels of pollution, the destruction of rivers and sacred groves, poor sanitation, the high level of noise pollution in the Berekum township, the activities of chain-saw operators, and the gradual depletion of the vegetation of Berekum, among others, have been ignored in the Municipal Assembly Survey. Because of this fragmentary information on the environmental situation in the municipality, little meaningful policy has been developed to deal with the problems listed above.

1.5 Aims and objectives

The main aim of the study is to better understand the nature and significance of indigenous conservation practices. The specific objectives are to:

- a. Perform further research into how indigenous Ghanaians use their indigenous knowledge to solve their environmental problems, using the indigenous Berekum people as a case study.
- b. Examine the possibility of blending traditional/indigenous and modern means of conserving the environment in order to address some of the environmental problems that the people of Berekum Traditional Area in particular and Ghana in general, are now facing.

1.6 Research Questions

In order to achieve the above objectives, the following three main research questions were posed:

- i) What roles do the worldviews and religions of the people of Berekum Traditional Area play in their conservation of nature?
- ii) What are the main indigenous nature conservation practices known to the people of Berekum Traditional Area?
- iii) To what extent can these indigenous conservation practices be used to address the mounting environmental problems of today?

1.7 Significance of the study

As little literature exists on the environmental situation in the study area, it is hoped that this study will:

- a) Publicise Berekum Traditional Area beyond Ghana. This, it is believed, will encourage the people—particularly the custodians of indigenous ecological knowledge—to feel recognised, and thus to ensure the protection of this special knowledge, which is now under the threat of extinction.
- b) Be beneficial to policy-makers in Ghana in particular, and in Africa in general, especially in relation to their future policy-making decisions concerning natural resource management and the fight against the destruction of the natural environment.
- c) Add to the existing knowledge of traditional and indigenous people with regards to nature conservation. This may serve as a point of reference for academics, researchers, students and eco-friendly Non-Governmental Organisations, in their quests to explore the means of salvaging the natural world.

1.8 Theoretical Background of the study

In view of the interdisciplinary nature of the study, the research has been carried out within the framework of human-environment relation theory (Ingold, 1992; Descola and Palsson, 1996; Milton, 1996). This theory, which is important in ecological anthropology, postulates that human beings are related to their environment and this human-environment relationship is mediated by culture (Ingold, 1992; Descola and Palsson, 1996; Milton, 1996). However, this mediating role of culture in the human-environment relationship has generated some debate, with some critics arguing that the relationship may be conceptualised in different ways (Milton, 1996). Milton (1996) categorises this relationship into three broad forms. First, human beings adapt to the environment and, as such, are influenced by their environment. Second, by adapting to their environment, human beings can also influence their environment to suit their needs, implying that they are capable of influencing or shaping the environment as well. Third [taking the first two interpretations into account], it is the nature of the human-environment relationship that it can result in both human beings and the environment influencing or shaping each other (Milton, 1996; see also Sarfo-Mensah, 2001).

Corroborating the above views, Rolston (1988, p. 3) argues that ‘culture and nature have entwined destinies, similar to (and related to) the way minds are inseparable from bodies. He further contends that ‘the ecological movement has made it clear that culture remains tethered to the biosystem and that the options within built environments, however expanded, provide no release from nature’ (Rolston, 1988, p. 3). He continues that ‘some sort of inclusive environmental fitness is required of even the most advanced culture. Whatever their options, however their environments are rebuilt; humans remain residents in an ecosystem’ (ibid., p. 3).

Thus the human-environment theory as mediated by culture fits into the indigenous Berekum people’s understanding of the relationship that exists between society and its environment--where there is an intrinsic relationship between humans and nature, as they are not separate or distinct entities. This intrinsic relationship is even seen as spiritual in the Berekum society, where the spiritual

realm and the physical realm are themselves one entity, with the spiritual realm showing itself through the physical realm (see Pals, 2006, p. 205) even though the spiritual realm takes precedence over the physical realm. The human-environment theory is therefore seen as a useful framework for this study. This is because the people of Berekum traditional society recognise that humans are, as a necessity, in a relationship with their environment, and that it is in people's interests for this relationship to be a cordial one. Such beliefs have encouraged Berekum people to make use of natural resources in a sustainable way. This close and harmonious relationship between traditional peoples and their environments has even been recognised by some international organisations, such as USAID, which holds that 'indigenous and traditional peoples have unique cultures that may be closely integrated with the local natural environment [...] [and] this close relationship can make indigenous groups a powerful force for conservation' (USAID, 2005).

1.9 Research Methodology

This section describes the research methodology, field work and data analysis utilised for the study. The general methodological approach of this thesis is located within the framework for conducting empirical studies in Religious Studies (Tomalin, 2007). That is, religious studies is viewed as interdisciplinary, 'drawing upon methods and theories from within both the humanities and the social sciences' (Tomalin, 2007, p. 10; see also Sutcliffe, 2004). Religious studies, as a discipline, emerged in the early 1960s (see Flood, 1999), with the phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1931; Smart, 1969, 1978, 1986; Cox, 2010) as one of its principal methodologies. Husserl defined the phenomenological method as a descriptive theory of knowledge (Merleau-Ponty, 1969, p. 14, cited in Cox, 2010, p. 28). The phenomenological method is a kind of empirical research technique that enables a researcher to investigate his subject matter through its visible aspects by allowing phenomena to speak for themselves, so that an objective understanding of that which is studied can be realised.

However, some scholars claim that the phenomenological approach has intrinsic limitations or inadequacies (Flood, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2000; McCutcheon,

1997, 1999; King, 1995; Sutcliffe, 2004; Ekeke, Ekeopara, 2010). Ekeke and Ekeopara for instance, argue that phenomenological approach is purely descriptive but ‘phenomenologists have been seen in many literatures as crossing the boundary from description to evaluation...so when phenomenology claims to be purely descriptive methodology is totally unacceptable’ (Ekeke and Ekeopara, 2010: 273). It must, however, be noted that the fact that phenomenological method is descriptive does not necessarily mean that it only stops at the descriptive stage. To define phenomenological methodology in this way is to oversimplify this methodology. Rather, phenomenology is a kind of descriptive-analysis technique used to study a phenomenon. This usually brings about a better understanding of the subject matter. This makes the criticism of Ekeke and Ekeopara misleading.

Lester (1999) contends that pure phenomenological research from Husserl (1970) [its major proponent’s perspective] ‘seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions’ (Lester, 1999, p. 1). This view has become a source of criticism of phenomenology methodology since it is practically impossible to completely apply the principle of *epoche*--suspending or doing away with all preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied--as suggested by Husserl (1970). Lester (1999) points out that:

Recent humanist and feminist researchers refute the possibility of starting without preconceptions or bias, and emphasise the importance of making clear how interpretations and meanings have been placed on findings, as well as making the researcher visible in the ‘frame’ of the research as an interested and subjective actor rather than a detached and impartial observer (e.g. see Plummer 1983, Stanley & Wise 1993, cited in Lester, 1999, p. 1)

These criticisms call into question whether the phenomenological approach is a credible method in religious studies. In spite of these criticisms, James Cox argues that the phenomenological method ‘still represents a fundamental approach within mainstream thinking among scholars of religion’ (Cox, 2010, p. 28), and ‘despite its detractors, the phenomenology of religion retains an essential place in the academic study of religion and thus needs to occupy a principal role in teaching about methodologies in university programmes in Religious Studies’ (Cox, 2010, pp. 28,

153-164).⁷ To sidestep the debate, some contemporary researchers in religious studies now adopt what has come to be known today as a ‘multidisciplinary’ or ‘interdisciplinary’ approach in their studies. Sutcliffe (2004), for instance, thinks that because religious studies now draws upon a range of methodologies, it is appropriate for scholars in the field to adopt ‘a view of the study of religion as a “field” akin to thematic or areas studies [...] rather than a self-contained discipline’ (Sutcliffe, 2004, p. xviii, cited in Tomalin, 2007, p. 9). Therefore, as stated above, it is in this broader approach that the general methodology of this thesis is located.

Having discussed the discipline within which this thesis is located and the general methodology, I will now introduce the specific methods used to conduct this research. Qualitative methods guided this study, and these are ‘tools used in understanding and describing the world of human experience’ (Myers, 2000). Qualitative research deals with matters relating to people and their lives seeking to understand human thought and behaviour in general (Holloway and Wheeler, 1996). An important feature of qualitative research, as Morse (1999) notes, is that it seeks to elicit meaning, experience or perception from the point of view of the respondent (emic perspective) rather than from the perspective of the researcher (etic perspective). That is, qualitative studies seek to understand [a] people in their socio-cultural environment, and to lessen the imposition of the researcher’s perspective on to the informant.

The qualitative methods adopted in the study were the in-depth interview, focus group discussion and participant-observation. As a study investigating the attitudes, behaviours, concerns, beliefs, practices, opinions and perceptions of the traditional Berekum people in relation to nature conservation, this research is descriptive and exploratory, for it describes and explores the ecological beliefs and practices of the people of Berekum Traditional Society. This explains why the qualitative research method was adopted, as it is suitable for studying people in their socio-cultural contexts and facilitates a deep understanding of why people have the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs that make them behave as they do (Kani and Sidibe, undated). It also allows the respondents to freely answer the questions that the researcher poses to them.

⁷ See Cox, 2010, p. 151 for other criticisms of the phenomenology method.

In view of the nature of this study, the quantitative methodology, which usually involves large numbers and closed-ended types of questions, was deemed to be unsuitable. Although I am aware of the challenges and issues for qualitative studies in terms of validity (i.e. attaining accurate results that provide a true reflection of reality), reliability (i.e. findings that would be the same if a different researcher replicated the study), generalisability (i.e. producing results that can be applied to a wider group of people or social settings rather than just the one investigated) (see Bryman, 2008, chapter 6) and the reflexivity (The potential but unintended influence or effect a researcher can have on the outcome of his/her research, see Gilgun, 2010; Alvesson and Sköldböck, 2000; Steedman, 1991) involved in qualitative methodology, these challenges—particularly that of validity—are addressed through triangulation, as outlined below.

Bryman defines triangulation as ‘the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings’ (Bryman, 2004). Specifically, the methodological and data-gathering types of triangulation suggested by Denzin, (1970) were imperative to the study. Denzin explains that ‘methodological triangulation refers to the use of more than one method for gathering data’ (Bryman, 2004). It is against this background that the main instruments employed to collect data for the study were semi-structured interview guides (see Appendices 1-3), focus group discussion, participant-observation, key informant interview (Agar and Hobbs, 1985; Dougherty and Keller, 1985), and document analysis. Data triangulation, ‘entails gathering data through several sampling strategies, so that slices of data at different times and social situations, as well as on a variety of people are gathered’ (Bryman, 2004).

Triangulation is generally understood to involve the use of multiple methods within a single piece of research, such as the adoption of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Bryman, however, contends that ‘there are good reasons for reserving the term for those specific occasions in which researchers seek to check the validity of their findings by cross-checking them with another method’ (Bryman, 2004).

1.9.1 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall plan for obtaining answers to the project's research questions (Polit and Hungler, 1993). The results of qualitative research are usually presented in a narrative or a case study form, and this thesis adopted case study research, which enables the pursuit of an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Focusing on the traditional Berekum society facilitated an in-depth study of the delimited area in this case. Although the study also made use of existing literature in the field, the bulk of the information was taken from fieldwork, as there is scant extant literature on the subject in relation to the study area.

1.9.2 Study Sample

I used the purposive sampling technique to select my key informants. This is a technique through which the researcher deliberately selects his or her informants on the basis of the knowledge or experience that the informants possess, with the aim of securing informants that will be able to provide the relevant answers to the researcher's questions (Bernard, 2002; Lewis and Sheppard, 2006; Dixon, et al., 1987). I chose informants whose activities directly affect the environment. For instance, traditional leaders, particularly chiefs, ensure that the rules and regulations pertaining to environmental conservation are obeyed in their respective jurisdictions. Moreover, based on my earlier experience in identifying the appropriate target group for obtaining information on environmental issues in semi-rural areas, I identified nineteen categories of interviewees (of both sexes) in the study area. This was done to ensure that my key informants were people with different shades of opinion, as well as to enable me to understand the relevant issues from a variety of perspectives, and thus to satisfy the criterion of triangulation. A total of 41 interviews were conducted, 29 being on a one-on-one basis, with 5 joint interviews involving either 2 or 3 people, and 7 focus group discussions. I found the focus groups and joint discussions particularly helpful, as the presence of multiple members enabled them to support and aid each other in recalling information relevant to the issues under discussion.

The quota sampling procedure (Dixon et al., 1987) backed by the snowball technique (Heckathorn, 2002; Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997) were used to select the individual members of the targeted group. Sinclair and Walker (1999) refer to this as a ‘knowledge-based systems methodology’ for the acquisition of local ecological knowledge. Based on my previous experience in research in some aspects of indigenous ecological knowledge, my respondents were selected after initial contacts had been made with a group of people—traditional rulers, sacred grove attendants, farmers, herbalists and hunters—whom I considered to be key informants in matters of local ecological knowledge. After this, I relied on the snowball technique. This technique enabled me to identify the rest of my informants that the local people themselves considered to be knowledgeable about local environmental issues. This methodology took me to 25⁸ out of the 33 towns and villages comprising the Berekum Traditional Area including the Berekum town itself. The number of informants interviewed in each town or village depended on the momentum of the snowball process. But in the areas where more than 3 names were given, I arranged for either a joint interview or focus group discussion. The overall breakdown of the interviews is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Breakdown of interviews

	Category of interviewee	No. selected and interviewed	Remarks
1	Traditional rulers (chiefs, queen-mothers & elders)	10	
2	Traditional priests (priests and priestesses)	6	
3	Sacred grove attendants (males & females)	4	
4	Christian priests (Catholic, Protestants & Pentecostal)	5	

⁸ The places visited were: Abi, Abisase, Adom, Akroforo, Amomaso, Berekum (central), Biadan, Botokrom, Domfete, Fetentaa, Jinijini, Kato, Koraso, Kotaa, Kutre No.1, Kutre No.2, Mpataapo, Mpatasie, Nanasuano, Namasua, Nkyenkyemam, Nsapor, Pepase, Senase and Twebaabi (see map on p. 62).

5	Muslims	3	The chief Imam directed me to an Islamic scholar for the history of Islam in Berekum
6	Bahai	2	The area head and a missionary
7	Herbalists	4	
8	Farmers	16	
9	Hunters	3	
10	Palm wine tappers	2	
11	Charcoal producers	2	
12	Chain-saw-operators/Wood sellers	6	
13	Sand winners	2	
14	Foresters	2	
15	Eco-biased NGOs	3	Only 2 are active in the area
16	Agriculture- Extension Officers	1	
17	Environmental protection official	1	It was the district officer who was interviewed
18	Municipal Education Directorate	1	The Deputy Director, Finance and Administration was interviewed for the Ministry of Education's view on the suggestion of putting indigenous ecological knowledge on the curriculum

1.9.3 Fieldwork methods

Field work was carried out in two parts over a seven-month period; the first 6 months (August 2011- January 2012) being used to collect the bulk of the data, and the remaining one month (December 2012) used to cross-check the findings and collect extra data where necessary to provide extra grounding for findings. One merit of the qualitative research approach is that it enables the researcher to become a participant-observer, which can further enhance the data collection process (Ushe, 2005). As a participant-observer, I was guided by Wande`s admonition that:

... scholars interested in tradition should not limit themselves to collecting and transcribing and analysis. They should cultivate an active part in the material... by forging a link between the older and younger generations (Wande, 1977, pp. 12-13, quoted in Ushe, 2005).

Ryding and Geertz (1988, p. 3) re-emphasised the importance of participant-observation when they contended that it is foundational to anthropological research since it predisposes the researcher to have an ‘intuitive understanding’ of what takes place in a cultural milieu. This, they added, will enable the researcher to engage with or analyse his or her data with greater confidence.

Securing the confidence of your informants is also crucial to qualitative research. In my case, as I was born and bred in the study area, this meant that I was very familiar with it, which enabled me to satisfy the criteria of theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978). Hailing from the area also aided me during the data collection stage, as I am not only a member of the study area, but also a royal of the Akwamu stool⁹ of the area – one of the important divisions of the traditional area. This enabled me to win the confidence of my respondents – some of whom were

⁹A stool of a chief among the Akan of Ghana is the symbol of his/her office. This explains why a chief must have a stool before his/her installation into office. It is on the stool that all the important rituals connected with a chief are performed, and therefore a ‘Berekum stool’ refers to the traditional authority of the area. This also explains why in Ghana, and especially among the Akan, the property of a traditional area is referred to as ‘stool property’ and ‘stool lands’. In this case, people of a traditional area may be referred to as the ‘sons and daughters’ of that particular stool. In northern Ghana, a skin is used in place of a stool.

personally known to me, whilst others opened up to me due to my cultural background as a member of one of the royal clans of the traditional area.

Being a member of the study area also places me in the domain of auto-ethnography – I have an insider's (emic) perspective, as well as an outsider's (etic) [Pike, 1967] perspective, since I do not profess the indigenous religion. I addressed insider issues by making sure that my insider disposition did not outweigh my objectivity. In other words, reflexivity – the recognition that a researcher's background and prior knowledge has an unavoidable influence on the research they are conducting – was an important consideration for me (Mays and Pope, 2000).

I have already pointed out that I not only hail from the study area, but also belong to one of the royal clans. But in the study area, especially in this contemporary time, a member of a royal clan is not viewed in an aristocratic way --- person who is divorced or isolated from the ordinary people—as it is understood in many Western societies but rather, an individual who belongs to the core identity of the people. What this means is that, my status as a royal did not influence my informants to either hide important facts from me or tell me what I would want to hear. But rather, they genuinely opened up to me to present the facts as they are on the ground.

But knowing what reflexivity can do to research—the likelihood of the researcher reporting his/her own views instead of that of his/her participants—impacts on reliability (Bryman, 2008, chapter 6). I took some precautionary measures to ameliorate any negative influence that may result from reflexivity by being guided by Westerlund's suggestion that in order to reduce the influence of reflexivity, a researcher 'should aim at as "pure" a description as possible' (Westerlund, 1991, p. 21). Thus I tried (as indicated above) to accurately capture data by reporting the responses of my informants as precisely as possible. I was also guided by the phenomenologist's admonition that the researcher in a qualitative study should always allow the data to speak for themselves. Again, as Westerlund further adds that another means to resolve the difficulty (insider's influence on a research) 'is to reproduce verbatim questions and answers of or other kinds of information in the original language as well as in translation' (Westerlund, 1991, p. 21). This explains why I have provided direct words of many of my key informants and at times in the original language (Akan [Twi]) throughout the discussion.

Furthermore, in the course of presenting the report, my supervisors also drew my attention to some of the areas where in their view my voice seemed to be more prominent than those of my respondents, and this guidance enabled me to remove all identified instances and features of reflexivity in the research report. In addition, I tried to retain the accuracy and precision inherent in my interaction with my informants by comparing information provided by different informants, as well as checking this information against that provided in other available sources, such as published and unpublished manuscripts. This methodology proved useful for the collection and interpretation of local ecological knowledge. It is important to stress however, that as an insider, I cannot claim to have no influence whatsoever on the report, since this is humanly not possible. But what I am totally sure of is that in view of precautions I took as evidenced in the above measures, my insider's influence has been managed well and thus has no significant influence on the analysis and conclusions of the study.

In the course of the data collection, I had to revise the initial format of my questions because I noticed that their order did not fit well with the manner in which my informants relayed information. This also proved to be helpful in the course of the data collection. I met many of the informants more than once in order to fill in missing details, resolve apparent discrepancies, and update information. During the course of the data collection, I got the impression that the people of Berekum do not need written evidence to confirm the veracity of their oral knowledge and traditions, and I did not have much cause to question this inherent veracity, as I triangulated the data collection process by conducting the interviews at different times of the day, at different locations, and with different people, yet received consistent answers.

Also, contrary to Glaser and Strauss' view that it is customary for the duration of research interviews to reduce as the data collection progresses (1967), my



interviews remained of similar length and, if anything, became even longer. This was because, as already indicated, I tried to triangulate the data as the interviews progressed. That is, I tried to cross-check and verify some of the data that I had already collected

Figure 1. Dr. Kevin Ward in attendance at one of my interview sessions with Nana Siraa Ababio III, the queen-mother of Kato and her elders in her Palace at Kato.

to be very helpful, since it increased the data's likelihood of being valid and reliable. Another boost that I received during the course of my data collection came from a visit that Dr. Kevin Ward—one of my supervisors—paid to me in Ghana. He personally accompanied me to some of my interview sessions, and observed how I went about my interviews. He would occasionally ask one or two questions for clarification. He usually provided me with feedback on how the session went, and suggestions about how to improve my interview technique. This was very helpful to me, and his presence in the area also authenticated my research, leading my informants to open up to me more, and to provide me with more information. I found that his presence encouraged me and boosted my confidence in the process.

1.9.4 Data Analysis

According to Thorne (2000, p. 68), the data analysis portion of a piece of research is the 'most complex and mysterious' part of all qualitative studies, although it is the section that receives the 'least thoughtful discussion in the literature'. Data analysis is one of the most important aspects of a research project as it is one of the areas that enables the researcher to make an original contribution to his/her chosen discipline. Jorgensen (1989) sees analysis as:

A breaking up separating, or disassembling of research materials into pieces, parts, elements, or units. With facts broken down into manageable pieces, the researcher sorts and sifts them, searching for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns or wholes. The aim of this process is to assemble or reconstruct the data in a meaningful or comprehensible fashion (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 107).

In view of the anthropological nature of the issues under consideration and the fact that the study is qualitatively based, the Qualitative Content Analysis technique provided an appropriate method for analysing the data. Qualitative Content Analysis 'is a dynamic form of analysis of verbal and visual data that is oriented toward summarizing the informational contents of that data' (Altheide, 1987; Morgan, 1993 cited in Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338). Qualitative Content Analysis is both reflexive and interactive, since the researcher continuously has to modify the way he/she treats data so as to make room for new insights produced through those data

(Sandelowski, 2000). The Qualitative Content Analysis technique is used when the researcher is interested in attaining a straight description of the phenomenon under investigation. I found this to be an appropriate analytical method for this study, since the major focus of the thesis is to discover what role Berekum religio-cultural practices can play in managing the current environmental problems in this area. Although Qualitative Content Analysis tends to describe the findings of a research, it does not necessarily mean that no attempt is made to interpret the data in any way. As Sandelowski puts it:

Qualitative content analysis moves farther into the domain of interpretation than quantitative content analysis in that there is an effort to understand not only the manifest (e.g., frequencies and means), but also the latent content of data (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 338).

This explains why the discussion of this study goes beyond the level of description. After the data have been collected in a qualitative study, it may initially appear to be a mass of confusing, unrelated, accounts (Charmaz, 1983, p. 114), but researchers have devised means to manage the data and draw out meaning and relationships if they exist. One such means is through the use of coding. According to Bryman (2008, p. 692), coding in qualitative research 'is the process whereby data are broken down into component parts, which are given names', and Schneide (2008) sees a code as a "label" to tag a variable (concept) and/or a value found in a "text".

The data analysis involved the use of both inductive (observation-based inference) and deductive (formal logical inference) reasoning (O'Leary, 2004), and the qualitative methodology also required the data from the interviews and field notes to be transcribed and coded for the purposes of analysis. This is necessary because, as Charmaz (1983) puts it:

Codes serve to summarize, synthesize, and sort many observations made of the data [...] coding becomes the fundamental means of developing the analysis. [...] Researchers use codes to pull together and categorize a series of otherwise discrete events, statements, and observations which they identify in the data (Charmaz, 1983, p. 112).

In summary, coding allows the researcher to begin to create order in the seemingly disordered data. In other words, coding helps the researcher to put his/her data into manageable units of analysis, enabling all the salient information (i.e. that which is

in the researcher's interests) to be found. This made coding germane to the study. The coding was done in the following way. First, I listened to the tapes a number of times before transcribing the interviews. The transcripts were then read and re-read a number of times, by which stage I was able to identify certain categories and themes in the data (see Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). The themes or categories were those portions that had bearings on my research questions. Another round of reading was then performed, this time with the aim of identifying sub-categories and sub-themes. I also searched for the interconnections among the themes and sub-themes as the process progressed. Initially, numerous themes and sub-themes were identified, but after integrating and synthesising the data, the coding resulted in the production of the following six core sets of categories:

1. Knowledge relating to ecological practices;
2. The influence of indigenous religion and culture on ecological practices;
3. Actual indigenous ecological practices;
4. How awareness of indigenous ecological knowledge is created;
5. Impediments to the use of indigenous ecological methods today;
6. How to blend indigenous and modern methods to address current environmental problems in Berekum.

I also made use of the constant comparison technique (Thorne, 2000)—that is, instead of focusing on individual in-depth analyses of each case, I tried to produce a composite picture for each entire interview (see Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). This enabled me to piece together ideas or extracts from other interviewees, which eventually helped me to construct the thinking patterns of my informants (Billig, 1997, p. 48). Thus, based on the above themes or core categories, the ecological knowledge of a representative sample of Berekum's population was identified and analysed. The details are presented in the chapters that follow.

Furthermore, language-uses, particularly in the forms of stresses, body gestures and the use of proverbs were analysed, as these are important for interpreting how people perceive phenomena, and are thus a key element in analysing qualitative data. Over 95 % of the interviews were taped using a digital voice-recording device, and close to 70 % were videotaped as well. Notes were also taken in conjunction with these methods. This variety of methods aided me in recalling and picking up on certain expressions and uses of body language that

conveyed information pertinent to the participants' intended meanings (cf. Jones and Alony, 2011), and proved to be a great asset to me during the analysis of the data. For example, in response to a question on the current landscape of the study area, instead of saying that desertification is gradually becoming a feature of the Berekum area, one informant remarked, in a raised voice, 'this place is becoming Libya'. Picking up on the importance of such comments involves what Glaser terms as listening 'with a big ear'—that is, the interpretation of research needs to be a holistic process (Glaser, 2001, p. 175).

1.10 Clarification of concepts/terms

In order to assist readers in developing a clear understanding of the arguments in the thesis, it is imperative to clarify some of the terms that will feature prominently in the course of the discussions.

1.10.1 Tradition (Traditional)

I use 'tradition' to refer to the long-established patterns of behaviour that have been handed down from generation to generation in Berekum society. These long-established patterns of behaviour are known as *amanmre* in the Akan language. To say 'handed down from generation to generation' does not necessarily mean that this tradition is monolithic, and there is in fact, clear evidence of contemporary manifestations in Berekum people's way of life, resulting from the impact of colonialism and contact with other peoples. In fact, there is an element of dynamism in this society, with components of continuity and discontinuity. For instance, human sacrifice is no longer practised in Berekum society, and many fewer people are now living in thatch houses than there were in recent history. A large proportion and a respectable number of people are now able to read and write and enjoy many modern social amenities, such as electricity, piped water, and modern methods of health care.

1.10.2 Berekum Traditional Area

To refer to the Berekum society as ‘traditional’ means, to borrow Opoku’s (1978) words, that Berekum society ‘is undergirded by a fundamentally indigenous value system and that it has its own pattern, with its own historical inheritance from the past’ (Opoku, 1978, p. 9). Therefore, when an area is described as ‘traditional’ in Ghana, this is used to express the idea that the people of that area share a common heritage that is bequeathed to them by their forebears. In the traditional Ghanaian political system, when an area is described as ‘traditional’, it means that the place is *autonomous*. That is, it qualifies as an *ɔman* (state), with its own leader, known as a *ɔmanhene* (a paramount chief).

1.10.3 Indigenous

Although there is some debate over the scope of the term ‘indigenous’, my use of it here stems from its etymological sense—that is, from its Latin origin—*indigena* (native). Therefore, in this thesis, ‘indigenous’ refers to those people whose forebears founded settlements where they still remain today. In other words, indigenous people are those that can lay legitimate claim to the land they are occupying today through ancestry. In this way, one may also refer to indigenous people as ‘traditional’ people. For this reason, the two terms are used interchangeably in this thesis (adapted from Awuah-Nyamekye and Sarfo-Mensah, 2011).

1.10.4 Traditional/Indigenous Ecological knowledge

In this thesis, the terms traditional or indigenous ecological knowledge refers to knowledge that local people have about their environment—particularly in relation to the local flora, fauna and other natural phenomena—and the means to interact with these natural elements in a sustainable way.

1.10.5 Traditional African Religion

Many of the earlier writers who briefly visited Africa thought that Africans had no religion. This may be due to the fact that they were expecting to see priests in charge of the worship of the Supreme Being (God), places of worship dedicated specifically to the worship of God (such as temples, cathedrals, or mosques) and some sort of written scriptures (such as the Bible, Quran, or the Bhagavad Gita). As they did not see any of these things, they presumed there to be no organised public religion. But later, writers who actually had the opportunity to stay longer and study the people, realised that indigenous Africans did have religion. One of these writers was Rattray, who had the opportunity to spend a number of years with the Asantes of Ghana. He made the following remarks about African religion:

I sometimes like to think, had these people been left to work out their own salvation, perhaps someday an African Messiah would have arisen and swept their pantheons clean of the fetish (suman). West Africa might then have become the cradle of a new creed which acknowledged One Great Spirit, Who, being One, nevertheless manifested Himself in everything around Him and taught men to hear His voice in the flow of His waters and in the sound of His winds in the trees (Rattray, 1959, P. iii).

Although this comment suggests that Rattray perceived African people's religion in polytheistic terms, the point is that he did see that African people do have religion. Parrinder, however, had a better understanding of the African religion. He remarked that:

It is probably true to say that African religion has been more misunderstood, and has suffered more at the hands of the early writers, than any part of African life. Unhappily old misconceptions linger with us still (Parrinder, 1974, p. 13).

The above observation is accurate, and the impression I gathered through my readings prior to my training in the Department of Religion and Human Values at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana was that the spirituality of indigenous African peoples could not be referred to as *religion* in the strictest sense of the word. However, my studies on the spirituality of the African peoples led me to realise that the spirituality of its indigenous peoples can be referred to as a religion, because a

close analysis of the belief system of these peoples indicates that they had most of the elements that the West refers to as religious. One particular book that shaped and deepened my understanding of African religion was *African Traditional Religion* (1974 [1951, 1962]), which was written by Parrinder—a non-African. His book is one of the expositions on African religion that paved the way for the recognition and acceptance of African religion as a religion in its own right. Rejecting the obnoxious terminologies used by some of the earlier Western writers to denote the spirituality of Africans, Parrinder argued:

It is evident that fetish is a most ambiguous word [for African religion] and the time has come for all serious writers and speakers to abandon it completely and finally (Parrinder 1974, p. 16).

However, my research and experience show that even today, there are writers (including Africans) who continue to see African religion as a false religion and use early European terminology to describe it. However, whatever such authors say about the spirituality of the African, there is enough evidence for African spirituality to be justifiably referred to as religion. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, African Traditional Religion will be understood as the religion of the people of the indigenous Berekum people, with all its current manifestations, in contrast to other religions such as Christianity and Islam. A detailed discussion of African Traditional Religion is provided in the literature review in chapter two of this thesis.

1.11 Outline of Thesis

This thesis provides a case study about the role that people's religion and culture can play in addressing some of their pressing environmental problems. This means that it falls within the field of the study of religion and the environment. It was therefore deemed appropriate to set the scene in the general introduction of this study by briefly tracing the history of global environmental consciousness, and of how religion became a part of the attempt to address the mounting environmental problems of the world. The problems that necessitated the current study were then

outlined, and religion's role in engaging with environmental issues was summarised. Since this study focuses on environmental problems in Ghana, the current environmental situation in Ghana has been briefly described, and this was followed by an explanation of why Berekum was selected as the case study area. The aims and objectives, research questions and the significance of the study have also been presented. The theoretical foundation of the study was outlined, and an account of the study's methodology was given. In order to make it easy for readers of the thesis to follow the arguments presented, some of the key concepts and terms of the discussion were clarified.

Chapter Two is mainly devoted to reviewing the literature that is relevant to the study. The review centres on the following key concepts: African Traditional Religion, culture, the environment, environmental crisis, the foundation for African environmental ethics and indigenous people and environmental conservation and the changes in perceptions about indigenous conservation models.

Chapter Three provides an overview of Berekum Traditional Area. It discusses issues relating to geographical location, its physical characteristics, local economy, politico-social organisation, and the religion of its people. This is followed by an overview of the current environmental problems of the study area, the factors accounting for these problems, and the effects that these problems have on its people.

Since the worldviews of people are seen to play a role in their conduct, Chapter Four is devoted to the worldviews of the people under study. The indigenous religion in the study area is also discussed here, as there is evidence that the people of Berekum traditional society have a religious worldview, and thus it is prudent to engage with the two issues together. The section of this chapter dealing with religion in Berekum has two parts. The first part looks at the nature of the people's religion prior to their contact with Western culture and religions, such as Christianity and Islam, while the second part deals with the current religious landscape of the study area, which is seen to be religiously pluralistic. In view of this, the relationship between the various religions in the area is discussed, and how this relationship is impacting on the host religion is explored.

In Chapter Five, religio-cultural practices that have implications for nature conservation or direct bearings on it are discussed. The major religio-cultural

practices explored in this chapter include: *Kwaebennɔ* (Sacred Groves), belief in *Akyeneboa* (totem), general attitudes towards *Asaase Yaa* (Land/Earth), *Nsuo* (Water bodies), landscapes, the concept of *Nkyida* or *Dabɔne* (resting or sacred/taboo days), planting of *Ngyedua* (large-leafy-trees of the ficus family), and the belief in *Sasa* (the belief that some plants and animals possess some spiritual power). For many of these practices, the histories behind their beginnings are examined.

As the late Kenyan Professor and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Wangari Maathai observed, it is through empowerment that people can understand the need to protect their resources. That is, it is through knowledge that you can empower people to behave responsibly. For this reason, Chapter Six is solely devoted to the treatment of how the indigenous Berekum people generate and transmit their ecological knowledge, particularly to their youth. The indigenous pedagogical practices that are discussed in this chapter include proverbs, myths, folktales, and the performance of rituals, such as puberty rites and festivals.

Chapter Seven discusses the indigenous Berekum people's ways of life, along with their encounters with colonisation and Christianity and how such encounters have impacted upon or influenced their ways of managing their environmental problems.

Finally, Chapter Eight highlights the main findings of the study, and also makes suggestions and discusses the problems involved in trying to integrate traditional perspectives with modern means of combating environmental problems.

1.12 Summary

In this introductory chapter, I outlined the subject matter of this thesis – religion and the environment. I traced the origins of global environmental consciousness, and put religious environmentalism into its historical context. The statement of the research problem, as well as the scope of the study and the reasons for setting it were discussed. The aims and objectives, research questions and the significance of the thesis were presented, and the key terms of the thesis were clarified so that readers can be clear in their minds about how these terms are being used. This chapter concluded by outlining how the thesis is organised.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relevant literature for the thesis, and explains the key concepts in the study. It aims to clarify issues relevant to the thesis and also to contextualise the discussion. The key concepts include African traditional religion, culture, environment, environmental crisis and the foundation for African environmental ethics. The chapter ends with a general review of literature on indigenous people and environmental conservation, and of the changes in perception that has occurred regarding indigenous conservation methods.

2.2 What is the religion of the African?

When Emil Ludwig visited Africa, he reportedly asked: ‘How can the untutored Africans conceive God? ... How can this be? ... Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing’ (cited in Smith, 1950, p. 1). Mary Kingsley is also reported to have said: ‘When I say juju or fetish, I mean the religion of the native of West Africa’ (Opoku, 1978, p. 4). It was against this background that Parrinder observed: ‘It is true to say that African Religion has been more misunderstood and has suffered more at the hands of the early writers than any part of African life. Unhappily old misconceptions linger with us still’ (1974, p.13). Parrinder’s words were uttered about thirty-nine years ago, but they still hold some truth today, with scholars continuing to use highly objectionable, derogatory and pejorative terms such as paganism, fetishism, animism, polytheism, juju, heathenism, native religion and others to describe African Traditional Religion. In Parrinder’s view, there is no question about the *sui generis* nature of African indigenous religion, as he remarks that ‘in [African] religious beliefs there is great similarity between many parts of the continent that cut across racial origins, perhaps because of contacts over the centuries’ (Parrinder, 1974, p.11).

Sarpong (not dated) has a problem with scholars who do not want to recognise African spirituality as a religion. His argument is contained in what I called his 'theory of the pillars of religion'. He contends:

Without trying to sound too simplistic, it can be argued that all religions are built on three major pillars: faith, morality and worship. Religion deals with *belief* in some higher power or being who is accepted as having some influence on devotees. This conviction enables or even compels the adherents to comport themselves in their socio-cultural life in a manner they believe will please the object of their worship. Here we have moral or ethical behaviour. This, in turn, leads to the believers meeting from time to time to express in public their faith in, and dependence on, their spiritual overlord. This is worship or liturgy. These three elements common to all religions, are not in any way linked to a written word (Sarpong, not dated.).

Eminent scholars of African descent, such as Mbiti, Idowu, Arinze, Sarpong, Nokuzola Mndende, Gaba and others vehemently opposed the denial of the spirituality of African people its status of a religion, as well as its description in derogatory and pejorative terms. For example, paganism—probably the oldest of the names adopted to describe the religion of the so-called primitive or 'uncivilised' peoples of the world—has the Latin origin *paganus* (Idowu, 1973), which means a village-dweller or a countryman. Thus, the word was originally applied sociologically to mark the distinction between the enlightened, civilised and the sophisticated, on the one hand, and the rustic, unpolished, and unsophisticated, on the other (Idowu, 1973, p. 116). If none of these terms provides a correct description of African Religion, what then is African Traditional Religion? I pose this question being aware of the long debate concerning the core of African religion and whether it is a singular entity – African Traditional Religion—or a group of religions—African Traditional Religions (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 1-2; Idowu, 1973, p. 103; Booth, 1977, p. 3; Ikenga-Metuh, 1987, p. 19; Alolo, 2007, p.14f; Ejizu, not dated).

Many scholars, both African and non-African, have attempted to define or describe the spirituality of the African. Osei (not dated) observes that African traditional theologians explain that one cannot worship the Supreme Being formally without the agency of the divinities or ancestors, just as within traditional political

and diplomatic contexts, one cannot formally contact the king without the agency of his linguists (spokesperson) or sub-chiefs. He continues that this phenomenological conception of African Traditional Religion logically implies the rejection of the ‘stupidity theory of religion’, which maintains that African Traditional Religion and similar non-western religions are followed by irrational or foolish people who, in their stupidity, bow down to stones, trees and rivers instead of the creator of such objects (and themselves). According to Osei (not dated), a more logical interpretation of African Traditional Religion does not hold that the worshippers worship such material objects per se, but that they worship the Spirit of the Creator reflected in them. Osei makes a strong argument for this, although his choice of the word ‘stupidity’ is inadvisable in such an academic context of analysis.

Awolalu (1976) contends that the nature and meaning of African religion is better understood through description rather than definition, and describes it as follows:

When we say African Traditional Religion, then we mean the indigenous religion of the Africans. It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is “written” everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the peoples’ myths and folktales, in their proverbs and pithy sayings. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped; it is a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young or old (1976, p. 275).

Another comprehensive description of African Traditional Religion is given by Stamer (1995, pp. 121-125), cited by Alolo (2007). Stamer’s describes it, notwithstanding its diverse manifestations as:

a global framework of life, encompassing every human situation and governing the whole of society. It closely linked to the ancestral soil and places each African both in the succession of the generations (ancestors), in his [sic] relationship with his fellow creatures and in his productive activities. Everything is religious. The direct relation with God is rarely explicit but the belief in one God, Who is creator ... underlies everything else. God does not intervene in the day-to-day affairs of life. These are governed by the

other invisible forces, good or evil, from whom it is possible to win favour through the ritualised experience of the ancestors. Strict observation of rites and taboos and total solidarity within the group are the best guarantee of group survival and the transmission of life to the numerous descendants. Seen from the outside, constraint and fear seem to be the dominant notes of traditional African religion, but this would be to forget that it offers an overall framework of security in an often very hostile environment, where only the survival of the group ultimately counts (quoted in Alolo, 2007, p. 16).

Obviously, it is not easy to capture all the components inherent in the above pieces within a single definition. This is why preference is given to describing the spirituality of the African rather than defining it. This does not mean that no attempts have been made to define African Traditional Religion, however. Ikenga-Metuh, for instance, summarises it as ‘institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practised by the various African societies from time immemorial in response to the “supernatural” as manifested in their environment and practice’ (1987, p. 17). It may also be simply seen as the religion of the African before their contact with foreign religions, such as Christianity and Islam.

Scholars agree that the main elements of African Traditional Religion are the belief in a supreme being, the ancestors, lesser gods and the impersonal forces that manifest themselves in the workings of magic, witchcraft, sorcery, charms and amulets (Rattray, 1923; Smith, 1950; Parrinder, 1961; Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973). These spiritual entities are hierarchically arranged, with God always presiding over this hierarchy, as God is believed to be the creator of the universe and everything in it. Africans firmly believe that some of the entities in the pantheon of their spirituality are evil, but that all of them qualify for cultic attention as they are capable of influencing human life either positively or negatively.

2.3 Is there a single *African Traditional Religion* or are there many?

Scholars on African religion generally agree on what this religion involves, as the above survey shows, but disagree when it comes to the matter of whether it should be understood in the singular or in the plural. After struggling to debunk inaccurate

and pejorative terminologies such as paganism, fetishism, ancestral worship, witchcraft, animism and others that were used by early western writers (especially anthropologists), African scholars (theologians, anthropologists and sociologists) are now confronted with the difficulty of categorising and naming African religion.

There is a longstanding debate over whether Africans have a single religion or a plurality of religions. In the words of Ejizu (not dated), this may sound rather elementary, but the truth is that the issue of the precise name and nature of the spirituality of the indigenous Africans remains unsettled (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987, p.19). Ejizu intimates that this debate has engaged scholars and been the focus of publications and conferences for a considerable period of time. The school of thought led by Idowu (Idowu, 1973, p. 103) argues that it is correct to talk about 'African Traditional Religion' in the singular form, whilst that led by Mbiti insists that it is deceptive to speak of the spirituality of the African in singular terms. For him, 'we speak of African religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system' (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 1-2). Mbiti is supported by scholars including Ray (1976) and Ikenga-Metuh (1987), who argue that one cannot truly speak of a uniform 'African Traditional Religion' because religion in Africa is tribe-based, with each religion being limited to the ethnic group within which it has evolved. One traditional religion cannot be propagated in another tribal group, according to this view, and moreover, there is no conversion from one traditional religion to another. Supporting Mbiti's school of thought, Booth states that:

Our reading and observation turn up a profusion of phenomena to which we may attach such labels as supreme gods [sic], nature spirits, ancestor rituals, initiation practices ... and demons with considerable variety from place to place. Perhaps we will decide that there is no such thing as 'African Religion', but 'African Religions' (1977, p. 3).

However, along with this variety in belief and practice, there is evidence to show that the belief in and influence of some deities goes beyond the group within which they evolved. For instance, in Ghana, belief and worship of *Tigare* is not limited to northern Ghana—to where belief in this deity can first be traced—but cuts across many

parts of Ghana. One can also cite the *nkonkansa* (deity) shrine at Biadan in the Berekum Traditional Area, whose origin is in the Ivory Coast.

Nokuzola Mndende—a South African, and a practitioner of African indigenous religion—rejects the position of Mbiti and his supporters, contending that African spirituality should be referred to as "African Religion". She argues that 'no religion is monolithic but people look at the common features' (cited in Gathogo, 2007a, p.166), and that 'We never hear people talking about Christianities, Islams, and Hinduisms etc. We cannot, for example, talk about Zulu Religion or Xhosa Religion – African Religion is one. While there are differences in some of the customs and objects used to perform rituals, the underlying principle remains the same' (cited in Gathogo, 2007a, p.166). It is however, worth noting that in recent time, some scholars use the term 'Christianities'. This in a way weakens Mndende's argument.

The pro-single religion group is also of the candid opinion that there is evidence to show that one can genuinely speak of African religion in a homogenous sense, as there are a remarkable number of features of religious belief and practice that are found everywhere in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as a unified basic world-view (quoted in Ejizu, not dated.).

Taylor, for instance, argues that:

A careful look through actual observation and comparative discussions with Africans from various parts of the continent will show, first and foremost, that there is a common factor which the coined word negritude will express aptly. There is a common Africanness about the total culture and religious beliefs and practices of Africa. This common factor may be due either to the fact of diffusions or to the fact that most Africans share common origins with regard to race and customs and religious practices (quoted in Shorter, 1975, p. 48).

Magesa (1997, p. 6), siding with Idowu's school of thought, adds that the homogeneity of Africa was recognised as far back as the International Missionaries' conference in Le Zoute, Belgium in the 1920s, despite the diversities associated with the African peoples. The conclusion of the Le Zoute Conference was emphatic: that there is an "essential unity: 'underlying all the divergence that marks the pagan ...

Negro tribes, there is a fundamental unity of belief and outlook upon the world ... Africa is a unity – a unity in diversity” (Magesa, 1997, p. 6; see Alolo, 2007, p. 14).

According to Westerlund, comparative research conducted by scholars on religion revealed that ‘there seems to be a search for transcultural “spiritual unity”, and a tendency to emphasize similarity rather than dissimilarities’ (Westerlund, 1991, p.16). That is, those who emphasise on the homogeneity or similarities and thus argue for a singular term may have been influenced by the above view. Some scholars have even argued that “the influence of nationalism cannot be overlooked” (Westerlund, 1991, p. 19). The contention is that some post-independence scholars of African descent have tended to present Africa as a unified body including her religious expressions. This might have influenced those who would like to refer to African religion in singular terms.

As the debate rages on the progenitor of the heterogeneity theory on African Religion, Mbiti, became converted and said there is indeed a basis to refer to African religion by a singular term. Interestingly, his underlying argument for his change of mind is that African spirituality cuts across the African sub-region and shares the same worldview. For instance, he observes that, ‘in many African languages, the name of God means ‘Creator’; even where there is another name; He is called “the creator” as well’ (Mbiti, 1991, p. 35). Thus, he now accepts the position Idowu and his supporters have expounded all along (see Alolo, 2007). And indeed went on further to title one of his several books on African spirituality as *Introduction to African Religion* (in the singular form). He published this book in 1975 and revised it in 1991. This seems to have given the supporters of the singular school of thought an upper hand. But the reality on the ground points to the contrary.

The view of the pro-singular African scholars on African Religion is expressed in the following quote from Ejizu (not dated):

The existence of a common world-view as well as similarities in belief-systems, ritual forms, values and institutions across the various regions of the continent, provide a sufficient basis for keeping the singular form of the name. There is no reason to single out African traditional religion, while accepting as normal a multiplicity of denominations, even rival sects in other religions of humankind, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

It may be reasonable to suppose that the above view may have played a role in Mbiti's conversion. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the repudiation of the heterogeneity theory by its originator, the debate nonetheless continues. Contemporary scholars on African religions feel that in spite of the change in mind of the proponent of the plural form of African religion, there are still good reasons to refer to African religions in the plural form rather than in the singular. I saw clear evidence of this first-hand when I sent an article to a journal for review and publication in South Africa in 2009, and one of the comments from the assessors was that there is nothing like an 'African Traditional Religion' but only 'African Traditional Religions'.

The debate, however, continues unabated. Ejizu (not. dated), for instance, argues that contemporary scholarship seems to favour the singular form while Soko (2012) contends that 'the debate between singular and plural formatives tilts towards the plural' (Soko, 2012, p, 54). However, it is common to find many contemporary scholars using both the singular and the plural forms in discourses on African religion. At times, one can find one scholar using both terms interchangeably in his/her writing even on the same page. For instance, as late as 2012, Danfulani, a respected scholar on Africa religion uses both terms in his excellent piece titled 'Africa religions in scholarship: A critique', which appears in the first chapter of an edited volume by Adogame et al (2012)—'African traditions in the study of religion in Africa'--Danfulani uses both terms on the very first page of his discussion--p. 19--as well as on pp, 23, 25 and 28. Altogether, he used the singular form more than the plural throughout the discussion. In the same volume, Togarasei (2012) uses the singular form throughout in discussing his paper titled: 'African Traditional Religion in the study of the New Testament'. What this means is that the debate will rage on for a very long time since to some extent, there is basis to use either of them depending on where the emphasis is being placed. In other words, it 'depends on the individual scholar's worldview and interest' as Westerlund (1991, p.18) suggests.

2.4 Culture

Since this study examines the Berekum religio-cultural contribution to nature conservation, it is also important to look at the concept of culture. The word 'culture' was introduced into anthropology as a technical term by Tylor (White and Dillingham, 1972, p. 21), who used it in the opening words of his widely read book *Primitive Culture* in 1871. Tylor saw culture as, 'that complex whole, which includes beliefs, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society' (quoted in White and Dillingham, 1972, p. 21). Storey (2001) cites William Raymond as having conceptualised the term 'culture' in three different ways. First, it can be viewed as 'a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development' (Storey, 2001, p. 1); secondly, it can be used to refer to 'a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group' (Storey, 2001, p. 2); and third, it can be used to refer to 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (Raymond, 1983, p. 90; quoted in Storey, 2001, p. 2).

Geertz (1973) thinks that we should try to see cultures, 'not as organically unified or traditionally continuous but rather as negotiated, present processes' (Geertz, 1988, p. 273). He also quotes Kluckhohn as describing or defining culture in his book *Mirror for Man* in at least eleven different ways: (1) 'the total way of life of a people'; (2) 'the social legacy the individual acquires from his group'; (3) 'a way of thinking, feeling, and believing'; (4) 'an abstraction from behaviour'; (5) 'a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave'; (6) 'a store-house of pooled learning'; (7) 'a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems'; (8) 'learned behaviour'; (9) 'a mechanism for the normative regulation of behaviour'; (10) 'a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men'; and (11) 'a precipitate of history' (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). Mugambi (1996, p. 32), however, sees culture as having six main pillars—politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, kinship and religion.

Geertz considers Max Weber's view that 'man is an animal suspended in a web of significance he himself has spun' (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) to be referring to the webs of culture, adding that the analysis of culture should not be conceived as 'an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning'

(Geertz, 1973, p. 5). This stems from his view that the concept of culture is 'essentially a semiotic one' (Geertz, 1973, p. 5). What Geertz is saying is that cultural behaviours are symbolic—that is, they are inherent or pregnant with meanings which have to be uncovered in order to appreciate what culture is all about. Mbiti (1991) characterises this as covering a broad range of things, manifesting itself in a peoples' art, literature, language, dance, music, drama; the style through which they build their houses and dress; the way they organise socially and politically; their religious ideas, ethics, moral and philosophy; the way their customs, economic life and institutions of people are structured and their values and ethic (Mbiti, 1991, p. 7).

Dogbe (2009, p. 101) says that the term 'culture' brings to 'mind many things including ideas, beliefs customs and practices', which cover areas such as 'what life should be and should not be, the people's judgement, inventions, languages, technology, art and craft, literature, music, ways of farming, building houses, storing and preparing food, weaving clothes and other things'. Mugambi's, Mbiti's and Dogbe's descriptions of culture are very comprehensive, including almost all its essential elements—both the tangible or material (tools, machines, food, clothing, houses tools for leisure and entertainment) and the intangible (institutions for governing and maintaining law and order, belief systems, values, history, ideologies and concepts). Their descriptions also satisfy the various nuances that William Raymond suggests that the term culture covers.

According to Peter Sarpong—a renowned Ghanaian theologian and an authority on Akan culture—'culture is the integrated sum-total of behavioural traits that have been learned, and [...] passed on from one generation to another in an uninterrupted succession' (1974, p. vii). He quickly adds that 'all the same, the transformation of culture cannot be so profound as to leave nothing of it', even though 'culture is dynamic and never static' (1974, p. vii).

Gathogo (2009, p. 83) corroborates this when he argues that, 'while cultural meanings may differ historically, it would however be erroneous to suggest that there is a complete break up in cultural meanings, as there is also continuity'. Flolu (2009, p. 59) reiterates this, noting that all cultures are subjected to growth, change and development. One thing that emerges from the various definitions of culture is

that it is an important element in every society. In other words, culture is generic to humanity, as it is that which distinguishes one group of people from another.

Dogbe points out that culture determines “what is needed and how to get it” in any given community. He argues further that: ‘the culture of a people serves to meet their needs for educating themselves, keeping healthy in mind and body, human reproduction to perpetuate the society, and for living longer through combating diseases and epidemics’ (Dogbe, 2009, p. 103). This shows that it is culture that influences or directs members of a society to achieve their goals and aspirations. Dogbe (2009) also makes the important observation that there are some cultural objects that have unique characteristics which render them unsuitable for use in other cultural settings—for instance, some European clothes and houses are designed for cold winter weather, and are hence useless in countries that have tropical climates. The implication of this is that it is totally wrong for any group of people to impose their culturally grounded values and practices on others. This is in line with Tomlinson’s criticism of ‘personal observation’ methods, which tend to be paternalistic and presume that those in the West know the needs of other cultures better than the members of those cultures themselves do (quoted in Gathogo, 2009, p. 87). For Flolu, culture includes all forms of human endeavour that are purposeful and are meant to harmonise people with their environment (Flolu, 2009, p. 59). This makes the environment a key element in the content of a people’s culture.

Religion is another important component of every culture, and as such cannot be ignored. Mbiti (1991, p.10) argues that religion ‘is by far the richest part of the African [people’s] heritage’. This is because religion is prevalent in all spheres of human life (Mugambi, 1996). That is, it shapes their cultures, their social life, their politics, and economics (Mbiti (1991, p.10).

White and Dillingham use their ‘theory of symboling’ to explain the basis of culture (1972, p. 1f). They describe human beings as a ‘symboling’ animal, and culture as the result of symboling. Symboling, according to them, is the ‘ability freely and arbitrarily to originate, determine, and bestow meaning upon things and events in the external world, and the ability to comprehend such meanings’ (1972, p. 1). They thus argue that human beings and culture are an inseparable couplet (ibid., p. 9; see Flolu, 2009, p. 59). This assertion appears to be well grounded, for all the evidence points to the fact that culture is something that human beings have

‘created’ for their own good. This confirms the old adage that ‘necessity is the mother of invention’. In the words of White and Dillingham, ‘any organism will employ any means at hand to make life more secure, for such behavior has biological survival for the species’(1972, p. 11).

Referring to human beings as the ‘product of revolution and also as a symboling animal’, White and Dillingham (1972, p. 12) conclude that ‘when a symboling animal was produced by the natural biological process of evolution and revolution, culture came into being’. In other words, their theory of the origin of culture is that ‘culture is the consequence of the ability to symbol’ (ibid.).

White and Dillingham (1972) challenged the theory that cultural differences are due to biological differences in race, viewing this as, at best, an inference. The basis of their argument against it is that it is possible to present data to buttress an incorrect or unfounded proposition, and they appeal to the North American Indians to show this. They contend that, in terms of biology, all North American Indians are identical, but they differ sharply in their cultures (ibid. p.18). They also argued that ‘lower cultures’ can be identified among the Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid—the three major races of the world. They further buttress their position by arguing that culture is known to be dynamic, and for that reason, it is possible for a people from a lower culture to later develop their culture to a higher level. In other words, culture can vary over time (Asante, 1996, p. 5). For White and Dillingham (1972, p. 18), therefore, ‘there is no correlation between race and culture’, and they conclude that ‘there is no direct evidence in support of a theory of biological superiority or biological difference in terms of inferiority and superiority in cultural capacity’ (ibid., p. 19). With regard to differences in cultures due to space, White and Dillingham (1972) cautioned us against relying on the theory of environmental or geographic determinism, as this theory does not hold accurately in every case. They cite the case of the Eskimos and the Indians of Tierra del Fuego, who live in very similar environments but have very different cultures. They postulate that ‘habitat may permit certain things and prohibit certain others; there is still room for a great deal of variation’ (ibid., p. 19).

The foregoing discussion can leave little doubt that there is significant debate over what the term ‘culture’ refers to and how it evolved. It is no wonder that William Raymond describes culture as ‘one of the two or three most complicated

words in English Language' (Raymond, 1983, p. 87, quoted in Storey, 2001, p. 1). Culture, to borrow Storey's words, may be seen as 'an empty conceptual category, one which can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use' (Storey, 2001, p. 1). This also suggests that the concept of culture is very broad, even among social anthropologists, and thus it is important to be clear about the context in which the concept is being used to prevent unnecessary criticisms and misunderstandings.

Despite the difficulty involved in defining the concept of culture, we can nonetheless draw from the above discussion the idea that the culture of a people impacts on their attitudes towards things including their environmental issues. This has implications for the ecological practices of a people. That is, differences in culture lead to different ways of addressing issues, including environmental ones, even if the approaches of different cultures are similar. Sutton and Anderson (2010), p. 97) emphasise that 'All people belong to a specific culture, a group of people who share the same basic but unique pattern of learned behaviour. As such, each culture has a distinct ecological adaptation' (2010, p. 97). The logical implication of the above discussion, however, is that as long as there are different cultures, there will be diversity in approaches to similar issues.

2.5 Environment Conceptualised

The term 'environment' is a fluid concept, which is both culturally grounded and socially contested (Hannigan, 1995, p. 109). According to Attfield (2010), 'not everyone means the same thing when they speak of "environment" or "environmental problems"', and people:

Often (and this is a first meaning) mean "the surrounding", natural or otherwise, either of an individual of duration of her life, or of a society for the duration of its existence, but they sometimes mean (secondly) the objective system of nature that encompasses either local society or human society in general, and that precedes and succeeds it (Attfield, 2010, p. 2).

The fluidity of the term 'environment' is again stressed by Kumar and Kumar (2009) when they state that, 'as per [the definition of the term] by the Environment

(Protection) Act, environment includes all the physical and biological surroundings and their interactions' (Kumar and Kumar, 2009). The environment or environmental studies are part of a broad subject that requires an 'integrated approach for dealing with the various aspects' (Kumar and Kumar, 2009). According to Osuntokun (2001), when we say 'environment', we are talking about 'human beings and their surroundings, including the life support provided by air, water, land, animals and the entire ecosystem of which human beings are but a part' (Osuntokun, 2001, p. 293).

From the perspective of the environmental sciences, the term 'environment is derived from the science of ecology. The term 'ecology' or *Oekologie* was coined in 1866 by Haeckel, a German biologist (Boersema, 2009, p. 3). According to Boersema (ibid. p.3), Haeckel defines ecology as 'the comprehensive science of the relationship of the organism to the environment.' Boersema (2009) points out that environmental scientists exclude the social aspect of the environment and focus on the physical—air, water, land and all the biota that grows and lives therein. Therefore, for him, the term 'environment' refers to 'the physical, non-living and living, surrounding of a society with which it has a reciprocal relationship.' He argues that the reference to the 'living world' and the 'relation with society' makes his definition more comprehensive than the definition given by the UK Environmental Protection Act of 1990, which Porteous (2000, p. 217) quotes as saying that the environment: 'consists of all, or any, of the following media, namely, the air, water, and the land.' His concern is that the 'interrelationship between both the non-living and the living' (Boersema, 2009, p. 4) is vital to the definition of the environment. In other words, for a definition of the term to be sufficient, it must include the idea of an 'interrelationship between the non-living and the living'.

Unlike environmental scientists, who exclude the social aspect of the environment and focus on the physical, Africans generally have a broader view of the environment. According to Nwosu (2010), the environment remains a complex reality for many African people, and is seen in a much more inclusive way than it is in many developed countries. It is both physical and spiritual, encapsulating life-forms and non-life-forms, which can also be described as internal and external. Nwosu (2010) adds that the natural environment includes social, religious, linguistic, economic, and other cultural elements. Obeng (1991, p. 121) says that in the traditional African worldview, the environment embraces the culture of a people

(language, beliefs, customs, food habits, way of dressing and crafts), including the physical milieu of the people and their natural resources, climate, and human character. The African sees the natural environment as being closely tied to integral human life, and without it, human life may not be sustained (Nwosu, 2010).

Boersema (2009) traces the history of what is today known as ‘Environmental Sciences’, which is defined as ‘the study of man-made environmental problems’ (2009, p. 4). He observes that environmental problems are societal problems, and that scientists must recognise the limit of science in solving problems that ‘are ultimately societal problems’ (ibid.). A careful analysis of Boersema’s definition of ‘environment’—which he considers to be broad—and his observation that environmental problems are societal and that science is limited in its ability to effectively deal with issues that are ultimately societal seem to be inconsistent with the exclusion of the social environment from the concerns of environmental scientists. This is because society does not exist in a vacuum, but is constituted by human beings (who are social beings). It is human beings that create the problems that the environmental scientists claim to study and deal with. And, more importantly, the social environment, as Barnett and Casper note:

Encompass the immediate physical surroundings, social relationships, and cultural milieus within which defined groups of people function and interact. Components of the social environment include built infrastructure; industrial and occupational structure; labor markets; social and economic processes; wealth; social, human, and health services; power relations; government; race relations; social inequality; cultural practices; the arts; religious institutions and practices; and beliefs about place and community (Barnett and Casper, 2001, p. 465).

Barnett and Casper (ibid.) further argue that ‘the social environment subsumes many aspects of the physical environment’. Chittick (2007) appeals to the work of Nasr (1999)—an Iranian-American philosopher—who argues that the environmental crisis is fundamentally a crisis of values. One’s social environment, it is argued, comprises the culture that one is educated and/or lives in, and the people and institutions with whom one interacts, and this means that a person’s orientation may influence his general attitude to both the social and the physical environment.

This may also explain why traditional resource management and nature conservation strategies are in the hands of the leadership of the various communities

such as chiefs and elders, who determine how such things will be managed and approached. The link can also be explained within the context of the society-environment debate, which culminated in the theory that human-environment relations are mediated by culture (Ingold, 1992; Descola and Palsson, 1996; Milton, 1996). Consequently, it becomes difficult to exclude the social environment wherever a serious discussion about the natural environment is being held. Therefore, environmental scientists are misguided to exclude the social environment as relevant to the natural environment, and for the discipline of environmental science to have its desired impact on society; it must reconsider its exclusion of the social environment. Boersema (2009) argues that science has ‘a virtual monopoly’ in analysing the causes of environmental problems. However, this argument is again problematic, for it may be applicable only in certain communities, such as in the Western world or the developed world, but not in the third world, particularly West Africa, where religion has a very strong influence on many aspects of numerous people’s lives (Parrinder, 1974; Mbiti, 1969).

2.6 Environmental Crisis

Park (2007, p.4) notes that ‘since the 1970s, scientists have been writing about what they term the “environmental crisis” and more recently this debate has evolved and broadened, incorporating some other social issues of the day into the wider *green* debate’. That is, the term resulted from the environmental consciousness that emerged in the 1960s and early 1970s (Park, 2007, p. 4). It was coined by the environmental activists of the 1960s and 70s to describe the catastrophic end of the world that they envisaged would occur should humans refuse to change their ‘careless’ attitude towards nature. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Lynn White’s ‘*Historical roots of our ecological crisis*’ (1967) gave much currency to the term. It is important to stress that environmental problems abound in all regions of the world, but that the global awareness of problems was created by the activities of the Western world and American environmental activists.

The environmental crisis is now seen as one of the most serious problems facing humanity. In fact, it has become a global issue that no society is completely

immune from, as the threats that the crisis poses are to humanity as well as the ecosystem in general (Ojomo, 2010).

The magnitude of the crisis led Thomas Berry to pose an important question: 'Is the human a viable species on an endangered planet?' (Cited in Tucker and Grim, 2000, p. xxix). It is perhaps in light of this that Park (2007, p.184) remarks that, when examining the implications of the Gaia Hypothesis, 'the Earth will probably survive, no matter what humans do to it, but its survival might not include humans'.

One disturbing component of the environmental crisis is that, as governments, environmental organisations and activists debate how to deal with the crisis, resource depletion, species extinction and pollution continue to be experienced the world over. According to Tucker and Grim (2000), the crisis has been compounded by population explosion, industrial growth, technological manipulation, and military proliferation. Furthermore, many accounts have shown that the crisis has affected even the basic elements that sustain life—sufficient water, clean air, and arable land (Tucker and Grim, 2000). The above problems are indicative of the nature and seriousness of the crisis that we are confronted with.

Tucker and Grim (2000) further observe that people view the environmental crisis as a complex issue, and that it is not only the result of certain economic, political, and social factors, but must also be seen as a moral and spiritual crisis that requires us to develop 'broader philosophical and religious understandings of ourselves as creatures of nature, embedded in life cycles and dependent on ecosystems' (Tucker and Grim, 2000). They argue that religions have a role to play in addressing the crisis, as they can help to shape our attitudes toward nature positively in both conscious and unconscious ways. This is because religions are full of stories that enable us to interpret the nature and destinies of humans. This, Tucker and Grim (2000) contend, is found in the worldview of a society. It is against this background that a whole chapter (i.e. Chapter 4) is devoted to exploring the worldviews of the population studied in this thesis. The idea of using religion to engage with the environmental crisis is not a new one, as Lynn White and others raised such suggestions long ago, and DeWitt (2000, p. 297) carried the idea further when he emphasised that 'a traditional belief in the sovereignty of God as creator leads clearly to an awareness that contemporary environmental degradation is blasphemous'. He was emphatic that:

Authority over things belongs to the Author of those things: we have no authority to destroy what we ourselves did not create; destruction of a grand master's work by its onlooker, beholder, or curator may be a disgrace to their creator (DeWitt, *ibid.*).

The above discussion points to one important fact – that religion is connected to the crisis, and must also be a part of its solution (White, 1967).

2.7 Foundation for African environmental ethics

African environmental ethics is derived from a worldview that is strongly theistic. Agboro, (2008) argues the majority of Africans conceive humans and their environment to be 'two inseparable entities that cannot be divorced from each other'. Nwosu (2010) corroborates this, contending that many Africans believe that without the environment, human life may not be sustained. Furthermore, he points to studies that show that African cosmology conceives of the existence of human beings as being tied up with their environment. According to Opoku-Ankomah et al. (2010), culturally acceptable environmental management among Africans emanates from social organisation that is permeated by spirituality and a reverence for ancestors. Dopamu also contends that African peoples' ancestors addressed their environmental problems through the use of the 'available resources of nature to procure [the] non-therapeutic needs of man' (2003, p. 444). They applied the art of influencing courses of events by means of ritual behaviour and the invocation of divinities or spirit aids (Nwosu, 2010).

Ontologically, traditional African people believe that human beings did not just happen to be in this world, but rather that they were designed to live in the world and designed in relation to their environment(s). This implies that environmental consciousness is embedded in the traditional African worldview (Awuah-Nyamekye 2009a) – humanity, under such a worldview, is essentially connected with nature (Schulkin and Sarokin, 1996). Abayie-Boaten (1998) stresses that because of this, many traditional African societies conceive of themselves as stewards of the environment, with social and moral obligations to manage and conserve it for posterity (see Attfield, 2010). This social and moral obligation is a central part of African 'environmental ethics'.

Under this ethical code, Africans often view land and its resources as a divine gift to the social group, or as communal property that the living hold in trust for their ancestors and future generations (Omari, 1990; Byers et al., 2001; Asiama, 2007). For scholars like Byers et al. (2001) and Asiama (2007), many African people see their relationship with the land as a matter of spiritual concern. The Akan, together with many other traditional societies in Ghana, view the land as an important deity (Parrinder, 1961, p. 38; Opoku, 1978, p. 56).

Fortes' (1945, p. 176) studies among the Tallensi of northern Ghana revealed that the people 'stand in awe of the earth and speak of it as a "living thing" which they believe can intervene mystically in human affairs as the ancestral spirits do'. Danquah outlines the Akyim of Ghana's conception of land as the property of their ancestors (1928, p. 212). For them, it is not the property of the living, but is something that they should maintain and preserve for future generations. Timberlake and Cunliffe's (2007) study of Zambezi society, and Nwosu's (2010) study of the Okonko society of Nigeria have produced similar findings. This suggests that living members of these societies only hold the land in trust for posterity, and do not conceive of themselves as having the right to sell it. Edusah (2008) quotes Danquah (1968) as having observed that this is grounded in the Akan conception of natural resources and the need for conservation, stating:

... in our culture, we do not only hold in trust for the present and future generations all the natural resources on which our welfare and [the] continuance of the community depend, but also are accountable to [them] for the proper management of the resources (cited in Edusah, 2008, p. 4).

This position contrasts with what the Bible says in Genesis, 1:28, which Lynn White (1967) criticised. However, this criticism is rejected on the grounds that it involves a misunderstanding of the text, as well as being overly simplistic as dominion *implies* stewardship (Atfield, 1983, 2010; Warren, 1995). I am aware of the caution not to romanticise the role of religion and culture in nature conservation in indigenous or traditional societies (Ellen, 1986, 1993; Brightman, 1987; Milton, 1996, 1998). However, the evidence on the ground is compelling in terms of the potential of religion and culture to influence traditional peoples in relation to the conservation of nature. For instance, the study undertaken by Byers et al. (2001) in the sacred forests of Zimbabwe shows that 'the forest loss is dramatically less in forests that are now

considered sacred, or were in the past connected to these sacred forests, than in forests that were not formerly connected to a current sacred forest' (2001, p.205). In their analysis of the responses of their interviewees, they go on to state that the reasons that local residents give for the importance of respecting sacred forests are grounded in their perceived values together with the benefits they accrue from their uses of those forests. This view supports my thesis that indigenous religion and culture have the potential to address some of the environmental crisis that Ghana is currently experiencing. This also calls into question the reductionist or simplistic hypothesis which holds that today's environmental crises can only be effectively handled through secular means (science and technology).

The available literature on African religion and environment identified the following as the main ideas, beliefs and practices that lead many traditional African communities to conserve the natural environment: sacred groves, totemism, the perception of bodies of land and water as sacred entities, and the belief in *sasa* (the belief that some powers suffuse certain trees and animals, which could be harmful to humans if such entities are not properly approached). All these are enforced through taboos (Ntiama-Baidu, 1991, 1995; Derman, 1996; Byers et al., 2001; Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005; Nwosu, 2010). Among these phenomena, sacred groves appear to be the most researched, with almost all the publications on African religion and environment mentioning them. *Sasa* is the least researched, with only a few writers mentioning it (Rattray, 1959, p. 5, 271; Warren, 1973, p. 60; Sarfo-Mensah, 2001). This is one of the reasons why *sasa* is one of the areas that the present study does emphasise.

Chieftaincy (the rule of chiefs) is the main institution responsible for supervising the use and enforcement of these indigenous means of nature conservation, as the chiefs are the overall custodians of lands in the local communities (Rattray, 1923; Busia, 1968; Fallers, 1964; McLeod, 1981; McCaskie, 1995; Anane, (not dated); Ephirim-Donkor, 2010). However, as the literature notes, the institution of chieftaincy is steadily losing its grip (authority) among many traditional societies in Africa (Boafo-Arthur, 2003; McCaskie, 2002; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009c) because of paradigm shifts in the system of governance resulting from the influence of Western culture. Byers et al. (2001) quote Derman's (1996) observations that, in Zimbabwe:

The enactment of the Communal Lands Act of 1982, and [the] repealing of the Tribal Trust Lands Act of 1979, shifted land allocation authority from traditional political leaders to District Councils [...] Traditional leaders have no legal means to compel modern leaders to respect traditional land use rules. The chiefs have no legal power to create and enforce rules on natural resource management in communal lands. The wholesale importation of [the] Western form of democracy is a factor in this trend of affairs which is gradually gaining root throughout Africa now (Byers et al. (2001, p.194).

However, the foregoing review has pointed out that long before the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) came into being on the back of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro 'Earth Summit', traditional African societies already had complex indigenous mechanisms in place for dealing with biodiversity (Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005). It is against this backdrop that African indigenous religion has been referred to as 'profoundly ecological' (Schoffeleers, 1978) in contrast to Lynn White's view that 'Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen' (1967, p. 1205; see Joranson and Butigan, 1984; Harrison, 1999; Johnson, 2000).

2.8 Change in local perceptions on traditional conservation methods

Some of the extant literature on environmental problems in Ghana argues that the traditional strategies and institutions for addressing these problems in Ghana are under threat. A recent study conducted by Sarfo-Mensah and Oduro (2010) to investigate the spirituality of forests and conservation within Akan communities in the transitional agro-ecological zone of Ghana revealed that the role of *tumi* (the traditional belief in super natural power suffused in nature by *Onyame*, the Supreme Creator Deity) and *suro* (the awesome reverence and fear), which are usually attached to nature, are waning (see also Ntiama-Baidu, 1995; Abayie-Boaten, 1998; Appiah-Opoku and Hyma, 1999). This is partly attributed to changes in perceptions and attitudes of local people in relation to their worldviews, and Christianity is held by my informants as major factor for this change in local perceptions and attitudes.

Nwosu (2010) argues that until Christianity's and Islam's arrivals on the African religious landscape, the African used to live in harmony with his or her environment. He singles Christianity out for its sustained attack on African indigenous religion. Nwosu is emphatic in his claims that the arrival of Christianity and Islam in South-eastern Nigeria led to an increase in the rate of environmental degradation. Basing his claims on his studies in the Okonko society of South-eastern Nigeria, he suggests that the Okonko recognise and appreciate the beauty of nature and have made conscious efforts to put mechanisms in place for checking deforestation, assortments, and pollution to the land, air, and water. However, several studies on traditional people across Africa suggest that such efforts to conserve nature deteriorated with the introduction of foreign religious traditions, particularly Christianity (Parrinder, 1961; Smith, 1986, p. 86; Nukunya, 1986, p. 87; Juhe-Beaulaton, 2008; Western Regional Directorate of CNC, 2010; Teye, 2010; Opoku-Ankomah et al., 2010).

Although it is important not to romanticise the role of religion and culture in nature conservation in indigenous or traditional societies, the evidence of the potential of religion and culture to influence traditional peoples in relation to nature conservation is compelling. For instance, a study in parts of the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana—where the current study is also located—revealed that despite the fact that local health and law enforcement officials have explained the health and legal implications of fishing with poison to the villagers there, it was the indigenous beliefs and taboos that effectively reduced the incidence of pesticide fishing in the area (Dyasi, 1985; Appiah-Opoku, 2005). This re-emphasises the need for further research into indigenous religions and nature conservation in relation to the potential benefits that can be derived from this relationship. It was against this background that this thesis sought to examine the role that traditional Berekum religion can play in the environmental problems of the area.¹⁰

It is interesting to note that the literature on the issue of indigenous religion and environment thus far identified claims that the indigenous religion of African peoples has a role to play in nature conservation (Ntiamoa-Baidu, 2008, 1991; Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005; Byers et al., 2001; Dorm-Adzobu et al., 1991). The

¹⁰For detailed studies on religious responses to environmental issues, see Hargrove, 1986; Rockefeller and Elder, 1992; and Kingsley, 1995.

literature also claims that many indigenous nature conservation methods may be relevant today, and should plausibly be revived and integrated with modern methods. However, the question of how these methods can be transmitted to the next generation, which are the focuses of this study, are most often left out of the literature, or else only discussed tangentially.

2.9 Summary

This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature for the key concepts in this study—those of African traditional religion, culture, the environment and environmental crisis, and traditional ecological principles—with the aim of providing the thesis with a firm theoretical base. It was argued that African traditional religion was misunderstood by early scholars, such as anthropologists, and still is misunderstood by some contemporary scholars. African spirituality has been subjected to all kinds of descriptions, many of which use pejorative terms.

Many contemporary African scholars have attempted to delve into the nature of African indigenous religion, although the issue of its exact nature remains contested, with some scholars believing that we should consider there to be a single, central African Traditional Religion (ATR), whilst others believe there are many African Traditional Religions that cannot all be placed under a single banner. Recent scholarship appears to support the idea that there is a single African Traditional Religion, with many different *branches*. In relation to culture, the study found that the word ‘culture’ was introduced by Tylor in his widely read book *Primitive Culture* in 1871. Tylor (1871) viewed culture as ‘that complex whole which includes, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’. However, the discussion pointed out that there has been debate concerning what constitutes a culture and how cultures evolve. One fact that was clear from the review was that culture, however it is understood, plays a crucial role in the life of a group of people by distinguishing them from other groups of people, and influencing or directing members of a society to achieve their goals and aspirations. This

implies that once different cultures exist, different methods will be employed for addressing the same or similar problems.

Like culture, the term 'environment' was found to be fluid, as it is both culturally grounded and socially contested. For instance, in relation to the field of environmental science, it is limited to physical surroundings, such as air, water, land and all the biota that grow and live in it. However, there are good reasons to think that the term should be viewed in a broader way, as the concept includes the interrelation between both the living and the non-living, and also because the environmental problems that environmental scientists claim to be addressing are fundamentally societal problems, which are created by human beings. Thus, it is inadequate to define the term without the inclusion of the social aspect of society. The review touched on the basis of environmental ethics among indigenous African people and it was discovered that their environmental ethics is underpinned by their worldview which is basically religious.

The last key concept that the review covered was 'environmental crises'. The genesis of the term was traced to the raising of environmental consciousness that began in the 1960s and early 1970s (Park, 2007). The term was coined to express the activists' conviction that the world will end imminently should human beings fail to change their careless attitudes towards nature. The review drew the connections between religion and the environmental crisis introduced in White's work. It is notable that Lynn White, after blaming Christianity for the environmental crisis in part, also pointed out that Christianity could aid in finding solution to the crisis, and a benchmark of religious involvement came when leaders of the world religions were invited to the 25th anniversary of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in Assisi to consider concrete ways in which religion could assist to address the crisis. It is thus no surprise that religious environmentalism is now interested in the contributions of indigenous peoples' religions, which were initially excluded from its radar.

CHAPTER 3

THE STUDY AREA – BEREKUM TRADITIONAL AREA/ MUNICIPALITY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter has been split into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the study area. Section two will survey the current environmental situation in the study area while section three examines the factors responsible for the current environmental situation. The last section takes a look at the effects or impacts of the problems on the people in the study area in particular, and in Ghana in general.

3.2 Who are the Berekum people?

The Berekum people are one of the Bono people within the larger Akan ethnic group of Ghana, and speak the Bono dialect of the Akan language. Ghana's 2010 population census put their number at 129,628 (Ghana Statistical Service). Oral tradition and fragmentary information from the few available written documents from the Berekums explains that three Akan groups migrated to and settled in the Berekum area. One of these groups was the *Awasu* people (now the people of Biadan), who were said to have migrated from Denkyira in the Central Region of Ghana to settle at Berekum through Abofo in the Offinso area of the Ashanti Region. Berekum Traditional Council Records (1949) put this migration as taking place between 1699 and 1702, which coincides with the period of the Denkyira-Asante wars. This migration was said to have been led by an eminent hunter called *Bɔfoakwa*, whose name literally means 'hunter Akwa' (see Benneh, 1990; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012b).

Another prominent hunter known as *Bɔfoɔbem* was also said to have led the second group of migrants from Jukwa in the Denkyira area of the Central Region of Ghana. This group of migrants settled at Abi, which is now a village that lies approximately 4 kilometres north-west of Berekum.

The third group of migrants who came to settle in Berekum comprised soldiers from Asante-Asokore. They were said to have arrived on the eve of the Asantehene's campaign against Adinkra, the chief of the Gyamans in 1818. The Asante army was led by Sefa Antwireboa, the *Asokorehene* [the chief of Asokore] of the time. According to the sources, the Gyamans were defeated, but some of their soldiers managed to escape to the Republic of La Côte d'Ivoire. As a result, the Asantes thought it wise to leave some of their soldiers behind to check on any resurgence of the defeated Gyamans. Therefore, a security post was set up at Berekum by the Asantes (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012b).

The above brief historical overview of the Berekums suggests that their religious and cultural practices should not fundamentally differ from other Akans in Ghana, and perhaps those outside Ghana. The Akans constitute the largest ethnic group in Ghana, and extend outside Ghana, being found in the south-eastern portion of the Republic of Ivory Coast or La Cote d'Ivoire (Warren, 1986, p.7; Beeko, 2005). They are found in six out of the ten administrative regions in Ghana, viz: Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, Eastern, Central, Western and a small part of the Volta region (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a). Ghana's 2010 population census found that the Akan population comprises 47.5% of the country's total population. The Akans are culturally homogenous and, by and large, matrilineal—i.e. they inherit through the mother's line, except from the Akwapim of Larteh and Mampong, who are patrilineal—i.e. they inherit through the father's line (Pobee, 1979, p. 44).

3.3 An Overview of Berekum Traditional Area

Berekum Traditional Area is one of the many traditional districts from the twenty-two districts in the Brong-Ahafo region of Ghana. The Berekum District Assembly was created in 1989 by splitting the former Berekum-Jaman District following the decentralisation policy adopted by the Government in 1988. The district has now been raised to a municipality, with Berekum as its capital, and the area comprised 33 towns and villages. The Ghanaian system of administration has zoned the country into ten regions, within which are the Districts, Municipalities and Metropolitan areas. An area is designated as a District if the population is greater than 75,000, a Municipality if the population is greater than 95,000, and a Metropolitan area if its

population is greater than 250, 000. Currently, there are 216 districts in Ghana, consisting of 164 District Assemblies, 46 Municipal Assemblies and 6 Metropolitan Assemblies.

In Ghana, the name of the capital or the headquarters of a traditional area is generally used to refer to the entire traditional area. Interestingly, the names of the district, municipal and metropolitan areas have followed the same trend. Thus, Berekum, which is a town, is also the name for both the traditional area and the Municipal area. The terms Berekum Traditional Area and Berekum Municipality or Municipal area will thus be used interchangeably, as they refer to the same area.

3.3.1 Geographical Location of Berekum

Berekum Traditional Area is located at the western part of Ghana in the Brong-Ahafo region (see fig. 2). It lies between latitude 7°15' South and 8°00' North and longitude 2°25' East and 2°50' West. It shares boundaries with the Tain District to the Northeast, the Jaman South District to the Northwest, the Dormaa East district to the South, the Sunyani West District to the Southeast, and the Asunafo District to the South. Berekum is the capital of the Berekum Municipality, which has a total area of 1094.2 square kilometres. The population of the Municipality is 129,628 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The growth rate is estimated at 2.5% per annum (Berekum Municipal Heath Annual Report, 2007). Berekum is 32 km from Sunyani, the regional capital, and 437 km from Accra, the national capital.

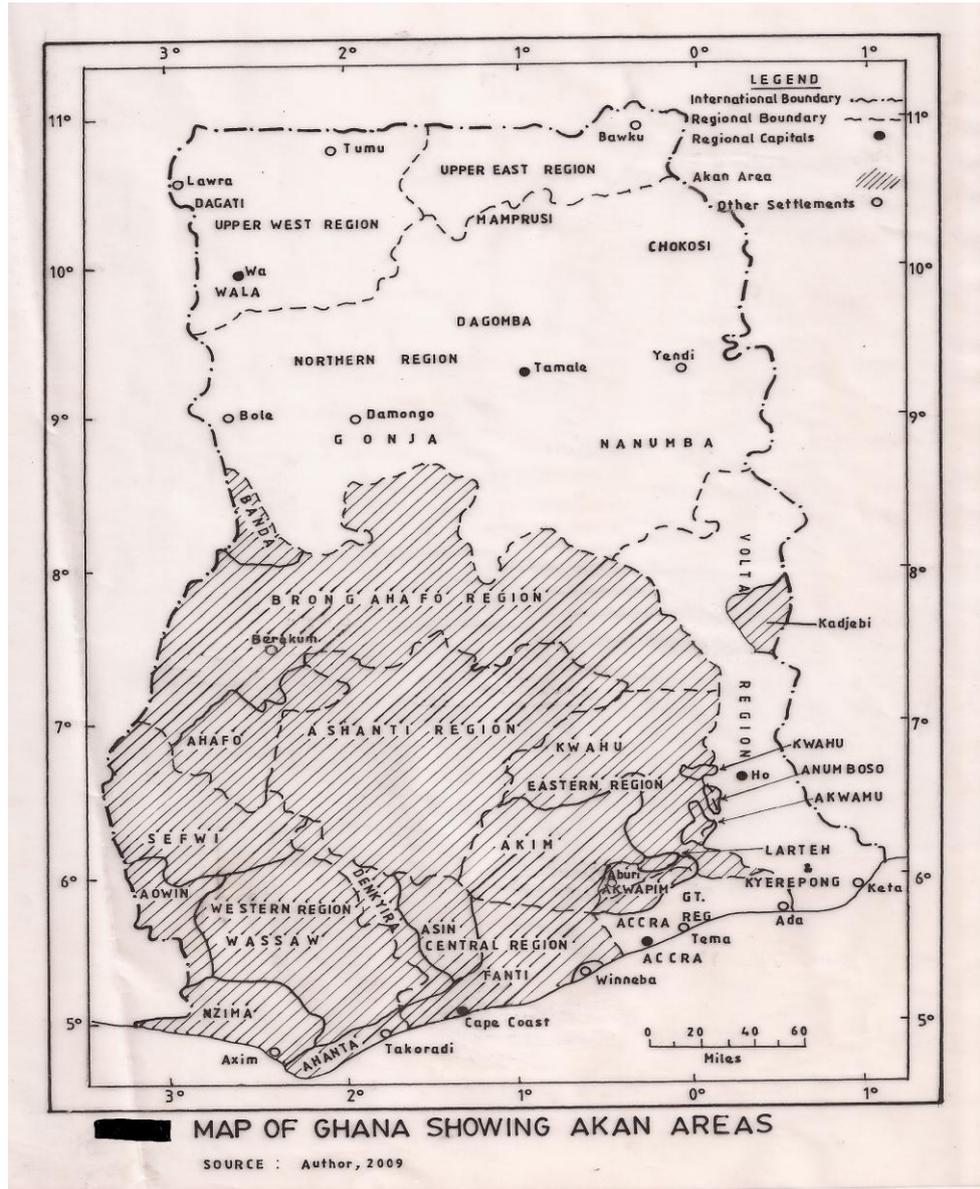


Figure 2. The distribution of the Akans in Ghana

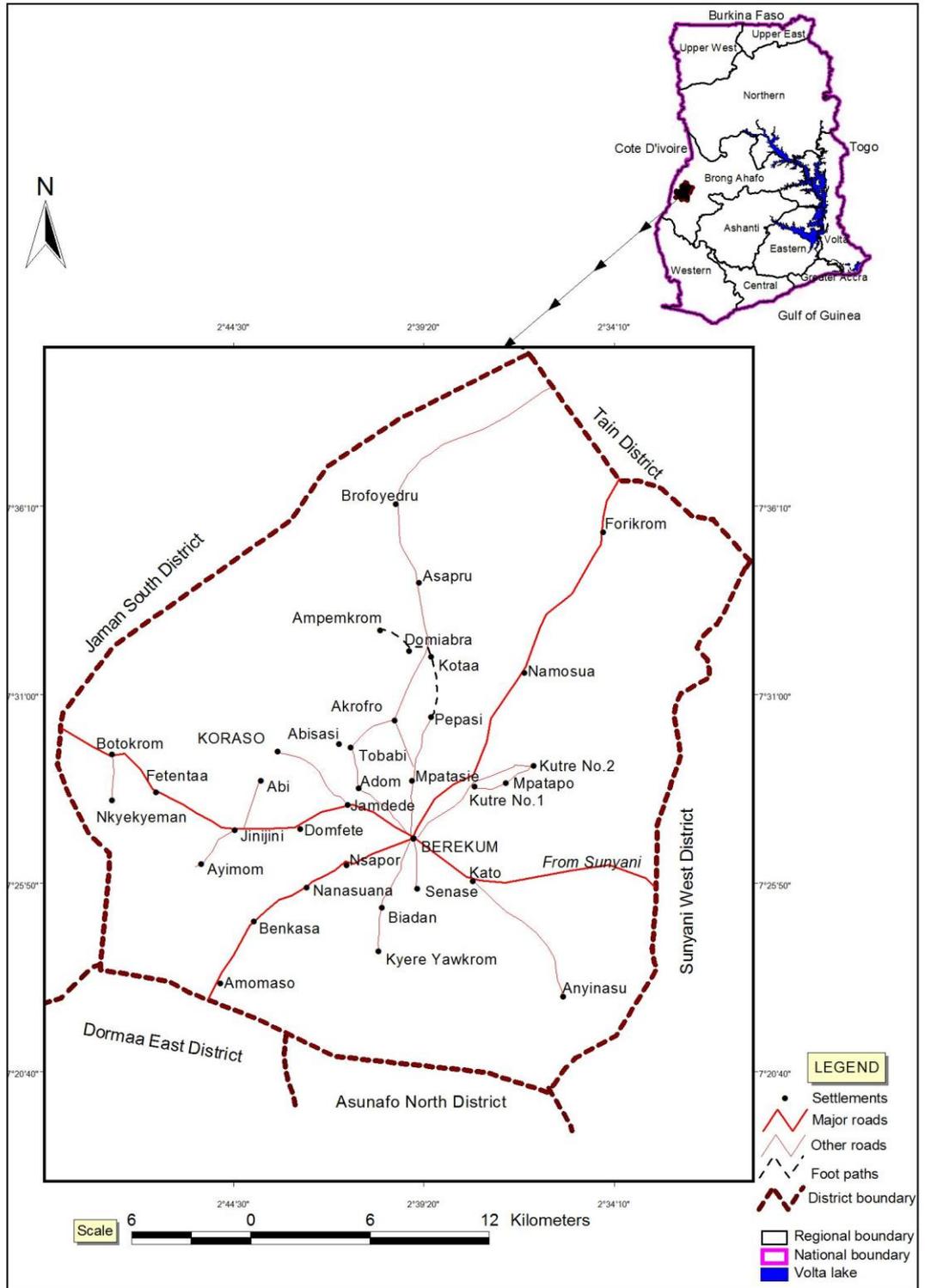


Figure 3. Map of Berekum Traditional Area–The study site

3.3.2 Physical Characteristics of the Area (relief & drainage)

The Traditional Area is 800-900m above sea level (Berekum Municipal Health Report, 2007), with a landscape of undulating landforms that are interspersed by isolated hills. Its rivers are small and the area is generally well drained, hence serious flooding is uncommon. The area falls within the moist semi-equatorial climatic zone and has a double maxima rainfall regime, with a mean annual rainfall of between 1270-1524mm (KOB Consulting Ltd., 1988, p. 17). The first and heaviest rainfalls occur in June, with the second rainfalls being from September to October every year. The dry season, which is referred to as *Harmattan*, takes place from December to March, during which time the trees shed their leaves and generally appear brown. The original vegetation in the area was mostly moist semi-deciduous forest, but this has been severely depleted through a combination of inappropriate farming methods, indiscriminate logging, rampant annual bush fires, and a general disregard for indigenous conservation models, with the result that grass species have gradually come to dominate the vegetation of Berekum area.

3.3.3 The Local Economy

The physical characteristics of Berekum favour an agrarian economy, with farming thus being the major economic activity in the area. All sorts of food crops are cultivated in Berekum, but the major ones are cocoyam, plantain, yam, cassava and maize. Vegetables such as okros, onions, garden eggs, pumpkins, peppers and tomatoes are cultivated as well.

The major cash crops of the area include cocoa, cashew nuts and oil palm, and Berekum is well known for its cocoa production. According to Benneh (1990), Berekum ranked among the chief cocoa producing centres of West Asante in 1936, but the production of cocoa became so intensive that the existing forest was quickly depleted. This compelled the farmers to migrate to Sefwi, in the Western Region of Ghana, to cultivate cocoa. The dominant method of farming is traditional, utilising cutlasses and hoes for clearing the bush and harvesting the produce. Animal rearing is also important in the study area, where the people also engage in hunting that uses local guns produced by the blacksmithing centres in the area. Lumbering is also

practised, and there is currently one large sawmill in the area that processes wood and plywood for local consumption and export. There are an uncountable number of what have become known as ‘table saw-mills’, which are dotted around the residential parts of the study area.

The Berekum Municipal Assembly report of 1996 says that about 87.7% of the citizens of Berekum are employed, and the report breaks down the local economy as follows:

Table 2: Breakdown of local economy

No	Sector	Percentage (%)
1	Farming	67
2	Industry	16
3	Services	17

However, according to ghanadistricts.com (12 November 2010), the farming sector now only makes up 57% of the workforce. This could mean that both the services and industry sectors have benefited from this drop, but the report was silent on this matter. It is thus clear that the greatest percentage of the workforce in the study area is in the farming sector, which means there is pressure on the land in the traditional area.

3.3.4 Political Organisation

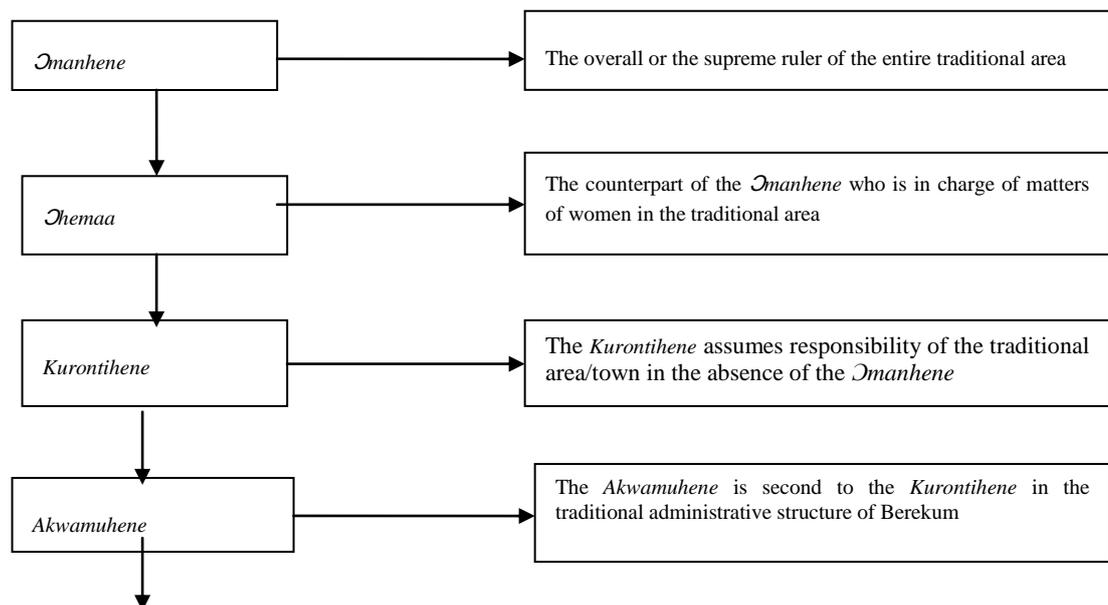
Berekum uses the chieftaincy system of governance, and chiefs are selected through maternal lineage¹¹. A chief in Berekum is usually considered as the first citizen of the village, town or state. He is viewed as the source of all traditional authority, because he is regarded as representing the founding fathers of the state. This makes

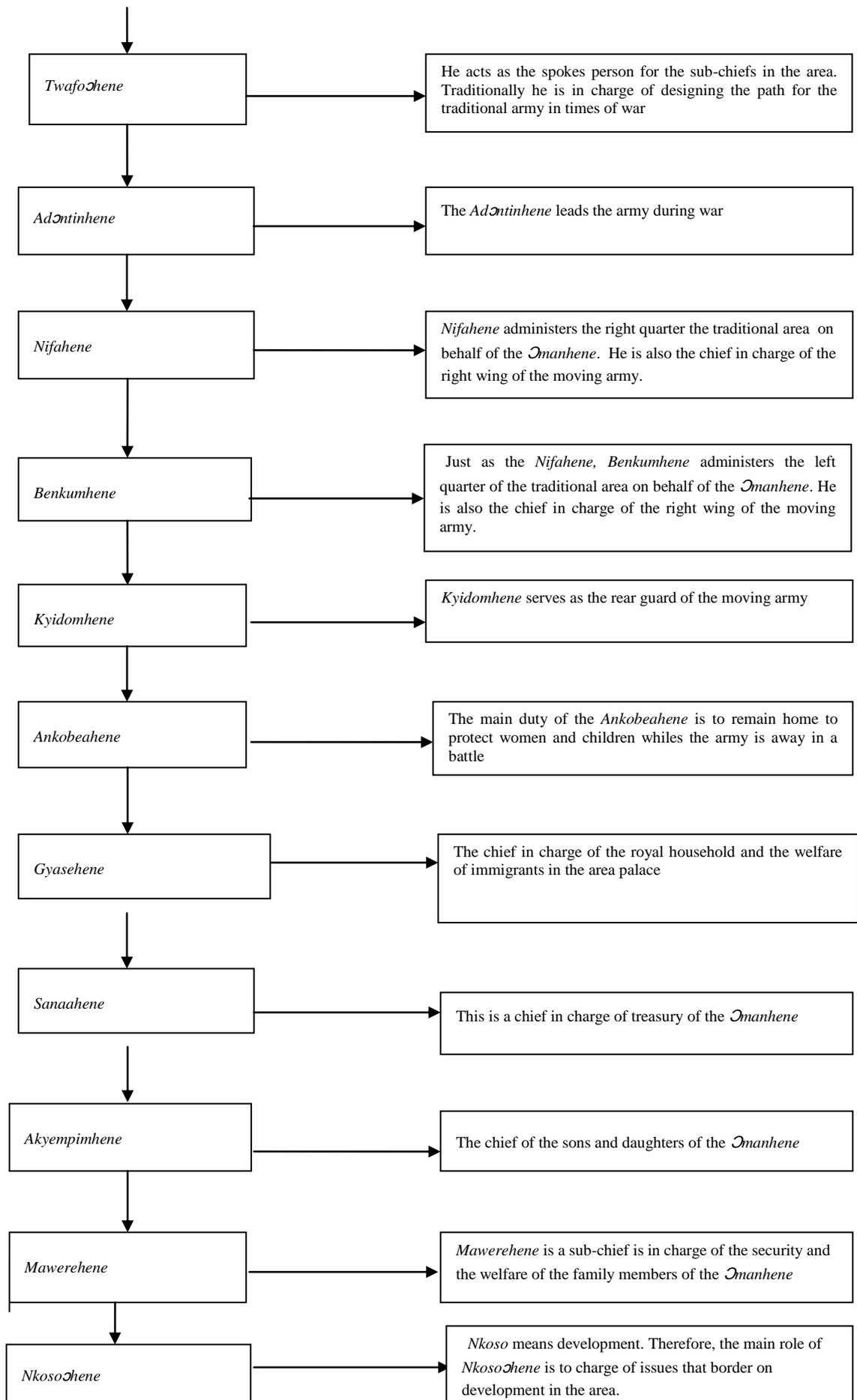
¹¹ It is interesting to note that in Akan traditional societies, a woman can become a chief in some communities although currently chieftaincy is a male dominated office in Ghana. Historically the reverse was the case (see Meyerowitz, 1958).

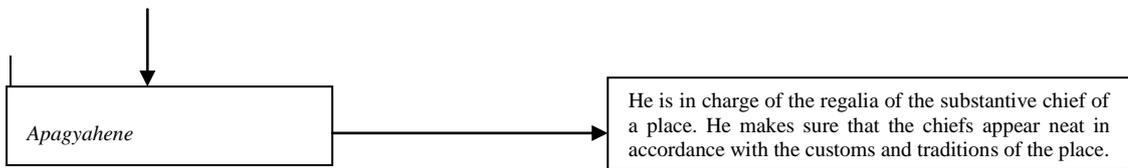
the office of the chief a sacred one, as he is regarded as the earthly representative of the ancestors (Busia, 1968; Boafo-Arthur, 2001; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009c, 2012; Odotei and Awedoba, 2006; Owusu, 2006). The appointment of a chief is normally preceded by divination and other rituals, such as the offering of prayers and sacrifices, which are meant to help the kingmakers in selecting a candidate that is acceptable to the people and the ancestors. Hence, the chief is accorded the greatest respect and obedience in traditional society. The Berekum Traditional Area was given paramountcy status by the colonial government in 1901. This was the alleged reward for the loyalty that the people of Berekum demonstrated to the British during the Asante uprising of 1900-01 (Arhin, 1973).

As in other Akan traditional societies, a chief in Berekum has staff that assist him in the day-to-day administration of the area. The highest traditional authority is vested in the *Ɔmanhene* (Paramount Chief), who is the supreme ruler of the traditional area. He is followed by the *Ɔhema* (queen-mother), then the *Asafohene* (wing or divisional chiefs), who are followed by the *Adikro* (town or village chiefs). The next in line are the clan or lineage heads, with the household heads occupying the bottom space in the hierarchy. The following table constructed from my interviews shows the main traditional political offices in their hierarchical order in the Berekum Traditional Area, and the roles involved therein:

Table 3. The traditional administrative structure in Berekum Traditional Area







The above structure is replicated in the villages, where the *Ohene* (chief) is the head, since there should be only one *Omanhene* in any traditional area.

There are currently two sets of political administration in the Berekum Traditional Area, the central government being responsible for its day-to-day running through the Municipal Chief Executive (MCE) of Berekum, whilst traditional matters are handled by the *Omanhene*. However, it is important to note that the real political power in the area belongs to the Municipal Chief Executive (central government), as the MCE can make certain decisions without any consultation with the traditional head of the area—the *Omanhene*. For instance, the MCE presides over security matters in the Municipality or traditional area and can ban any activity in the area—including that of the *Omanhene* and his elders—that he deems to endanger the security of the area. For example, the MCE can ban the celebration of a local traditional festival if he/she has a reason to do so. At times, this can happen for political expediency, for example, if the MCE believes that the *Omanhene* is politically aligned with the opposition party in the country.

Theoretically, all the pre- and post-independence constitutions of Ghana recognise the authority of chiefs (Article 13 of the 1960 Constitution of Ghana stipulates that ‘chieftaincy should be guaranteed and preserved’ and Article 270 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana prevents parliament from enacting any law that directly or indirectly intends to control the institution of chieftaincy), but this does not transfer into practice. The above development means that the chiefs no longer have total control over issues affecting the environment. Although the chief is traditionally the custodian of the land, and thus ensures that environmental laws are obeyed in order to ensure its sustainable use, this does not necessarily mean that the chiefs do not (have to) cooperate with ruling governments, especially in terms of maintaining law and order and providing developmental projects.

3.3.5 Social Organisation (Kinship ties)

I have already pointed out that the Berekum people are one of the Bono people forming part of the larger Akan ethnic group, and speak the Bono dialect of the Akan language. Socially, the people of Berekum are hierarchically organised. At the top of the social ladder is the ruling class, that is, the *Omanhene* and other members of the royalty. The divisional chiefs and the sub-chiefs follow them and next come the commoners or the free-born. Some time ago, the bottom of the social ladder was occupied by domestic slaves, who were part and parcel of their masters' households, with those judged to be 'good' and hardworking sometimes even being allowed to marry from their masters' households. Later on, when slavery was completely abolished, they were integrated into their owners' families. The basic social unit in the Berekum society—as it is in all the Akan societies—is the matrilineal family (Rattray, 1923, 1959; Danquah, 1928; Nkansa-Kyeremanteng, 1999).

However, due to the unprecedented process of cultural interaction and evolution, the extended family—the glue that holds members together—has been seriously weakened. The factors responsible for this have been Western education and culture—which encourages the nuclear family system—and the demands of the modern economic system, among others. The only time at which the collective responsibility associated with the extended family system remains strong is with the death of family members.

The foregoing provides a summary of the basics of Berekum society. The following section will now present the area's religious demography, which plays a major role in environmental issues there.

3.3.6 Religion

Religion is a notable aspect of Berekum culture, being infused in everyday lives, with secular aspects of lives being hard to separate from spiritual ones. Prior to their encounter with the Western world in the latter part of the 19th Century, their indigenous religion—which is now known as African Traditional Religion—was the only religion known to them. This faith has profoundly influenced their lives and

thought. Berekum people believe in a host of spirit beings, with *Onyame* or *Onyankopon* being the Supreme Being, creator, controller and sustainer of the world. Many of the other spirit beings are believed to inhabit images, rocks, mountains, caves, trees, rivers, and other natural objects, and this belief made the people treat such natural objects with a form of reverential respect. However, in the present day, due to this people's contact with the outside world through colonisation, western education, foreign religions and other meaning-giving systems, the traditional area is religiously plural. This pluralism is revisited in Chapter 4.

Section one has presented the current environmental situation in Berekum. I now move to section two of this chapter, which examines the environmental situation in the area now.

3.3.7 The current environmental situation in the Berekum area

The land is now bare and degraded. Almost all our forests are gone and several plants and animal species are no longer here. It was only in a few areas that one could see grasses. But now the place is gradually becoming grassland and most streams and water bodies are drying up (Akua Amponsah, personal communication, 7 October 2011).

The above quote is the answer that Akua Amponsah, a farmer in Berekum, gave when I asked her views on the current environmental situation in the Berekum Traditional Area, and epitomises the environmental reality of Berekum today. The details are examined in the following paragraphs.

3.3.7.1 Deforestation

Deforestation, according to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), is the 'land degradation in arid, semi-arid, and sub-humid areas resulting from various factors including climatic variations and human activities' (UNCED, 1992). The conference also explained that deforestation should not be confused with degradation, stating that while deforestation reduces the size of forests, degradation involves the decrease in the condition (quality) of the forest,

which manifests itself in the vegetation, faunal and floral diversity, the fertility of the soil, and the other components of the ecosystem of forests (UNCED, 1992). The distinction between deforestation and degradation is important, as the first does not necessarily imply the second and vice versa. However, in the case of the study area, both have occurred.

The rate of environmental degradation and deforestation in Ghana has already been noted. Various governments of Ghana have made several attempts to deal with the situation by developing plans to ensure the sustainable management of the harvesting of forest products (MLF, 1994, 1996; Donkor and Vloski, 2003). As part of its effort to protect and conserve the forests in Ghana, the government of Ghana has created a total of 266 National Forest Reserves in the high forest zone, which occupy 1,634,100 hectares of land (Hawthorne and Abu-Juam, 1995 quoted in Donkor and Vloski, 2003). Berekum Traditional Area has two forest reserves—Tain II and Pamu-Berekum. However, the exploitation of the forest in these reserves continues despite its illegality and the government's efforts to stop it. It is sad to note that these national assets are diminishing seriously in both size and quality. According to the local people, the Tain II and Pamu-Berekum Reserves are now shadows of their former selves. This is corroborated by Mrs. Philomena Appiah Boakye, the Regional Director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the Brong-Ahafo Region. In her Keynote address to the public during the 2011 World Environmental Day, held at Kato near Berekum, she revealed that:

The Pamu-Berekum Forest Reserve was established in 1932 with a total area of 189 km². The forest area in 1990 had been reduced to 91 km² (a loss of 98 km² in 58 years); in 2000 it had been reduced to 1 km² (a loss of 90 km² in just 10 years). In the other instance, the Tain II Forest Reserve was established in 1934 with a total area of 509 km². The forest area in 1990 had been reduced to 451 km² (a loss of 58 km² in 56 years); and in 2000 it had been reduced to just 108 km² (a loss of 343 km² in just 10 years) (Appiah Boakye, 2011).

Mr. Gyedu (personal communication, 13 December 2012, Berekum), a forester from Berekum, explained that although the actual reserve (land) is intact, the tree cover is reduced. This is environmentally unhealthy, since increasing the number of trees is believed to be the answer to counteracting global warming (Burley and Haslam,

2008). The concern is that, if even government-protected areas are being degraded in this way, then the fate of non-protected areas in the study area is all the more certain. A report by Forestry Outlook Study for Africa (FOSA) and the Ghanaian Ministry of Lands and Forestry has the following to say on the consumption of forest products:

A major problem in Ghana is the high consumption of wood for energy and cooking, estimated at 14 million m³ annually and expected to increase to 20 million m³ in 2010. Even in urban areas, about 69% of all households use charcoal. Agyarko found that 91% of total roundwood production is used as fuelwood and for charcoal. The remaining (9%) is used as industrial roundwood (mainly timber) (FOSA, 2002).

It is thus unsurprising that a recent report has indicated that there has been a significant rise in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions in Ghana (Edjekumhene et al., 2011), and this now puts the country into the bracket of being a *net-emitter* of GHGs. The above statistics show the level of degradation in the study area, and in contemporary Ghana more generally. Notably, it is the vegetation, especially the trees, that are most affected.

3.3.7.2 The theft of timber

Closely connected with illegal deforestation is the theft of high value trees by both timber contractors and chain-saw operators in the area. Again, some corrupt forestry officials collude in these illegal activities, and contractors and chain-saw operators indiscriminately cut the trees, including the endangered ones. I was told in the villages close to the forests that they hear the noise made by chain-saws deep into the night on an almost daily basis. The following statement taken from the Tropical Timber Report (TTR) in 1990, which is attributed to Mr. Joe Ackah – Brong Ahafo Regional Zonal Manager for Ghana's Forestry Commission (FC) – attests to the stealing of timber in the study area:

[...] about ten uncertified mobile sawmills were identified in Tein II and Paamu/Berekum forest reserves. Authorities were able to impound over 1,200 teak billets now placed at the Berekum District office of the Forestry Services Division.

The billets were meant for export and could have costed [sic] the government several millions of cedis. Mr. Ackah said that illegality occurred due to [a] lack of logistics and capacity on the part of the FC (Forestry Commission) and [a] lack of cooperation among the police, the community and the FC. (TTR, 2006, p. 2).

In providing some background to the problem, Mr. Gyedu observed that the increase in illegal logging is due to the inability of the Forestry Commission to check timber felling and to ensure concessionaires comply with harvesting procedures. The local people are of the view that the government's redeployment of forest guards in Ghana has been one of the major contributory factors. Another illegal practice closely linked to illegal logging is the illegal poaching practiced by hunters in the forest.

3.3.7.3 Poaching

Some of my informants (especially those who live close to these forests) discussed the illegal activities of poachers, who secretly enter the reserves to hunt for game with traps. It was revealed that some corrupt district forestry officials connive with the hunters, and this affects the protection of endangered species in the traditional area. The hunters I interviewed generally agreed that their activities had adversely affected the faunal capacity of the area, and some of the animal species they mentioned hunting have been considerably reduced in number, including the groove-toothed forest mouse (*Leimacomys buettneri*); the toothed shrew (*Crocidura foxi*); the red-fronted gazelle (*Gazella rufifrons*); the spotted wild dog (*Lycan pictus*); the white-thighed black-and-white colobus (*Colobus vellerosus*); the white-necked otter (*Lutra maculicollis*); the pied bat (*Chalinolobus superbis*); the bongo (*Tragelaphus euryceros isaacii*); the bush buck (*Tragelaphus sylvaticus*); the buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*); the black duiker (*Cephalophus niger*); the side striped jackal (*Canis adustus*); and the grey parrot (*Psittacus erithacus*)—the final three having now completely disappeared from the area. Many of these species are also listed as globally threatened species by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Studies have established that hunting for game in West and Central Africa poses a great danger not only to biological diversity and ecological processes, but

also to future generations of people, whose protein needs and income are highly dependent on bushmeat (Bowen-Jones et al., 2002 and Milner-Gulland et al., 2003, cited in Swensson, 2005, p. 5). The FAO twenty-third regional conference for Africa (2004),—which had the theme ‘The bushmeat crisis in Africa: conciliating food security and biodiversity conservation in the continent’—noted that ‘the unsustainable bushmeat utilization in West and Central Africa is currently one of the most important food security and biodiversity conservation challenges facing the region’.

In Ghana, a ban is usually placed on the hunting of all wild animals with the exception of the grass cutter during ‘close season’, which takes place between August and December. *Ɔpanin* Yaw Barima (personal communication 18, November 2011), an experienced hunter at Mpatasie, told me that the ban is a pre-colonial practice, but has been adopted by the governments of Ghana. It became a regulatory mechanism backed by the Wildlife Conservation Regulations L. I. 685 of 1961. However, despite this regulation, it is common to see bushmeat being sold by ‘Chop bar’ operators (local restaurants) in Berekum, and indeed throughout the country all the year round.

3.3.7.4 Bush fires

According to my key informants, the most serious of all the factors that impact on the environment are the annual bush fires the traditional area experiences, especially during the *Harmattan* (dry) season. Interviewees pointed out that bushfires are the major cause of the loss of the basic forest products mentioned above. It was also mentioned that bushfires are the principal threat to sacred groves in the area. The local people said that several decades ago, all the towns and villages in the traditional area used to have sacred groves. In some cases, one could count as many as ten groves in one village or town. However, most of these groves have now been degraded or destroyed through bush fires. Bushfires generally degrade forests since they cause forests to lose their natural status and their ability to influence the weather in the area. Interviewees also said they were partly responsible for the loss of wildlife in the area. This was noted to have far reaching ecological implications. For instance, some of the experienced farmers I interviewed pointed out that many

plants, and animals such as worms and insects, play crucial ecological roles, including the recycling of nutrients, and thus ultimately aid soil fertility. These empirical claims have been ratified by scientific studies elsewhere (see Fisher, 1978; Morris et al., 1991).

In addition to the loss of land fertility, bush fires also lead to the loss of important medicinal herbs, which a preponderance of the Berekum people rely on for their health needs (see Brown, 1992). The above situation partly explains why species of grass are gradually taking over the vegetation that comprises the study area. Interestingly, some respondents said that the emergence of grasses in the area is now encouraging the rearing of cattle there. In view of this development, the presence of the Fulani (major cattle farmers in West Africa) is on the increase in Berekum. However, there is strong resistance to this development, and there have been a number of protests due to the destruction of people's farms. I was told by Ameyaw Martin of Akroforo (personal communication 13, November 2011) that these cattle owners have secretly been sending their herds to graze in the national reserve. Bushfires are sometimes accidental, but the phenomenon of group hunting is emerging fast in the study area and, according to one hunter that I interviewed—Kwaku Amoabeng, (personal communication, 13 December 2011)—hunters deliberately set fires during the *Hamattan* (dry) season in order to force game out to be shot (or else killed by the fire). My informant said that this practice represents a new phenomenon in the area, and that although there is legislation against starting bushfires, its enforcement is very weak. Mr. Gyedu (personal communication, 16 October 2011) explained that bush fires are a central cause for the rapid depletion in forest cover in the Berekum area.

3.3.7.5 Threat to the Koraa River and its Fish Sanctuary

Some of my interviewees informed me that the heavy encroachment on the Koraa



Figure 4. The Koraa fish sanctuary now.

basin has led the once-forested basin of the river to be gradually taken over by grasses. There used to be a fish sanctuary on the river, which the local people (and tourists to the area) visited to watch fish in the river from the bridge on *nkyida* (sacred days or holidays). Now, however, the *Asuo Koraa*

(river Koraa) has become seasonal, and it is only during the sporadic rainfalls that

the fish come out. At the time I was gathering the data, weeds (mostly grasses) had taken over most of the section where people stood to watch the fish from the bridge, and it is now difficult to see the fish even when it rains.

During the data collection phase of my research, I found that land very close to river Koraa—the main river in the study area—had been sold, and is now under plantain and coconut plantation. Nana Adjei (personal communication, 17 November 2011) informed me that many rivers are being destroyed by the activities of sand contractors, who go very close to the river-beds to take sand. The trenches they leave after their activities impede the smooth flow of the rivers because they collect some of the water from the rivers and thus affect their natural flows. When the local people complained about this, the contractors claimed that they have been issued permits by the Municipal Assembly of Berekum. It was also noted that another river—the River Berekum, from which the traditional headquarters ‘Berekum’ takes its name—is almost dried up now. This is because its catchment area is now almost covered with buildings. Some of these buildings are virtually in the channel of the river, as are farms close to the banks of the river. It surprises many people that the catchment area for this river houses an important sacred grove in Berekum, within which important rituals connected with the main festival of Berekum (*Kwafie*) are performed. Nana Kwabena Wusu (personal communication, 8 September 2011) told me that all the blackened stools of the past chiefs of Berekum are brought here during the evening of the festival day for ritual bathing (washing). A car-washing bay has now even been constructed close to the river and the waste water flows into the river.

3.3.7.6 Pollution

According to Mr. Oliver, the Berekum Municipal Environmental Officer (personal



Figure 5. A heap of refuse, dumped right in the centre of the Municipal capital.

communication, 14 December 2011), the general state of the sanitation in the municipality is a source of worry to many people. The management of both the solid and liquid wastes in the traditional area

leaves much to be desired. Heaps of refuse are also a common sight in the traditional area, especially in the Municipal capital – Berekum. One can sometimes

witness stray animals in the middle of the town feeding on the refuse dumps. Moreover, the majority of people in the municipality rely on public conveniences, but these places are managed very poorly. The Municipal Assembly that owns them is unable to regularly buy the needed detergents to clean the toilets. This is a major source of worry to those who live close to these toilets, both because of their unbearable stench and the attendant health problems.

The waste disposal sites in the area are also a problem as they are not efficiently managed. The human excreta are not treated, but simply dumped raw at



Figure 6. Caked human excreta at the dump site in Berekum

the sites, and passers-by can be witnessed covering their noses whenever they are close to the dumping sites. These sites become dry and caked during the dry season, and I was told by the Municipal Environmental Officer

that the caked excreta are set on fire in the dry season. This practice is another source of bush fires. All these problems are the result of inadequate resources to acquire the necessary logistics to manage them ecologically. This pollution impedes the fight against global warming that the world has on its hands today.

Another source of pollution is noise-making. Noise pollution is high, particularly in the Municipal capital, Berekum. This is perpetrated by drinking bars (local pubs), restaurants, music shop operators and churches, particularly the penteco-charismatic group.

The religious demography table of Berekum on page 108 shows that Christian-related groups dominate. In Ghana, Christians are generally noted for making high levels of noise during their worship sessions as the use of modern musical gadgets is a key element to their worship today, so even a church with a low number in its congregation may make a lot of noise with their musical instruments. At times, the level of the noise becomes unbearable during their special prayer sessions—which they called “all-night” or “half-night” sessions. Many of my informants said that people are, however, afraid to complain for the fear of being tagged as ‘anti-Christ’

by Christians. This makes it difficult for people to get good sleep after a day's work. There are provisions in the country's law against noise pollution, but the police are not keen to enforce these laws. Mr. Oliver, the Municipal environmental Officer (personal communication, 14 December 2011), lamented about this situation, but said his hands were tied since the police were not keen to enforce the law against excessive noise-making in the area.

Yet another source of pollution comes from the activities of what is known as 'table-saw-milling'. Instead of setting up their milling machines at the light industrial area provided by the Municipal Assembly, plants are set up within the residential areas all over the municipality, and the dust that is produced by the table-saw-milling is a source of worry to those who live close to them.



Figure 7. Some of the Table –Saw- Milling sites at the heart of residential areas in Berekum.

During my fieldwork, I discovered that apart from financial motive for table-saw-milling, some of the millers are completely ignorant about the effects of their industry in the area. For instance, in responding to questions about the negative effects of the table-saw-milling on the environment, Kwasi Jacob (personal communication, 10 November 2011, at his workshop)—a table saw-miller and wood seller – asked whether it made any difference if the trees were logged, since crops do well even in the northern parts of Ghana, where the vegetation is dominantly grasses with very few trees. This represents a clear confirmation of one of the concerns shared by most of my key informants—that many of the younger generations lack even a basic knowledge of their surroundings, with many failing to understand the consequences of their actions, and only taking an interest in the monetary benefits that they can accrue. This is one of the hurdles that must be crossed in the people's quest to find a lasting solution to the environmental problems that are now

confronting the area. Thus, the study area has many environmental problems, but those provided above constitute the major ones. Having surveyed the environmental problems in the study area, my next focus is to examine some of the major causes of these problems within the study area.

3.4 Factors accounting for the environmental degradation in Berekum

Through analysing the data, it was found that a combination of factors is responsible for the environmental degradation in Berekum. The main ones will now be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.4.1 Over reliance on the scientific methods of environmental management

I have already indicated that combined factors account for the current environmental situation in both Berekum and Ghana as a whole, but the issues involved will be better explained or appreciated if they are analysed within the broader context of the colonial experience and its attendant effects. My interactions with the key informants revealed the heavy reliance on scientific methods now (by those in charge of environmental management in the area) for addressing environmental problems to the neglect of indigenous methods is one of the key problems that underwrites the difficulties they experience in trying to handle environmental issues in Berekum, and that this can be more broadly generalised to Ghana as a whole. The issue of how to balance economic growth against environmental concerns was also identified as a significant problem, and this difficulty is grounded in the fact that economic considerations are infused in all areas of Ghana's political decision-making (see Drazen, 2000).

There is an interplay between political and economic decisions with regard to resource management and how economic decisions impact on environmental issues in Ghana. Nana Akumfi Ameyaw (personal communication, 12 September 2011) emphasised the idea that the colonial masters were to be blamed for the over-exploitation of Ghana's natural resources, particularly its minerals and forest

products. He argued that the commercialisation of minerals (gold, diamonds and bauxite) and timber became more pronounced in Ghana during the colonial era. This was the time when these resources began to be exported in large quantities to the Western World. Cecile Jackson (1994) has expressed a similar view: 'Early colonial policies were concerned with securing natural resources for European interests and introduced many environmental policies to achieve this end and [to] regulate usage of natural resources' (cited in Amanor, 2001, p. 64). Nana Yaw Mensah (personal communication, 7 November 2011) observed that the imposition of the colonial masters' way of life on the African negatively affected the indigenous peoples in many ways, especially with regards to indigenous ways of conserving nature. In fact, this opinion was expressed by almost all of my respondents. Akyeampong captures the influence on colonisation in the following words:

Colonial rule in Africa privileged Western Knowledge Systems and discredited Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and provided the context for the fashioning of 'scientific knowledge' about Africa (Akyeampong, 2007).

Interestingly, some of my respondents mentioned that the modern National Forest Reserves in Ghana are a positive legacy of colonialism. For instance, reference was made to the creation of the Tain II and Pamu-Berekum Reserves, which are all located in the study area. A concern, however, is that during colonial times, Ghana experienced a lot of planned development, but lacked the recourses to systematically analyse the potential environmental impacts of this (Adarkwa, 1983; Ofori, 1991). This trend continued after the country's independence, being guided by modernisation theory, which rejects most features of indigenous life-styles in favour of alien or modern systems (Appiah-Opoku and Mulamootil, 1997). According to my key informants, this has had an adverse effect on the weal of the country, particularly the local culture.

Many of my respondents (particularly the chiefs) pointed out that the only time that politicians in Ghana make favourable comments about local people (chiefs and their subjects) is during election campaigns, when the politicians go to the various communities to solicit votes. Nana Agyemang (personal communication, 14 October 2011), for instance, observed, 'during this time one would hear that the chiefs are the fulcrum for development and thus their views are important for development.

But, contrary to this, the politicians mostly fail to consult us, even when some developmental projects that fall within our jurisdiction are being carried out'. Corroborating Nana Agyemang's claim, Nana Yaw Nkrumah (personal communication, 11 November 2011) added,

For instance, when you have an informal chat with them [politicians], you realise they recognise and appreciate the potentials of indigenous knowledge. They tell you that *nananom* have great wisdom to deal with the pressing issues in their communities most especially those that border on the management of natural resources and the conservation of the environment in general. Personally, I see this as rhetoric, for as soon as they assume political power, they relegate these ideas to the background in favour of modern scientific ones which have been inadequate in addressing the problems on the ground and, in some cases, are not applicable here.

A good number of my respondents, especially the chiefs, were not happy with the attitudes shown by contemporary Ghanaian policy-makers through their retention of many of the economic policies bequeathed to Ghana by the colonialists. For instance, economic considerations remain higher than those of environmental conservation in all the major policies in country, and logging continues to increase at an alarming rate. Mineral deposits are being overexploited throughout the country, and even lands close to river-beds/channels have been sold as building plots or farmland.

According to my respondents, one other major effect of this activity is that almost all the quality sand resources in the Berekum area have now been used up. According to Nana Kwadwo Buadu—the Secretary of the Friends of the Earth, a local environmental NGO – Berekum people now have to buy and import quality sand from far away in the Kyiraa area of the Sunyani Municipality in order to build their houses (personal communication, 12 October 2011), and this comes with a serious financial cost.

3.4.2 Overpopulation

An important factor relating to environmental degradation that was noted by almost all my key informants is the population explosion that has occurred in Berekum. They conjectured that when the population of the area was much lower, there was little pressure on the land and other natural resources, so their management was not an issue, but as the population rose, it became much more of one. The Ghanaian demographic statistics below show this dramatic population increase.

Table 4: Size of Berekum Population in relation to Ghana (%)

Year	Berekum(District)	National(Ghana
1960	39, 374	6,126, 185
1970	56,046	8, 579 313
1984	78.604	12, 296,081
2000	93,235	18, 922 079
2004	106,391	-
2006	113,650	-

Source: 2000 Population and Housing Census

The 2010 Population and Housing Census put the population of Berekum at 129,628. This means that it has witnessed a population increase of 36,293 in a decade. This analysis shows the increase in intensity of land use and the pressure put on the land for both settlement and farming purposes. As a result, the *Kontonkori* and *Kwaabaa* sacred groves in Mpatasie and Senase respectively and the *adwame* in Biadan are now residential areas.

Another effect of this population explosion is that most of the youth move to urban centres for work. According to *Okra Acheampong* (personal communication, 12 January 2012), this rural-urban drift alienates the youth from their roots as city lifestyles are different, and thus most of the youth return home with worldviews that are very different to those held within the local area. These youth, he said, are those who have received Western education, and often view the traditional way of life as old-fashioned, and are thus unprepared to listen to the

elders. They consider most of traditional explanations to issues, including ecological views, as unscientific. Moreover, when they return to their villages, they transfer their newly acquired worldviews to their peers in the area, who venerate them because of the wealth they have acquired from the cities. In fact, this view was corroborated by many of my informants.

3.4.3 Inappropriate farming methods

Many of the farmers that I interacted with during the study identified bad farming as one of the major reasons for the fast depletion of the forest and the degradation of the environment, with shifting cultivation techniques being singled out. They described shifting cultivation as a method of farming in which the farmer repeats the cropping on the same land for two to four years before moving to another plot of land to allow the previous land to fallow for five to ten years before he/she returns to it again (see Akinsanmi, 1975, pp. 72f). The farmers I talked to accepted that some years of fallow are needed for the land to regain its fertility, but contended that once the original land has been cultivated it will never return to its original state. They were unanimous in holding that although this type of farming was possible some time ago, it is no longer practicable today due to the population explosion in the area (see table 4 above). However, it is still the major farming method used in the Berekum area—hence the high rates of deforestation and degradation there. The chiefs, as custodians of the land, said that they wished they could do something about this, but contended that their hands were tied due to the population explosion, adding that although custom places them as the custodians of the land, the loyalty of the people is gradually being transferred away from them and towards the central government.

Furthermore, Yaw Barima (personal communication, 18 October 2011) stressed that a sizable proportion of the land is used for maize cultivation, but his experience as a farmer has shown that repeated cultivation of maize on the same land induces grass growth. He contends that this is what is responsible for the gradual replacement of the vegetation by grasses.

3.4.4 Protracted chieftaincy problem in Berekum

Although my respondents agreed that the influence of chiefs is waning, they stressed that no matter what the situation, the role of the chiefs as agents of development in their respective communities cannot be overemphasised. According to my informants, the chiefs provide security in terms of ensuring the smooth functioning of the labour and protecting the rights of the people that undertake communal labour for the execution of development projects. This explains why development often stalls in the areas where there are no substantive chiefs, or where there are protracted chieftaincy disputes. This even affects the smooth running of local governmental administration (see Clarke-Ekrong, 1977).

In Ghana, the land for development projects must be released by the chief, who is traditionally the custodian of the stool land in his/her area of jurisdiction (Busia, 1968; Yanka, 1995; Owusu, 2006; Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009c). Berekum, however, has not had a substantive *Omanhene* for more than a decade due to a protracted chieftaincy dispute that erupted after the demise of the substantive *Omanhene*, Nana Owusu Yiadom II. This has made the situation worse in Berekum, and the chiefs I interviewed did not hide their frustration over the matter. This issue of chieftaincy is revisited in chapter 7 where the special role that this institution plays in the life of the people is analysed.

3.4.5 General apathy

My respondents stressed the impact that people's apathy towards government property is having on development in the area, and indeed throughout Ghana. Several theories have been propounded to explain this behaviour. One of them is the colonisation experience, which suggests that, as Ghanaians saw the rule of colonial masters as rule by strangers, they have also applied this notion to any legacy that remains in the country from the colonial masters. It is suggested that this is why, for instance, Ghanaians view the stealing of government property as the stealing of the property of a stranger. This notion has become deep-rooted among Ghanaians who, even after independence, have found it difficult to do away with. According to Nana Adjei (personal communication, 17 November 2011), this explains why some

contemporary Ghanaian politicians continue to steal from the national coffers with impunity—stealing from the national reserves is not viewed as immoral. Others also blame this attitude on the way and manner in which reserves were created. The new system of managing the forests was perceived to undermine customary arrangements for ownership and for the utilisation of natural resources (Dikirr, 2005), but this non-involvement of local people in the management of the forest has encouraged apathy towards what happens to the national assets from people who live at the fringes of the reserves. In fact, these people are the worst offenders in the chain-saw business and in poaching in the forests. This may represent a registering of their resentment over the effects that the creation of these forests have had on their socio-economic lives.

One chief that I interviewed said that another problem regarding the treatment of the forests is due to the fact that over 90% of land in the country is communally owned—that is, controlled by the traditional customary tenure system, with the chiefs as the custodians—whereas the state is responsible for the trees in these lands Bamfo (2008)—the Head of Climate Change Unit of the Forestry Commission—has also made this point.

A final reason for the environmental woes of the area, according to my informants, is the influence that Christianity has had there, although this issue will be discussed in a different chapter (Chapter 7) due to the complex issues that are associated with it. The following section will now deal with the effects of the above environmental problems on the people of the study area in particular, and Ghana more generally.

3.5 The effects of the current environmental situation on the study area

During the data collection phase of this research, I observed that the people were already aware of the unacceptable level of environmental degradation in the area, and many found the situation very painful and demoralising. They were emphatic that the degradation that the environment has suffered is gradually bringing about unpredictable weather conditions in the area, and that the area is gradually been taken over by grasses. A prominent market woman said ‘some time ago, foodstuffs

like cocoyam, yam, plantain and cassava used to do very well here, but it is not the case today. At times, we have to travel afar to bring some [of these] from other areas to meet the local requirement' (Akua Ampomah, personal communication, 7 October 2011). I also noticed that although my respondents did not have indigenous terms for what have become known today as 'greenhouse gases', such as carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, etc., their comments suggested that they were aware of the existence of such gases, as well as their effects on the environment.

A quote that Chris Park made when he was analysing the 'Gaia Hypothesis'¹² here is relevant, as it echoes the implications of the above situation for Berekum people: 'The Earth will probably survive, no matter what humans do to it, but its survival might not include humans' (Park, 2007, p. 185).

3.5.1 Loss of primary basic forest product for the local people

Okyeame Okra Acheampong told me that the traditional area is experiencing an environmental crisis. The following words from him tell it all:

There has been a massive destruction of the environment. For instance, big trees, lianas, all kinds of *nhoma* [ropes] such as *sibire*, *nnɔtɔ*, and leaves like *aworomo* for making *kenkey*, and a lot more which we could use in our daily activities are now gone. It is only at some few places that you can find some. Even wild food like *nnwa* [snails]; *mmire*, *kyikyiriki* and *nsosoa* [kinds of mushroom]; and common wild fruits like *atefu*—which were in abundance here – are all now vanished in this area, all due to environmental degradation, particularly bushfires. The rainfall pattern has become erratic. This has affected food production. You know this place was noted for its big sizes of plantain, cocoyam, and cassava. The sizes of these crops today are nothing near those of some years past. What can save us is to allow the land to fallow for a longer period to regenerate (personal communication, 6 December 2011).

¹²This theory or hypothesis was first suggested by James Lovelock in 1979. It was based on the idea that the earth should be seen and treated as a living organism. Lovelock named the hypothesis after the Greek goddess, Gaea—taking from the Greek myth that sees the earth as a person (personifies the earth). The theory assumes that both the living and the non-living part of the earth are mutually interdependent and must be seen as such (see Park, 2007, p184).

Kwame Amoabeng, a hunter, corroborated *Ɔkyeame*'s assertion, adding that: 'now some animals like *nko* [parrots], *nsee* [a kind of strong beaked bird] and *abobonnua* [woodpeckers] are all gone from this area. Even my kids do not know what *asee* [singular] is, for they are no more here' (personal communication, 13 December 2012). Corroborating this further, Nana Oppong Taah Senti II, the chief of Abi, said:

There has been a vast change. The sun now shines in the extreme. The wind blows in the extreme. The rivers did not get dried up some time ago, but they get dried today. Now herbs and trees, which were not seen here before are springing up. A lot of animals, such as *esono*, *nwam*, *nsoromoa*, *ekoo*, *weataa*, *aperaa*, etc. are no more found here. We are indeed in a deep crisis (personal communication, 16 November 2011).

The effects of environmental degradation have manifested themselves in many ways in the study area, with poverty being one of its impacts.

In Ghana, whenever areas associated with wealth and general prosperity are mentioned, Berekum is one of the areas that readily comes to mind. This is because the level of poverty was low and manageable in this area in recent history. The area had a lot of successful farmers, and in the mid-1970s, *Ɔpanyin* Dabɔne—an illustrious son of the traditional area—was recognised by the government of Ghana, the Supreme Military Council (SMC 1) by having his picture printed on the old ten Cedis (¢10.00) of Ghanaian currency. Because of the wealth associated with the area, when it is said that somebody hails from Berekum, then (anywhere in Ghana) the next comment (even now) is generally '*eeh enie wowɔ sika ɔfiri se wofiri sikakrom*' (literal translation: 'then you have money, for are you from a town of money/wealth').

However, Berekum is now a shadow of its former self, and the level of poverty there is gradually increasing. The main reason for this is the degradation of the fertility of the land, which the local people depend on for their livelihood. As a result, many of the beautiful buildings—which are one of the reasons that Berekum is associated with wealth—are in a dilapidated state. Many of them have not been painted for years, as there is no money to maintain them. The situation is worse in the surrounding villages where many of the buildings are in an even more dilapidated state, and some are total ruins. I was told during the data collection phase of my research that some families have decided to sign agreements with the building

societies that have sprung up in the country in order to save their family houses from collapsing. These building societies rehabilitate the buildings and rent them out to either individual business people or corporate bodies in order to recoup their investment before handing them back to the owners. This seems to be a way for some Berekum residents to maintain their homes, but it means that family members have to relocate until the sponsors recoup their investments, which can take decades. Finding alternative accommodation is not easy in this area, due to an astronomical increase in rent advances.

The link between the above situation and the change in the local environment is that the local economy is largely agrarian (see the 1996 District report). Therefore, the level of degradation is correlated with the living standards in the area. Given such relations, DeClerck et al. (2006, p. 553) argue that: 'Ecologists must focus research on interactions between ecosystems and societies in developing countries, while development experts need to understand that environmental management is a critical component of poverty alleviation strategies'. This obviously has implications for environmental policy-makers, as an alternative source of livelihood is germane to the success of any policy that is intended to conserve the environment, particularly in developing countries. For instance, the national newspaper, *The Ghanaian Times*, reported on 29 August 2012 that some women in the Church of Pentecost at Apori in Oda (located in the Eastern region of Ghana) have begun to leave the church as a protest to preaching against illegal chainsaw activities. These women are apparently those who are marrying chain-saw operators. This is an indication that the issue of survival is one of the major driving forces in the current deforestation and environmental degradation that Ghana is experiencing.

Moreover, *The Daily Graphic*, Ghana's leading newspaper, reported in its 30 April 2013 edition that Mr Samuel Afari Dartey, the Chief Executive Officer of the Forestry Commission, has said that sixty-two forests and wildlife guards have been killed in fatal attacks of cold-blooded murder by illegal chain-saw and galamsey operators [illegal small scale miners] in the last two years. Policies connected with environmental conservation and the alleviation of poverty are complex, with research showing that environmental conservation measures have increased the poverty levels of local people in some areas due to the limits that these measures place on their access to natural resources (Brockington and Schmidt-Soltau, 2005).

This explains why proactive research is needed to bail countries out of their present predicament.

3.5.2 The outbreak of Diseases

Environmental degradation has had a serious and negative impact on healthcare delivery in Berekum. The destruction of vegetation means the destruction of medicinal herbs that play a significant role in healthcare delivery (Brown, 1992). Although the traditional area can boast of one of the finest hospitals in Ghana—the Holy Family Hospital (owned by the Roman Catholic Church)—as well as a couple of privately owned clinics, many in the area are unable to take advantage of modern healthcare provision because of poverty, and rely instead on the use of herbs. This makes the destruction of the vegetation very serious. The high level of pollution in the area is also worsening the health of the people, most seriously that resulting from the smoke from charcoal producers and the dust from table-saw-mills set up within residential areas.

Many Berekum residents may be unaware of the damage being done to their health by the charcoal producers and the table-saw-milling operating sites dotted all over the communities and the indoor biomass. But research has shown links between premature deaths in the area and the pollutants mentioned above. For instance, Ezzati's (2005) research on 'indoor air pollution and health in developing countries' established that 'emissions released from indoor biomass burning are responsible for 1.6 million premature deaths a year due to acute respiratory infection, pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses' (Ezzati, 2005, quoted in DeClerck, 2006, p. 536). This provides a pointer for the decision-makers in the area regarding how to address the mounting levels of air pollution in the municipality.

In an interview, Mr. Oliver (2011), the Berekum Municipal Environmental Officer, informed me that there is a ban on the mass-production of charcoal in the municipality, but that the enforcement of this has been lax. This laxity may, in part, be due to the astronomical increase in the price of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) that has recently occurred in Ghana. About two decades ago, it was government policy to encourage the domestic use of LPG, and gas cylinders were given free of charge to those who purchased gas stoves to promote this and serve as an incentive

to encourage people to stop using charcoal and other sources of bio-fuel. However, the current high price of LPG has become a serious disincentive for people to use it now, which may explain why law enforcement agencies are not being strict on charcoal producers. The production of charcoal results in a dual damage to humanity—apart from deforestation, the smoke resulting from the burning of the wood for the charcoal is damaging to human health, as Ezzati (2005) has shown.

The emerging field of ‘conservation medicine’—which focuses on the intersection of the environment, the ecology of human and non-human hosts, pathogens, and conservation biology—aims to reduce the spread of emerging infectious diseases (DeClerck, 2006, p. 536). To gain a better idea about pollutant-related diseases in the study area, I consulted the Holy Family Hospital—the main modern healthcare provider in the area—and was provided with the following information on pollutant-related diseases from 2007-2012.

Table 5. Pollution-Related Diseases over the past Five Years (2007-2011) in Berekum Municipality (seen in the Holy Family Hospital, Berekum)

Disease	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Asthma	164	265	286	296	252
Cholera	1	3	2	6	0
Diarrhoea	234	283	258	247	256
Dysentery	131	179	163	153	157
Typhoid	55	154	275	314	200

Source: Holy Family Hospital Records, Berekum, 2012.

The above table, provided by the main health centre in the study area, summarises the effects of pollution resulting from poor environmental management in the study area.

3.5.3 Disasters

Another serious effect of deforestation in Berekum is houses losing their roofs during heavy storms—a phenomenon which, according to my informants, is very rare. However, I was told that on the eve of Easter 2012, a heavy storm swept through Berekum and ripped the roofs off several buildings. This necessitated an urgent appeal to the government through the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO), which obviously adds to the strain on national budgets (that are already under intense pressure). Nowadays, any serious storm results in turbidity, erosion, and floods in the area, something that is new to the traditional area according to Nana Okofo Dartey (personal communication, 14 December 2011).

3.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed Berekum's environmental degradation with regards to the misuse and encroachment on the two national forest reserves in the area. The specific environmental problems in the area were found to be those of deforestation, the theft of timber products, poaching, bush fires, threats to rivers, and poor sanitary conditions. As well as considering the specific environmental problems of the area, the discussion also touched on the major reasons for the current environmental problems in the area. These were found to be an over-reliance on modern methods for conserving nature, over-population, and a decline in the authority of chiefs (who are the custodians of natural resources in their respective areas), a lack of patriotism, general apathy, and the influence of non-native religions within the area. The environmental degradation was found to have resulted in the loss of primary forest products for the local community, an increase in poverty, an outbreak of diseases, and natural disasters (such as buildings losing their roofs without the shelter of trees during storms). Having explored the environmental problems, their causes and effects in the current chapter, the next chapter will now examine Berekum people's worldviews and native religion, which both impact on their ecological practices.

CHAPTER 4 THE TRADITIONAL BEREKUM WORLDVIEW AND RELIGION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter has two sections. Section one examines the Berekum people's worldview and this worldview is reflected in the daily life of the people. The second section examines the current religious landscape of the study area.

4.2 The Berekum Worldview

I begin this chapter by examining the worldview of the people under study, as my observations revealed that their worldview forms the basis of their conduct. By 'the Berekum worldview', I am referring to the set of assumptions that the Berekum people hold about the universe, which informs their understanding and interpretation of the nature of reality. In other words, their worldview concerns how they perceive or understand the world and their immediate environment to be.

Explaining what a worldview entails, Ikenga-Metuh (1985) says that it is 'the complex of a people's belief about the origin, structure and organization of the universe, and the laws governing the interaction of beings in it' (1985, p. 37), while Elkin (1938, cited in Rose, James and Watson, 2003, p. 59) sees a worldview as 'a view of nature and life, of the universe and man, which unites them with nature's activities and species' in a bond 'of mutual life-giving'. In other words, a worldview refers to the set of basic assumptions that a people have developed for explaining reality and their place and purpose in this world (Mkhize, 2004). For Bauman et al. (2011), a worldview is 'a set of basic assumptions through which one views reality, usually shared among members of a community and often heavily influenced by religion' (Bauman et al., 2011, p. 235). Kraft (1989) defines a worldview as the set of 'culturally structured assumptions, values and commitments / allegiances underlying a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions' (1989, p. 20), adding that worldview is not separate from culture. This affirms the

Berekum people's view that worldview is a legacy of the progenitors of their society.

Another word that scholars sometimes use instead of worldview is 'cosmovision' (Miller, 1999; Slikkerveer, 1999). Slikkerveer for instance, says cosmovision:

Refers specifically to the way in which the members of a particular culture perceive their world, cosmos or universe. It represents the view of the world as a living being, its totality including not only natural elements such as plants, animals and humans, but also spiritual elements such as spirits, ancestors and future generations. In this view, nature does not belong to humans, but humans to nature. As the concept of cosmovision includes the relationship between humans, nature and the spiritual world, it describes the principles, roles and processes of the forces of nature, often intertwined with local belief systems (Slikkerveer, 1999, p. 171).

Hence, a cosmovision or a worldview can be described as a mental lens through which people perceive the world (Olsen, Lodwick and Dunlap, 1992, cited in Hart 2010, p. 2).

According to Nana Kwabena Wusu (personal communication, 12 October 2011), the worldview of the people of Berekum traditional society is the sum of their core ideas about the universe and their role within it. This understanding reflects Chima's (1999, p. 35) view (as cited in Kamwaria and Katola, 2012, p. 50) that 'World-view is humanity's idea of the universe; the organization of ideas that answers questions such as: Who am I? Among what do I move? What are my relations to other people, things, or events?' Nana Wusu explained further that their worldview is the product of systematic reflections on phenomena and experiences that their forebears have bequeathed to them. Thus, a logical deduction from the above conception of worldview is that it is something that is abstractly constructed, but rather than remaining as something that exists purely at the abstract or conceptual level, it is manifested in real life through informing choices and actions via a people's culture (see Kraft, 1996). In other words, culture acts as a vehicle for the transmission of a worldview. It also follows that any new understanding of a

phenomenon or experience will affect the expression or the manifestation of a worldview that is expressed in the culture.

For the people of Berekum traditional society, the world is made up of both simple and complex phenomena, some of which are visible and others which are not. In order for humans to be able to create meaning in their lives, or to live meaningful lives, they have to be able to understand the various elements in the universe and how they relate with each other (*Okyeame* Okra Acheampong, chief spokesperson of the *Akwamuhene* of the Berekum Traditional Area, personal communication, 7 November 2011). Berekum people also conceive the human condition to be full of uncertainties and insecurities. These insecurities have led humans to realise that they are not 'whole', and thus need to 'lean on' something that can help to bring them security. This succour, according to my informants, can be found in the maintenance of a harmonious relationship with the spiritual world. This explains why the spiritual hugely influences their life and thought. *Okyeame* Okra Acheampong further explained that:

We traditional Africans do not act in a vacuum. There is a reason for every single act that we undertake. We believe that there are two interconnected realities of this world. These are the 'seen' (physical) and the unseen (spiritual) dimensions of life. These realities must necessarily be in harmony for things to move on well. Those who know and understand this reality succeed in their endeavours. It was this understanding that made *nananom* (ancestors) to always connect the 'seen' to the 'unseen' in all their endeavours. Anyone who loses this basic principle will never understand the African (personal communication, 7 November 2011)

This statement suggests that the supernatural (or the spiritual) plays a major role in the life and thought of the people of Berekum Traditional Society. Smith's (1986) study on the Akan confirms this view, and Mbiti's research (1969) among other African peoples revealed that they conceive of themselves as having two-dimensional lives, namely, their life in the world of spirits and their life in the world of humans (or the physical world). However, the division of the universe into the spiritual and the physical can be said to be for purposes of convenience, as the two are, somewhat paradoxically, only viewed as one entity. This is because the Berekum people believe that the two worlds cannot exist independently of each other (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009b). In other words, the worlds of humans and

spirits are not independent worlds, for one has no meaning without the other (Dickson and Ellingworth, 1969). Olupona corroborates this thus:

African spiritual experience is one in which the “divine” or the “sacred” realm interpenetrates into the daily experience of human person so much that religion, culture, and society are imperatively interrelated. The significance of this interaction is that there is no clear-cut distinction between religious and secular spheres or perspective of the ordinary life experience (Olupona, 2000, p. xvii).

However, although the spiritual and the physical are indispensable to each other, the world of spirits presides over the world of humans. In the words of Nana Kwabena Wusu (personal communication, 12 October 2011), ‘*Eyi ne se nea Berekumfoɔ hunu wiase fa*’, which translates ‘this is how the traditional Berekum people see or perceive the universe and all that is in it to be’. This statement summarises the traditional Berekum people’s worldview. The above discussion reveals that the supernatural (religion) plays a major role in the Berekum people’s worldview.

In an interview, Nana Kwabena Wusu observed that because the Berekum worldview is underpinned by its indigenous religion, entities such as land, water, animals and plants are not just materials of production, but also have a place in their religion or spirituality (personal communication, 12 October 2011, at Nana Takyiwaa’s palace at Senase). However, *Opanin* Kyere Kwame (personal communication, 2011) also pointed out that whilst respect is accorded to all elements of creation in the Berekum worldview, those that constitute the *primary* life-sustaining elements of creation are accorded more respect than others. For instance, trees, animals and rivers are fundamental or primary sustaining elements for human life and, for that reason, more attention is given to such objects in practice. Corroborating the above view, Nana Okofo Dartey, the *Gyasehene* of Berekum Traditional Area, observed: ‘Humans have a duty to conserve God’s creation. That is why one of the duties of a chief is to ensure that the forests in his area are not depleted anyhow. This also explains why we at times earmark a place as a sacred grove’ (personal communication, 14 December 2011). Millar (1999) and Gonese (1999) have made similar observations. Giving credence to this view of traditional Africans, Mbiti (1991) says that living in harmony with nature is so dear to indigenous African peoples that they tend to assign biological life even to

inanimate objects (Mbiti, 1991, p. 44). In the African worldview, the universe is the creation of God, and thus is itself viewed in religious terms. African peoples thus strongly believe that they have a duty to protect and conserve the universe for both secular and religious reasons. In addition, Mbiti points out that:

African religion sees nature as a friend of man (humans) and vice versa. He (humanity) is an integral part of nature and the priest of nature. The destruction or pollution of nature (including air, water, forest, land, animals, trees, plants and useful insects) brings harm to all life in general and injuries to human welfare in particular. Therefore, man [humanity] has to preserve nature and use it wisely, indeed mercifully, for his own and its survival (Mbiti, 1991, p. 44).

The worldview of the traditional African peoples is markedly distinct from the dominant Western worldview (Walker, 2004; Little Bear, 2000; Pichette et al., 1999). Traditional Berekum Society, and indeed many traditional African societies, do not make the clear distinction between what we now refer to as ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ in Western and North American societies. Numerous scholars now distinguish between the terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’, and many people prefer to be identified as ‘spiritual’ rather than ‘religious’ (Taylor, 2005). For instance, the sociologist of religion Wade Clark Roof, in one of his seminal studies, observed that for many, ‘to be religious conveys an institutional connotation [while] to be spiritual...is more personal and empowering and has to do with the deepest motivations in life’ (Roof, 1993, p. 76-7, cited in Taylor, 2005). In a study aimed at discovering people’s views about the two terms, Helminiak (1996) discovered that 90% of his informants preferred to refer to themselves as spiritual rather than religious, and reported that, according to these people, religion:

Implies a social and political organization with structures, rules, officials, [and] dues [while] spirituality refers only to the sense of the transcendent, which organized religions carry and are supposed to foster (Helminiak, 1996, p. 33).

Zinnbauer et al. (1997) also found in their study that ‘religiousness is increasingly characterized as “narrow and institutional,” and spirituality [...] as “personal and subjective”’ (Zinnbauer et al., 1997, p. 563). For Taylor (2005), probably the most commonly understood difference between the two terms is seeing religion as “organized” and “institutional”, and spirituality as involving one’s deepest moral values and most profound life experiences (Taylor, 2005, p. ix).

As I have indicated above, this distinction does not arise in Berekum Traditional Society as these terms are western constructs, and hence there are no local (Akan) terms for them. Even among some of the Christians I interviewed, the distinction between the terms “religion” and “spirituality” was difficult to make. This may be due to the fact they continue to be influenced by their indigenous worldview. In the view of *Ɔpanin* Kyere Kwame, ‘it will be a contradiction to say that “I am spiritual but not religious”, for religiosity implies spirituality and vice versa in our tradition’. Nana Kwabena Wusu observes that the traditional Berekum, and for that matter, traditional Africans in general, see life in a holistic way, with the spiritual and the secular intrinsically fused together (personal communication, 12 October 2011), and Nel (2008) makes a similar observation. Another scholar that shares the traditional Berekum view is Seyyed Hossein Nasr, an important Islamic theologian and philosopher. In a paper entitled ‘The Spirituality and Religious Dimension of the Environmental Crisis’ (in Chittick, 2007), Nasr rejects the distinction between the terms “spirituality” and “religion”, contending that the term “spiritual” or “spirituality” as it is understood today did not exist until around the mid-nineteenth century, when it began to be applied in its current usage by French Catholic theologians, and this usage later crept into the English language. He emphasises that today, the term:

Denotes for many people precisely those elements of religion which have been forgotten in the West and which therefore have come to be identified wrongly with spirituality as distinct from religion. From my point of view, which is always of course a traditional one, there is no spirituality without religion (Chittick, 2007, p. 29).

This clarification can aid an appreciation of the traditional Berekum people's way of life. One should not expect to find all the trappings of Western religion and culture in non-Western societies. Such interpretations lead to misrepresentations, and such misrepresentations or misunderstandings of the African led many of the early missionaries who came to evangelise in Africa to conclude that the African has no religion. It is true that Western education and Christianity have made phenomenal inroads in the study area, and indeed many parts of Africa today, but my observations show that many of the people's lives continue to be influenced by their indigenous religious worldviews as well. Ellis and ter Haar's view that 'religious worldviews do not necessarily diminish with formal education' (2004, p. 51) is clearly seen in relation to the traditional Berekum society, with even the 'highly' educated people in the study area continuing to explain the causes of several events (such as chronic diseases) in traditional religious terms.

We have established that worldview forms a basis for the conduct of people in the traditional Berekum society. However, there are a number of aspects of worldviews that one should not overlook. One is their susceptibility to change (Hart, 2010), and another is that a sub-worldview often exists under a dominant one (Hart, 2010). This explains the slight variations in religio-cultural practices among indigenous peoples. Factors such as new experiences, increased knowledge and contact with other cultures can bring about changes in a people's worldview. It has also been noted that any new understanding of a phenomenon or experience will affect the expression or the manifestation of a worldview. This means that the traditional Berekum worldview of the 18th century would not have been exactly the same as it is in the 21st century.

The influence of Western education for instance, has created a sub-worldview in the area. The strong presence of foreign religions, such as Islam and Christianity (which is heavily underpinned by Western worldview) has affected the worldview of many people in the study area, and this has implications for ecological management there. This is because issues regarding ecology in Berekum Traditional Society are influenced by the religio-cultural worldviews of the people, and therefore anything that affects the people's worldview has ramifications for the management of the local ecosystem. This issue is given more attention in Chapter 7, which deals with the impact of colonisation and Christianity on the indigenous Berekum lifestyles and environmental management.

As a result of the above factors, it may be thought that it is difficult to talk of a single Berekum traditional worldview today. Nonetheless, there is evidence of several continuities existing together with these discontinuities and changes. In other words, one can still make a case for the traditional Berekum worldview and, despite the influence of these factors, the core combination of elements that comprise the traditional Berekum worldview remain intact and continue to direct conduct. These include the belief in a supreme being, the belief in divinities/gods, the belief in spirit beings, and the belief in impersonal (mystical) power(s) that manifest themselves in the workings of magic, sorcery and witchcraft. There is still a strong belief that the spiritual world can influence the life of human beings either positively or negatively, and there is still a strong sense of community solidarity. The traditions for getting married and naming children remain largely the same. The European system of marriage, in which marriage is a legal contract, is practised in Berekum today, but no court in the Berekum society or Ghana as a whole will register any marriage that has not been through the customary ceremony. The system of inheritance also remains largely unchanged, as does the procedure for acquiring land.

According to Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa (personal communication, October 2011, at her palace residence at Senase), the resilience of the traditional worldview in Berekum lies in the fact that its people have an attitude that is captured by the saying '*amanmre yento ntwene*', which literally translates as 'we do not throw away our customs and traditions'. Thus, one may argue that the combination of traditional religious beliefs and practices with Christianity in traditional Berekum society (and other traditional African societies) can be traced to the hold that traditional worldviews exert on these people. This is reflected in Laurenti Magesa's (1997) observation that, most of the time, African Christians 'seek comfort in their own religious symbol systems, even though these may not correspond exactly to those inculcated and expected by their Christian leaders. Indeed, these are often symbols and rituals that church leaders have explicitly condemned' (Magesa, 1997, p. 7). Mbiti and Burleson (1986, p. 12) put it thus: 'Africans come out of African religion but they don't take off their traditional religiosity. They come as they are. They come as people whose worldview is shaped according to African religion'. As the preceding analysis has shown Berekum people have a religious worldview, just as Tucker and Grim's (2009) study argues that a culture or people's worldviews are contained in religious cosmologies and expressed through rituals and symbols,

which makes it imperative to throw more light on some aspects of the religion of the Berekum people. Their religion falls under what is known as African Traditional Religion (ATR). I have already argued that, as one of the Bono sub-groups within the larger Akan ethnic group, the Berekum people's religious beliefs and practices have many similarities with the Akan people of West Africa. Traditional Berekum people, as I pointed out earlier, make little distinction between their secular and spiritual lives. Their religiosity is seen in their political, social, economic, ethical, medical and environmental lives. Just as it is in other traditional Akan societies—and even among other traditional Africans—religion is life and life, religion (Opoku, 1978, Olupona, 2000). Gyekye describes the religiosity of the African thus: 'To be born into African society is to be born into a culture that is intensely and pervasively religious and that means, and requires, participating in the religious beliefs and rituals of the community' (1996, p. 4)

Supporting the view that religious influence runs deep in the life of the people of Berekum, Akua Amponsah (personal communication, 16 October 2011, Berekum) noted that 'the knowledge of *Onyame/Onyankopɔn* (God) and his influence on us is taken for granted. That is why we have a proverb that runs '*Obi nkyere abɔ fra nyame,*' to wit 'no one teaches the child about God'. This implies that the consciousness of God is inborn, and suggests that the belief in *Onyame/Onyankopɔn* is an essential element in both Berekum and Akan religious thought. A basic belief among the traditional Berekum people is that God is everywhere, hence the common Berekum proverb '*wo pɛ sɛ woka asem kyere Onyame a, ka kyere mframa* ('If you want to tell God something, tell it to the wind'). One of the attributes of *Onyame* in the Berekum society is *brekyirehunuaɔde* ('He who can know things that are behind or hidden from him'—i.e. omniscience). In the words of *Ɔkɔmfɔɔ* Agyemang Serwaa, 'we credit *Onyame* with creation, including human beings, animals and trees. That is why we give names such as *Ɔboadee* [creator], *Bɔrebɔre* [Excavator, Hower, Carver], and *Amasu* [giver of rain] to him'¹³. This claim is supported by Ekem (2008), who says that, 'In the Akan spiritual universe, which hardly lends itself to watertight compartmentalization, *Onyame* is generally acknowledged as the creator under whom created entities carry out their functions in human societies' (Ekem, 2008, p. 35). *Ɔkɔmfɔɔ* Agyemang continues,

¹³ These words were also used by Danquah (1968) and Opoku (1978, p. 15).

‘because we believe that everyone was created by God we say ‘*yɛn nyinaa yɛ Onyame mma, obiara nnye asaase ba*’–‘all of us are the children of God no one is the child of the earth’ (personal communication, 15 December 2011). Kwaku Asamoah (personal communication, 8 Nov 2011) adds that ‘the dignity that traditional believers accord every human being is informed by their belief that everybody was created by *Onyame*’, claiming that it is because they believe that everything was created by *Onyame* that they say ‘*Asansa se nea Onyame aye nyinaa yɛ*’–‘The hawk says all that God has created is good’. Asamoah stressed that this view dictates their attitudes towards certain elements of creation, such as that they know *Onyame* to be someone who hates stubbornness, and explains why *Onyame* withdrew from human beings after creating the world. There is a myth that runs:

In the beginning God was very close to humans on earth but the women persistently hit the sky, the dwelling place of God when they pounded *fufu* (an Akan local dish). God persistently complained about this bad behaviour of the women but they were adamant. This annoyed God and thus he withdrew from humans and went further into the sky.¹⁴

Since his withdrawal, God has entrusted the rule of this world to the lesser deities, which explains why traditional believers consider the *abosom* to be the representatives or ministers of God in his theocratic government, and also why ‘we [Berekums] worship these gods, for it is a way by which we honour *Onyame*, our creator’ (Kwaku Asamoah, personal communication, 8 November 2011).

The Traditional Berekum People’s belief in God can be argued to have ecological implications as they take their belief that everything was created by *Onyame* to give them responsibilities for protecting and conserving the environment. Nana Akumfi Ameyaw summarises the influence that the belief in *Onyame* has on the people’s attitude towards creation as follows:

In God’s creation there are things that can be used [destroyed] and other that cannot be used, so the destruction of such things constitutes a sin. Even those that can be used have the right time for their use. Anything short of this is considered as a sin in our tradition. This is to ensure that we make sustainable use of natural resources (personal communication, 7 November 2011).

¹⁴ This is a commonplace myth in the study area.

Studies among other indigenous peoples support this connection. For instance, Hussain (2002) finds that the ‘conservation ethics of local communities are complex and deeply embedded in their local cultural and historical cosmologies, and are therefore often indiscernible to, or misunderstood by, outsiders’. Zahan(2000, p.6) confirms this belief among other West African societies in his essay titled ‘ Some reflections on African spirituality’ in the Olupona’s (2000) edited volume--*African spirituality: Forms, meanings and experiences*.

The Ancestors (*Nananom Nsamanfoɔ*) are another central element in traditional Berekum religion. The ancestors are described as the ‘living dead’—the departed members of the community. An interviewee noted, ‘We describe them as “living dead” because, although they are dead, we still consider them as an important part of our society, for they continue to influence our lives’ (Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa, Kurontihemaa, personal communication, 12 October 2011, Berekum Traditional Area).

Nana Kwabena Wusu, the *Twafoɔhene* of the *Kurontihene* of Berekum Traditional Area added:

It is not every departed member of the family that we confer ancestorship on. To qualify for it, one must have led an exemplary live, married and had children, died a natural death [not through an accident or any violent means] and must have advanced in years among others. Since the ancestors constitute the forebears of the living, thereby being initiators of the core values, rules and regulations of the community—including the traditional ecological knowledge that is in use today—there is no way they [ancestors] will not be mentioned in discussion of traditional ecological knowledge and practices. Herein lies the ecological importance of the belief in ancestors (personal communication, 12 October 2011).

Another belief that is central to Berekum people’s religion is that of the *abosom nnuasa* (myriad of lesser deities), which are the multiplicity of other spirit beings in the universe. These spirit beings are believed to inhabit natural objects such as rocks, mountains, caves, trees, rivers, animal, etc. In addition, as Yaw *Kɔmfɔɔ*

hinted, all the deities in Berekum have particular animals or trees as taboos, and some have more than one animal or tree taboo (personal communication, 13 November 2011).¹⁵ These beliefs influence Berekum people's attitudes towards natural objects, and the relationship between natural object and deities explains why contravening any of the taboos in relation to natural objects is a matter of concern to the entire community. This is because the breaking of a taboo is viewed as *mmusuo* (a serious sin), as it can arouse supernatural anger towards the people (Nana Kwabena Wusu, personal communication, 12 October 2011, at Nana Takyiwa's palace in Senase). This belief may be explained through the principle of acting for the collective good (collective responsibility), and could be argued to have sustained the endurance of traditional ecological laws in the past as, according to Nana Yeboah (personal communication, October 2011), there is a strong belief in Berekum Traditional Society that an individual's acts of omission and commission can both result in collective suffering. For instance, the defilement of the ancestors, local gods or spirit beings can invoke the wrath of the spiritual entity involved, not only on the perpetrator(s), but on the entire community as well. In consequence, members of the society police each other's actions in order to safeguard the overall weal of the community. Such beliefs also predispose each and every member of the traditional society to vigilance. However, Nana Yeboah noted that these beliefs are no longer as strong and widespread in contemporary Berekum as they were in the past because of colonisation and the influence of other religions.

Furthermore, Berekum people's belief in *mmoatia* also has ecological implications. The people in the study area loosely translate *mmoatia* as 'dwarfs', but interaction with those who claim to be in contact with them suggests that they refer to a type of little spirit or fairy of the forest. The origins of *mmoatia* within the traditional Berekum religious belief system is unclear. The word '*mmoatia*' is a combination of two Akan words, *mmoa* (animals) and *tia* (small or short). Thus, *mmoatia* literally means 'short animals'. However, they are generally seen as something approximating a tiny human being, which makes it difficult to stipulate precisely what sort of beings the *mmoatia* are believed to be—animals or esuque entities. However, the existence of *mmoatia*, and their ability to influence the

¹⁵ Falconer (1992) also discusses these beliefs in his study among the Asante.

behaviour of human beings both negatively and positively is seen as a reality among the Berekum people and the Akan more generally.

An interview with Kofi Mensah, who is known as *mmoatiakɔmfɔ* (the priest of dwarfs) in his community, Koraso, threw some light on the belief and activities of *mmoatia* in the area. He said that he has been in league with *mmoatia* for the past 37 years, and reports that although he has never physically seen them before, he hears them when they speak through whistling. He claimed to have first come into contact with *mmoatia* during one of his hunting expeditions—while in the forest, he saw a *konko* (a small ant house), which he destroyed, and then heard a voice saying ‘*yɛbɛfa wo*’, meaning ‘we will take you’. He could not see anybody around, and on returning home, he said that he saw visions and heard voices in his sleep commanding him to do all sort of things. From this time onwards, he reported receiving accoutrements or paraphernalia on a daily basis from the *mmoatia*. Most of these were shown to me at his shrine. He said that he had been a Methodist before his encounter with the *mmoatia*, and that he had attempted to sever his relationship with them so that he could return to the Methodist church, which he did by throwing away all the accoutrements they had given him. But, in his own words, ‘I ended up in a hospital. I nearly died. So I quickly went back to them’. He told me that his association with the *mmoatia* has made him believe that they are not by nature evil, as he was made to believe prior to his encounter with them. He said that they hate wanton destruction of nature, in particular forests and animals such as *kotere* (ground agama), *pompoyini* (red-headed rock agama) and *ntatia* (ants).

My informant also claimed that forests and mountainous areas are very important to the *mmoatia*, as they serve as their abode, and that the *mmoatia* would sometimes ask him to carry out sacrifices for rivers. He stated that the *mmoatia* are a major source of traditional medicine and help those who respect them, but only deal with evil-minded people in the community. He added that most of the *tumi* (power) in the *abosom* are from the *mmoatia*, which makes the *abosom* inferior to the *mmoatia* in Akan religious thought (personal communication, 16 December 2001, at his shrine at Koraso). This also means that *mmoatia* play a key role in *abisaa* (divination) – a key means of discovering the unknown in the study area (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012b).

The analysis of the above narrative shows that *mmoatia* are conceived of as eco-centric beings—i.e. they have a central interest in the preservation of nature. The destruction of even the *konko* (the ant house), and the subsequent possessing of Kofi Mensah by them attest to this. The fact that forests are associated with *mmoatia* means that the belief in *mmoatia* has ecological implications for members of the community, and this is also seen in the fact that the origins of most sacred groves in the study area are linked with *mmoatia*. This link makes people afraid to enter such forests, and this prevents them from a degree of degradation.

An important feature of Berekum religion—which is shared by other African peoples (Smith, 1950; Parrinder, 1961)—is the hierarchical arrangement of spiritual entities in their religion. This is headed by the *Onyame/Onyankopon* (who is also known by other names), with the next in rank being the *Nananom nsamanfoɔ* (Ancestors), then the *abosom nnuasa* (the lesser gods/deities). The base of the hierarchy is occupied by *asunsum* (impersonal forces), which manifest themselves in the workings of *nnusem* (broadly translated as magic), *abayisem* (witchcraft), and *adutosem* (broadly translated as sorcery), *mmoatia*, and *nsumanssem* (charms and amulets – fetishes) (Nyina Kofi Bosomfoɔ Kwame Agyemang, personal communication, 23 November 2011, at his residence at Koraso). This information was corroborated by other *akɔmfɔɔ* (traditional priests) (see also Williamson, 1965, p. 104).

One contested issue here concerns the position of the *mmoatia* and the *abosom*. According to Kofi Mensah—*mmoatiakɔmfɔɔ*—the *abosom* are inferior to *mmoatia* as they receive their *tumi* (power) from the *mmoatia*. This, however, contradicts traditional Berekum and Akan beliefs. As was noted earlier, the traditional Berekum people believe that the *tumi* of the *abosom* is derived directly from *Onyame*. This explains why they view the *abosom* as the ministers in God's theocratic government, which should place them above the *mmoatia*. I tried to cross-check the veracity of *mmoatiakɔmfɔɔ*'s assertion, but nobody else corroborated it. A common view, however, is that the *abosom* are in league with the *mmoatia*. I therefore consider *mmoatiakɔmfɔɔ*'s assertion to be a result of the aggrandisement of the *tumi* of *mmoatia*, probably as a result of his association with them, given that his assertion is not confirmed by traditional Berekum religious thought.

The hierarchical arrangement of the spiritual entities in both the traditional Berekum and traditional Akan worldviews implies that the cultic attention they give

to these supernatural entities varies in degree. That is, the higher the position of the entity, the higher the cultic attention it receives. They also believe that there are both good and evil spirits in the pantheon of spirit beings but all these entities qualify for cultic attention because they are capable of influencing the life of humans either positively or negatively. In the words of Kalu (2000):

Human beings manoeuvre to tap the resources of the benevolent spirits to ward off the machinations of the devouring spirits. To achieve this vicarious goal, human beings weave enduring covenants with these spirits (Kalu, 2000, p.56).

From my focus group discussions with traditionalists (i.e. adherents to the traditional religion), I realised that the heavy reliance on the *abosom* in matters of the administration of their society stems from the close link that they believe to exist between the *abosom* and *Onyame*. What I gathered from the interviews made me believe that it may not be far from accurate to describe the system of government among the traditional Berekum people as the ‘rule of the *abosom*’. The chiefs, clans and family heads rely on the advice of the *abosom* through the oracular consultations they make when major decisions are to be taken in their communities, even today. For instance, during the selection of a chief, the *abosom* are consulted through divination in order to ascertain which of the contestants is preferred by the ancestors. Even after the chief is selected, he or she has to rely on the advice of the *abosom* for the day-to-day running of the community (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009c).

My informants also emphasised that the gods and the ancestors sometimes fail them, but that *Onyame* does not. They cited herbalists and priests at the shrines telling their patients ‘*Onyame boa a wobɛ te apɔ*’ (‘if God permits, you will get well’), in addition to everyday sayings such as ‘*Onyame boa me*’ (‘God help me’), ‘*wo ne Onyame nkɔ*’ (‘go with God’) as examples. These sayings suggest that the traditional Akan people conceive God to be supreme, and *Onyame* to be the ultimate recipient of all the sacrifices, prayers and the cultic attention they offer.¹⁶

Berekum religious life has an emphasis on being communal rather than individualistic, which is evident in the cultic attention given to *Nananom nsamanfo*

¹⁶ All the traditional priests interviewed shared this view.

(ancestors) and the *abosom*. This cultic attention is seen on sacred days such as *Akwasidae* (Sunday *Adae*),¹⁷ and the annual festival days for the gods and ancestors. The annual festivals are occasions for the people of Berekum to demonstrate a renewal of their commitments to their objects of worship. On these occasions, people redeem their pledges or promises to the spirit beings as well as making new ones. The festivals are used to show their gratitude to their gods and their ancestors for providing them with protection over the previous year. They also use these occasions to ask for protection and blessings from their gods and ancestors for the coming year (Nana Okofo Dartey, personal communication, 14 December 2011, at his palace in Berekum). Although the dominant form of cultic attention in Berekum is communally-based, it is also very important at the personal level, especially for individuals who have their own personal deities.

Two main types of *abosom* are held to exist in Berekum Traditional Area. The first category comprises *tete abosom* (nature gods),¹⁸ which Opoku Asare refers to as ‘ancient tutelary divinities’ (1978, p. 55). They are communally owned, and have been worshipped from time immemorial (*Okomfoɔ* Kwame Agyemang, personal communication, 14 October 2011, at his shrine in Jinijini). *Nyina Kofi Bosomfoɔ* Kwame Agyemang corroborated this categorisation (personal communication, 23 November 2011). This type of *abosom* are believed to be the children of *Onyame*, acting as his representative on Earth, and are found in every town and village in the traditional area. A god in this category is known as a *kurobosom* (town or village god). Some towns or villages have more than one of them, in which case they are referred to as *kuroabosom* (town or village gods). Among these gods are two (*Afuofu* and *Tankwasi*) that are considered as *ɔman abosom* (*ɔman* [state] gods). That is, these gods belong to the whole traditional area, and festivals for these two gods have to precede the--*Kwafie*--the main festival for the traditional area (*Okomfoɔ* Yaw, personal communication, 7 November 2011, at his shrine in Fetentaa). *Afuofu* is housed in the palace of the *ɔmanhene* (Paramount chief) of Berekum Traditional Area, whilst *Tankwasi* is housed at Biadan, a village located about three kilometres from Berekum town.

¹⁷ For details on Akan *Akwasidae*, see McCaskie (2002).

¹⁸ This category was mentioned by all the traditional priests interviewed.

The second category of gods in Berekum is *abusua abosom* (clan or family gods). The influences of these personal gods are limited to the clan, family or the individual respectively. These gods have recent origins, since many of them take the form of *asuman/bansere* (charms and amulets) (Yaw *Kɔmfoɔ*, personal communication, 7 November 2011, at his shrine in Fetentaa). The general belief among the traditional Berekum people is that all these types of gods play a role in God's theocratic government, and thus require human attention.

As *Onyame* is credited with creation, the traditional Berekum people believe that there is a bond between human beings and other creatures. This relationship is a spiritual one, because all life within creation is viewed to exist in a unitary form due to the possession of a *sunsum* (spirit) that is suffused within life by *Onyame*, the source of all creation. Awolalu (1972) suggests this relationship marks the idea that human beings are not created to live alone, but in a relationship with other creatures, while Turaki sees human beings and other creatures – especially plants and animals – as having ‘their own existence and place in the universe as independent parts of a whole’ (Turaki, 1999, p. 95). This implies that human beings and other creatures must co-exist in a symbiotic way, a view that Graham (2002) refers to as the ‘relational worldview’.

According to the Akan myth of creation, *Odomankoma* (another name for God) created the universe as follows: He created the sky, followed by the earth, rivers and plants, and finally human beings and animals. The animals were to feed on the plants and then provide food for human beings. God realised that human beings needed protection in their environment, and thus created the spirits of waters, forests and rocks to safeguard them (see Opoku, 1978). This creation story leads both the Akan and the traditional Berekum to view the universe as a religious entity, and provides the guiding principles about creation for both the traditional Berekum and the Akan people.

Moreover, it strongly impacts on the traditional Berekum people's attitude to the non-human elements of creation, constituting the framework within which their ecological knowledge and practices are analysed in this thesis.

4.3 The Contemporary Berekum Religious Landscape

The previous sections have demonstrated that religion is a central part of the culture of the people of Berekum Traditional Society, and until 1905, African Traditional Religion was the only religion known and practised in traditional Berekum society. But today, due to their contact with the outside world through colonisation, Western education, foreign religion, and other meaning-giving systems such as humanism, the traditional area is religiously and socially plural. This means that many of the beliefs and practices outlined above have been affected, some being held less widely, some dying out completely, and others being modified into hybrid views through being combined with concepts and ideas from different faiths to form new ideas.

4.4 The Current Religious Demography of Berekum Traditional Area

During the data collection phase of the study, I discovered that Berekum now contains Traditionalist (indigenous), Christian, Muslim and Bahaist religious communities. However, a survey conducted in the study area by the District Assembly in 2002 provides the following data.

Table 6. Berekum Religious Demography

Religion	Percentage (%)
Christianity	95
Islam	2.5
Traditionalist	1.4
Other	0.9

Source: District Assembly Survey, 2002.

It is important to observe that relying on religious demographic figures in contemporary Berekum/Ghanaian society may be inaccurate, if not highly deceptive,

as, at face value, almost everybody is either a Christian or a Muslim but, functionally; the majority of the people still retain many of the beliefs and practices of their indigenous religion. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2003, p. 3) observes: ‘People accommodate in their personal worlds as many religious persuasions as they can for as long as they respond to their existential concerns’. Ikenga-Metuh (2002, p. viii) makes a similar remark about religion in Nigeria, suggesting that hybridity is a contemporary feature of the entire African religious landscape. Moreover, the numbers in the above table only add up to 99.8 percent, perhaps neglecting to mention Baha’i, which was present in the study area at the time that the survey was conducted.

During the fieldwork, I also observed that some of my respondents were not being truthful about their religious affiliations. For instance, in the focus group discussions and joint interviews, the first person’s answer seemed to influence the responses of the other member(s) of the group, especially when the first respondent claimed to be a Christian. This became clear when they began to answer my questions, as I could tell from their responses what their actual religious affiliations were. I frequently asked those informants why they were not truthful about their religious lives, and the common answer was, ‘that is the trend now’. This is because Christians abuse them for saying they belong to the *nananom* religion—i.e. African Traditional Religion. But they also pointed out that surprisingly those who claim to be Christians quickly seek help from the traditional priests anytime that they (Christian converts) face misfortunes beyond their control. This confirms that the people have not abandoned their indigenous beliefs in spite of their conversion to a new faith—Christianity. But the issue is, why should they abuse their colleagues for being members of the religion which they themselves (Christian converts) have not repudiated completely and even resort to whenever in trouble? This reaffirms the view that ‘Africans come out of African religion but they don’t take off their traditional religiosity’ (Mbiti and Burleson, 1986, p. 12). This attitude provides one explanation for why the indigenous religion persists in the area despite the inroads of Christianity. This issue will be revisited in the course of the discussion.

4.4.1 The Traditionalist Community

The main traditional worship centres in the traditional area are found in the various shrines located in the towns and villages. Some of these shrines are not as active as they used to be and some have become dormant where there are a lack of worshippers to assist the priests, while cultic attention has completely ceased in others due to a lack of priests. The following table lists some of the deities and their shrines, as well as their current status.

Table 7 Some deities in the Berekum Traditional Area

No	Name of community	Name of Deity/Shrine	Current status of cultic attention
1	Abi	<i>Sira</i>	Dormant
2	Abisaas.e	<i>Adampa</i>	Dormant
3	Adom	<i>Tigare</i>	Dormant
4	Akroforo	<i>Afuofu</i>	Active
5	Amomaso	<i>Sheneba Kwadwo</i>	Dormant
6	Biadan	<i>i Tankwasi</i>	Dormant
		<i>ii Tankwabena</i>	Cultic attention has ceased
		<i>iii Nsuo Yaa</i>	Dormant
		<i>iv Nkonkonsa</i>	Dormant
7	Berekum (Central)	<i>Nana Mase</i>	Active
8	Botokrom	<i>Sakati Kwaku</i>	Active
9	Domfete	<i>i Bentin</i>	Dormant
		<i>ii Boabe</i>	Cultic attention has ceased
		<i>iii Nangro</i>	Cultic attention has ceased
10	Fetentaa	<i>i Tankwadwo</i>	Dormant
		<i>ii Tanyaw</i>	Active

		<i>iii Nimo</i>	Active
		<i>iv Akwatia</i>	Dormant
11	Jinijini	<i>i Tanframa</i>	Active
		<i>ii Boaban</i>	Active
12	Kato	<i>i Ntoafri</i>	Cultic attention has ceased-- , shine in ruins
		<i>ii Nana Gyabi</i>	Cultic attention has ceased – shine ruins
13	Koraso	<i>Ngora</i>	Active
14	Kotaa	<i>Tandwomo</i>	Active
15	Kutre No. 1	<i>Taakora</i>	Active
16	Mpatapo	<i>Asubɔnten</i>	Active
17	Mantukwa	<i>Ahu</i>	Dormant
18	Mpatasie	<i>Kontɔnkori</i>	Active
19	Namasua	<i>i Benyade</i>	Dormant
		<i>ii Boɔ kofi</i>	Dormant
20	Nanasuano	<i>i Nangro</i>	Cultic attention has ceased
		<i>ii Ntensere</i>	Active
21	Nkyenkyemamu	<i>Sakati Kwaku</i>	Dormant
22	Nsapor	<i>ɔheneba</i>	Dormant
23	Senase	<i>i Tansie</i>	Active
		<i>ii Kosua Kra</i>	Dormant
24	Tewbaabi	<i>Awasu</i>	Cultic attention has ceased

In addition to the above shrines, I discovered that there are some rivers in the area that still receive cultic attention. These rivers are believed to be deities, and thus some areas along their courses have been designated as *asɔnoyɛso* (shrines), where the cultic attention that the local people refer to as *sɔno* or *gugu* takes place. Maame Akua Donko explained to me in an interview that, ‘Most often, divination takes place at such *asɔnoyɛso*. Also, on *nkyinda* [literally ‘sacred days’], the priests or in

most cases, the attendants go to the *asɔnoyɛso* to offer libation and sacrifice to the river deity concerned to ask for favours' (personal communication, 28 January 2011). According to her, some of these favours include protection and prosperity for members of the community in which the river is located, together with all the other members of the Berekum Traditional Area. She added that it was common to see people from both near and far trudging to the *asɔnoyɛso* (shrines) on sacred days to present one petition or the other, or to redeem a vow taken before the river deity. Thus, numerous food sources, such as eggs, fowl, sheep, and goats are seen at the shrines on such days. Maame Akua Donko referred to *Asuo Koraa* (The River Koraa)—the river deity she serves as an attendant—as the most powerful river deity for helping to retrieve stolen property and for protecting people in the traditional area. She said that *Asuo Koraa* has four separate *asɔnoyɛso* located in the four communities through which it runs—Korasoo, Jamdede, Biadan and Senase. Although the terms *abosomfie* and *asɔnoyɛso* are both translated into English as 'shrine', there is a difference between the two terms. In an interview, Yaw *Kɔmfɔɔ* (personal communication, 25 November 2011) explained that the term *abosomfie* (literally, 'the house of the deity/god') is reserved for the *abosom* (deities/gods) that are housed within the towns and villages—that is, whose shrines are located in the residential areas of the communities—while *asɔnoyɛso* are usually located in the bush, where rituals are performed for the spirit(s) believed to be residing in rivers, trees, mountains or any other natural object believed to be the abode of a spiritual entity. He added that those who serve at the *asɔnoyɛso* are normally referred to as attendants, while those at the *abosomfie* are referred to as *akɔmfɔɔ* (priests or priestesses).¹⁹ This suggests that river deities, apart from serving the religious and social needs of the people, also have ecological value. This is because no farming or hunting activities are permitted in the areas designated as *asɔnoyɛso*. Even today, fishing remains strictly banned in the Koraa River.

¹⁹ The other important *Asuo abosom* in the traditional area that I discovered during the study include: *Takyiasua*, *Apraono*, *Biadan*, *Kyimira*, *Amoma*, *Awusu*, *Awusubire*, *Buasu*, *Nsapɔ*, *Sakati*, and *Gyansakyiwa*.

4.4.2 Tree Deity

One important tree deity that still continues to receive cultic attention in the Berekum Traditional Area is *Nyina Kofi*. *Nyina* is the local name for the silk cotton



Figure 8. *Nyina Kofi Bosomfoɔ* (priest) getting ready to pour libation at the shrine in the grove

tree (*Ceiba pentandra*). Nana Kwame

Agyemang, the *Nyina Kofi Bosomfoɔ* (priest)

explained that the spirit that is believed to be dwelling in the silk cotton tree is a male, and

that its natal day is a Friday, and thus the name *Kofi* is given to it. *Kofi* is a name that is given to every male born on Friday in the

Akan society of Ghana. Friday is thus its sacred day and, on that day, the priest and

other worshippers go to the spirit's shrine under the tree to offer libation and sacrifices. *Nyina Kofi* is located at Koraso, about four kilometres from Berekum town, and receives cultic attention from the people of Koraso. Details on *Nyina Kofi* grove are provided in chapter 5.

4.4.3 *Asaase Yaa* (the Earth goddess)

One important belief held by both the people of traditional Berekum society and the Akan in general is that the earth (land) is a goddess, and as with *Nyina Kofi*, *Yaa* is the name given to an Akan female born on a Thursday means 'the earth'. That is, the people believe that the natal day of the earth is Thursday, and this is therefore designated as her sacred day. As with all goddesses, the people treat her in a special way. Certain things are considered as taboo(s), or hateful to her. These include tilling the land on her sacred day (Thursday), sexual intercourse in the bush, not offering a libation prayer before a grave is dug to bury a corpse, etc. According to Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa, the *Senasehema* (personal communication, 12 October 2011), a breach of any of the above acts is considered as defilement, and is seen as a serious sin against the earth goddess. She emphasised that it is through purification rites that the severed relation can be restored, or else misfortunes will follow the

perpetrator(s) and, in some cases, all the members of the community may suffer (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a), through strange diseases or poor crop yields, for example. This was corroborated by Nana Ansu Gyeabour (personal communication, 11 November 2011). This shows the anthropomorphism present in the belief system of Berekum people.

Another religio-cultural practice is the protection of sacred groves, although



Figure 9. The researcher in an interview with Yaw Komfoo of *Nimo* shrine at Fetentaa

this protection has weakened in recent Berekum history (a detail account of sacred groves is provided in chapter 5). These groves are usually patches of land where ordinary people are not allowed to enter because they are considered sacred, even if the entry is for religious purposes.

In Berekum, only the *Ɔmanhene* or his accredited representatives and the grove attendant are allowed to enter the *Banim* (royal mausoleum) sacred grove at Pepase, although people with various problems are also granted permission to enter sometimes in order to ask for protection. Yaw *Komfoo* informed me (and all my key informants confirmed) that prior to the Berekum people's encounter with the Western world and its culture, all the towns and villages in the traditional area had their own *abosom* (deities/gods) and sacred groves. But today, due to a number of influences (including science, technology, foreign religions, Western influence, etc.), some of the *abosom* in the towns and villages are dormant as the result of a lack of priests/priestesses and worshippers (as has been noted earlier), and many of the sacred groves have been reduced in size or destroyed completely (personal communication, 19 November 2011). This issue kept recurring as I gathered my data but, paradoxically, the influence of these gods continues to affect the lives of the people in the study area. For instance, although the cultic attention given to the River Koraa has reduced, people in the area will still not eat fish or crabs from the river for fear of the repercussions that such acts may draw from the spirits.

4.4.4 Christianity in Berekum

20 January 1482 has been traditionally acknowledged as the date on which Christianity was first introduced to the Gold Coast (now Ghana). This was the day after a Portuguese expedition of six hundred men under the command of Don Diogo d'Azambuja landed at Elmina, near Cape Coast in Ghana, and on this day they:

Suspended the banner of Portugal from the bough of a lofty tree, at the foot of which they erected an altar, and prayed for the conversion of the natives from idolatry and (sic) the perpetual prosperity of the church they intended to erect upon the spot (Groves, 1948 p. 123).

After its introduction in Ghana, it took over four centuries before Christianity reached Berekum. The records show that the first church was set up in Berekum in



Figure 10. The Emmanuel Presby Church, Berekum

1905, and was a Presbyterian Church. According to the Presbyterian Church records (Emmanuel Presby Church, Berekum: Centenary Celebration and Thanks Giving, 10 September 2006), 17 April 1905 is recognised as the day on which Christianity was officially planted in

Berekum through the efforts of *Opanyin* Bediako, Reverend Parregaux and Reverend N. T. C. Clerk. Prior to this, and with the encouragement of Reverend Parregaux, Reverend Clerk arrived at Berekum (on the 2 September 1904) to see Nana Kwabena Wusu—the then *Omanhene* of Berekum—in order to ask for permission to establish a church in Berekum. There were difficulties at first, but permission was finally granted, and the church was set up in 1905. Incidentally, the Emmanuel Presby Church was the first Presbyterian Church in the whole of the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana.



Figure 11. The Freeman Methodist Church, Berekum



Figure 12 The ST. Theresa Catholic Church, Berekum

The next Christian denomination to follow the Presbyterians were the Wesleyans. Oral history has it that the Berekum Freeman Methodist Church was founded in 1920 (Very Rev. Acheampong, personal communication, 18 January 2012). The source mentioned that *ɔpanyin* James Kwadwo Tabiri was instrumental in its establishment. According to the church's history, *ɔpanyin* James Kwadwo Tabiri paid a visit to his brother—one M. C. Baiden, who was a teacher-catechist of the Methodist church at Sewia in the Ashanti Region of Ghana—and became converted. Upon the advice of his brother, he began dawn-preaching on his return. His efforts paid dividends, as he soon had other converts, who began as members of the Wesley Society of Berekum, which is now called the Freeman Methodist Church. The Roman Catholics followed the Methodists in 1923. The beginnings of Catholicism in Berekum were the result of a miraculous healing that *ɔpanyin* Anthony Kwabena Nsia received through the prayers of a Catholic Priest at Jukwa, in the Central region of Ghana. He and his brother *ɔpanyin* Kwabena Kuma went to Jukwa as masons, but he reportedly fell sick and was healed by the priest. Upon their return home to Berekum in 1923, they began to practise their new faith, during Nana Barnie's time as the *ɔmanhene* of Berekum.

The next church to follow was the Assemblies of God Church. According to Reverend Adu Yeboah—the current minister in charge of this church—the Berekum branch was established in 1945, and Pastor Emmanuel Appiah was its first minister, assisted by Pastor Okye.

The Church of Pentecost reached Berekum in 1959 according to oral sources. The first assembly was in Kato, but in the same year, the second assembly was also

established where Golden City Park now stands in Berekum (Pastor Ntiamoah, personal communication, 29 January 2012). In an interview with J. S. Inkabi, it was learnt that the Berekum branch of the Anglican Church was established in 1972 through the efforts of Catechist Asiedu and Elders Oduro and Agyemang.

There are now many Christian churches in the Berekum Traditional Area, but only thirty-two of these are on the official register of the Local Council of Churches (LCC) in the traditional area (Right Reverend Bawa, the Methodist Church Circuit Pastor, personal communication, 15 January 2011, Berekum). According to the Very Reverend Father, Augustine Obour of St. Theresa's Parish in Berekum, the mapping project he conducted on churches in Berekum town alone revealed that it had one hundred and twenty-six churches in 2009. The Roman Catholic, the Methodist and the Presbyterian churches now have branches in almost all the 33 villages forming the traditional area, with the Methodists having branches in twenty-two villages. Some of the current churches in Berekum are listed below:

Table 8. Christian Churches in Berekum and their categorisation

No.	NAME OF DENOMINATION	CATEGORY
1	Roman Catholic Church	Catholicism
2	Methodist Church	Protestant
3	Presbyterian Church	Protestant
4	Anglican Church	Protestant
5	Assemblies of God	Protestant
6	The Twelve Apostles` Church	African Independent Church (AIC)
7	Seventh Day Adventist Church	Protestant
8	Mozama-Disco-Christo Church	AIC
9	Christ Apostle Church	Protestant
10	A.M.E. Zion Church	Protestant
11	Church of Pentecost	Penteco-Charismatic
12	Apostolic Church of Ghana	Protestant
13	African Faith Tabernacle	AIC

14	Brotherhood Church	AIC
15	Church of the Lord Brotherhood	AIC
16	House of Faith	Penteco-Charismatic
17	Christ Redeemer Church	Penteco-Charismatic
18	Voice of Deliverance Church	Penteco-Charismatic
19	Intl. Central Gospel Church	Penteco-Charismatic
20	Redemption Church	Penteco-Charismatic
21	Holy Temple Ministry	Penteco-Charismatic
22	All for Christ Ministry	Penteco-Charismatic
23	Global Evangelical Presbyterian	Penteco-Charismatic
24	Light of the Lord Church	Penteco-Charismatic
25	<i>Osamadi Church (Gyedie)</i>	AIC
26	Jesus Redemption Church	Penteco-Charismatic
27	Spirit Alive Church	Penteco-Charismatic
28	Word Anointing Ministry	Penteco-Charismatic
29	Vision Charismatic Church	Penteco-Charismatic
30	Christian Praise International Church	Penteco-Charismatic
31	Agape Evangelical Ministry	Penteco-Charismatic
32	Vision Charismatic Chapel	Penteco-Charismatic
33	Saviour Church (<i>Gyedie</i>)	AIC

Source: Author`s Construct, 2012

4.4.4.1 Christians relationship with the traditionalists

Missionary Christianity has always seen indigenous African religion as a false religion. Christians in Africa have looked down on African Indigenous Religion, viewing its practices and beliefs (in spirits that reside in trees, fields, mountains, streams and other natural objects) as forms of paganism or idolatry. This attitude has sometimes resulted in tensions and violent conflicts between Christians and the indigenous communities in the traditional area. Most of the *akɔmfɔɔ* that I

interviewed said that Christians practise unprovoked attacks on them by conducting their dawn preaching, which is meant to denigrate believers of indigenous religion close to their (*akɔmfɔɔ*) residences. At times, the actions of some of the so-called 'born again' Christians result in unnecessary confrontations with the traditional authorities. For instance, *Okyeame Okra Acheampong* told me that a little over a decade ago, some young men in Biadan who were members of the Seventh Day Pentecostal Church defied a long standing community ban on visiting *beduruyɛ* (a section of the Koraa River) on Fridays to fetch water. The angry youth of the town 'arrested' these young men and sent them to the chief's palace, where they were flogged for their actions. This created tensions in the community (personal communication, 6 December 2011).

From my interviews with the chiefs, I discovered that the challenges that Christians were making to their authority have now subsided. The only Christian group that the chiefs cited as still causing occasional trouble were the Pentecostal group. This group of Christians believe that any compromise with the traditionalists in matters of their (Christian) belief is tantamount to idolatry. It must be noted, however, that none of these problems necessarily suggest that Christians in the study area are unconcerned with the current environmental problems in the area, and a section of Chapter 7 outlines the contributions of Christians in the area towards addressing these problems.

4.4.5 The Muslim Communities

The exact date of Islam's introduction to Ghana is not clear. While Fisher and Trimmingham believe that the people of Ancient Ghana were converted to Islam through their conquest by the Almoravids, Clarke and Conrad (among others) think otherwise (cited in Acquah, 2011, p. 129). Despite the uncertainty over when Islam was introduced to modern Ghana it is, however believed to have stemmed from the late 14th and early 15th centuries (Acquah, 2011, p.139) through the activities of the Wangara, Dyula and Yarse Muslim traders from the upper Niger, who came to settle in the northern regions of Ghana. The Gonja, Mamprusi, Dagomba and Wara communities were believed to be those that came under the influence of Islam first in modern Ghana (Acquah, 2011, p. 139).

4.4.5.1 Introduction of Islam in Berekum

The lack of certainty over the exact date of Islam's introduction to Ghana is mirrored in the Islamisation of Berekum, as there is little information on how Islam was introduced into the area at all. When I contacted the current Chief Imam of Berekum, he directed me to one of his assistants, Mujib Mohammed, who happened to have written a dissertation on Islamic education in Berekum. He told me his attempt to get materials on the advent of Islam in Berekum had proved futile, and that he had instead relied on oral tradition. However, he did provide me with a photocopy of the relevant portions of his undergraduate dissertation.

According to Mujib, who relied for his information on *Mallam* Asomah (the proprietor of Usmaniya Islamic School in Berekum), Islam emerged in Berekum through the activities of Muslim migrants from the northern parts of Ghana who moved southwards in search of greener pastures and better living conditions. The first group of migrants to settle in the area were the Mossi, who were followed by the Zugu from neighbouring Benin and Togo. Dyula-Wangara and Hausa traders also settled in the area because of the abundance of cola nuts in the area that they could trade. However, many of them were repatriated to their home countries during



Figure 13. Muslim Youth helping in the renovation of the Central Mosque in Berekum

the 1969 Aliens Compliance Order that was issued during Dr. K. A. Busia's regime. Another branch of Islam found in the study area is that of the Ahmadiyya Movement, which was introduced to Berekum in 1960 by Amadu Kramo (of Amadu Kramo stores fame), Ibrahim Aboagye and Mohammed Assenso (personal communication, 29 January 2012). This means

there are two Muslim communities in the Berekum Traditional Area – the Orthodox Muslims and the Ahmadis. The Ahmadis are in the minority, and the orthodox are divided between the *Al-sunna* (Sunni) and the Tijaniyya schools of thought. The Ahmadi community has been stable and peaceful since their arrival in

Berekum in 1960, whilst the orthodox community experienced some minor internal conflicts until 1999, when a major conflict broke out.

4.4.5.2 Traditionalists-Muslim Relationship in Berekum

My interviews revealed that theological relationship between Muslims and traditionalists in Berekum is better than that between traditionalists and Christians. The only area over which Muslims seem to strongly diverge with traditionalist views is with regard to the serious cultic attention that the *abosom* receive from traditionalists. All the traditionalists interviewed were unanimous in reporting that they experience few problems with the Muslims, as they agree with each other on many issues. Yaw *Komfoɔ* (personal communication, 13 November 2011), for instance, mentioned the fact that they agree on practices such as polygamy, casting spells on evil doers (especially thieves), magical healing and divination. Lewis (1967) reached similar findings in his study.

Divination is not accepted in the official Islamic scripture, with the Sura 5:90 (Al-Ma'idah), for instance, emphatically rejecting divination of any form within Islam. In addition, there are several Ahadith that speak against divination, one saying: 'Whoever goes to the soothsayer and believes in what he says has denied what was revealed to Muhammad' (al Qaradawi, p. 239). However, it is common knowledge that some Muslim clerics in Berekum practise divination and use charms and amulets. I learnt from my informants that the marriage charms and amulets prepared by Muslim clerics (popularly known in the area as *mallams*) are very effective. As a result, the majority of the *mallams*' clients in the area are women. The good relationship between the Traditionalists and their Muslim counterparts was confirmed by Nana Okofo Dartey, the *Gyaasehene* of the traditional area. He said the Muslims in the traditional area always respect the taboo of the land, and that there has never been a case in the area where a Muslim has violated any taboo, such as entering a sacred grove or going to the farm on a sacred day of a deity in the area. Lewis (1967) also finds that, right from the outset, Islam adopted a more flexible attitude towards African beliefs and practices than Christianity.

The Muslims' positive attitude towards environmental protection in the area was confirmed in an interview with Mujib (12 November 2011). Mujib stressed that Islam has a lot to say on the issue of the environment, and many of these

prescriptions and lessons can be found in the Hadith. For instance, he mentioned that Mohammed, the Holy Prophet, advised his companions on the need to protect the environment in which they lived, and encouraged them to plant trees. Mujib mentioned that during the defensive battles, the Holy Prophet also urged his companions to desist from the old practice in which a victor had to destroy everything in the land of the vanquished, including cutting down all the trees in the area. Mujib cited the teak plantation near the Usmaniya Primary School in Berekum as a concrete way of putting the Holy Prophet's advice into practice. These attitudes were also confirmed in the Muslim declaration on nature at Assisi.

4.4.6 The Baha'i Community – A brief history of Baha'i Faith in Berekum

In an interview with Nana Kuma Acheampong, a Bahaist and also the *Benkumhene*—the chief in charge of the left wing of Biadan (15 December 2011)—who claimed to have engineered the formation of the Berekum Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'i Faith in 1991, said that prior to this he had been a member of the Berekum Catholic Church, but had relinquished his Catholic faith in favour of the Baha'i Faith in 1988. He explained that in the Baha'i Faith, members are organised into what he calls 'Local Spiritual Assemblies' and 'Groups'. If a set of Baha'i has more than eight people, they are classified as a 'Local Spiritual Assembly', while they are classified as a 'Group' if they have eight members or less. He said that there is another Local Spiritual Assembly at Botokrom, and six other Groups in the traditional area. The Groups are found in the Biadan, Senase, Koraso, Jinijini, Amomaso and Mpatapo communities. According to Nana, there are currently 400 members of the Baha'i Faith in the traditional area, but they plan to increase their membership in the traditional area, and to do so, the Berekum Local Spiritual Assembly is inviting missionaries to augment their effort. And indeed, during the course of the interview, a young lady was introduced to me as a missionary who had just arrived in Berekum from the Volta Region of Ghana to begin working on this project.

4.4.6.1 The relationship between the Baha'i and the traditionalist communities

According to Nana Kuma Acheampong (personal communication, 15 December 2011), the Baha'i get on well with the traditionalists. Nana praised the traditionalists for their good attitude towards nature, especially for the institution of taboos to protect certain trees, animal and rivers, and described indigenous religion as an environmentally friendly religion. Nana was emphatic that, in terms of their attitudes towards nature, the Baha'i Faith and African Traditional Religion are on the same path.

Moreover, Nana said that the Baha'i Faith believes in the value of nature and thus teaches its members to protect nature by refraining from indiscriminately killing animals or cutting down trees. According to him, the Baha'i Faith strongly discourages its members from setting bush fires as they cause serious damage to the environment. He also emphasised that the Baha'i Faith stands for peace and development in the world, and that this religion supports any move that promotes the management of the environment in a sustainable way. He stressed that the Baha'i Faith believes that the survival of humanity depends on human beings' attitudes towards the environment, and hence they encourage their members to be responsible in their use of it. He also mentioned that members of their faith are involved in tree planting exercises in the traditional area, and have planted trees around the Holy Family Hospital area in Berekum, as well as in the towns of Koraso and Jinijini. In addition to this, he said that they regularly organise clean-up exercises in Berekum town, particularly at the Holy Family Hospital premises. Nana also said that until her death, his wife had used the three local private radio stations in Berekum to encourage members of the communities to stop degrading the environment.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has discussed the worldview of the people under study. The worldview of the Berekum people was argued to comprise a set of assumptions that they hold about the universe which enable them to understand and interpret the nature of reality and to express this through the culture of the people. It was noted that worldview forms the basis of the people's conduct, and thus that the people's

worldview helps them to live in harmony with their environment. It was also shown that the people's worldview is not static, and has an element of dynamism that enables it to accommodate the realities of the present. As the Berekum people's worldview dictates their conduct, it was found to have implications for their ecological practices as well. The discussion of this topic touched upon the religion of the people, since their worldview was shown to be largely underpinned by their indigenous religion. It was found that the spiritual elements of Berekum's indigenous religion are hierarchically arranged, with God heading the hierarchy. This discussion brought out the fact that the factors such as colonialism, Western education and the inroads of foreign religions in the study area (particularly Christianity) have affected the hold that indigenous religion has there, with many local shrines now being dormant. However, it was also shown that Berekum's indigenous religion has displayed resilience in some areas, with beliefs in river and tree deities, the power of the ancestors and some lesser gods, and the fear of witches all remaining strong. Finally, both the decline and the resilience of indigenous beliefs were found to have ecological implications for the conservation of nature in the area.

CHAPTER 5 BEREKUM RELIGIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND NATURE CONSERVATION

5.1 Introduction

In response to a question I posed to him regarding the philosophy behind the indigenous Berekum people's ecological practices, Nana Ameyaw Akumfi—the ex-*Gyasehene* of the *Akwamuhene* (the chief of the royal household in charge of the *Akwamu* division of Berekum)—responded by citing the proverb '*Adi daa ye kyen adipreko*'—'it is not good to eat all that you have in a day'. This statement can be seen as a summary of the motivation behind Berekum's indigenous ecological practices. In this chapter, I present information derived from my interactions with my key informants in Berekum Traditional Society concerning their indigenous ecological practices

5.2 Berekum's indigenous ways of conserving nature

In Berekum traditional life and thought, as in many traditional African societies (Danquah, 1928; Byers et al., 2001; Schoffeleers, 1978), human beings are conceived of as being in a relationship with the other creatures of the universe. This implies that in the worldview of the people under study, gods, spirits, ancestors, spiritual and political leaders, lands, forests, rivers, and animals are all interrelated. That is, traditional Berekum people see their lives as interrelated and interdependent with other life forms, which means that a holistic framework is needed to study Berekum environmental ideas and ethics. Informed by their worldview, the people of Berekum have put in place measures to conserve nature. The major ones that are examined in this chapter include: *Kwaebennɔ* (sacred groves); the belief in *akyeneboa* (totem); a general attitude towards protecting *Asaase Yaa* (land/earth),

nsuo (water bodies), and landscapes; the existence of *nkyida or nnabɔne* ('hateful days' or 'taboo days') and the planting of *Ngyedua*²⁰; and the belief in *Sasa*²¹.

It is important to note that the above forms of traditional ecological knowledge and practice are not as effective as they used to be for conserving the environment in Berekum as a result of a multiplicity of factors (see chapter three). However, it is still relevant to discuss them, as they remain the main means for conserving nature in the study area.

5.2.1 The origin of the *Kwaebennɔ* (sacred grove)

Berekum traditional worldview, as it is among the Akan in general, as I have argued (see p.93) poses two dimensions to life. That is, the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. The word 'profane' here is not being used in the sense of moral judgment, but rather, in the sense as used by Eliade (1959). That is, the word is being used here to denote the visible, physical or the material dimension of life. It consists of our physical environment and the secular activities that go on in it. The 'sacred' on the other hand, is used to designate the invisible, immaterial or the spiritual dimension of life. The sacred universe in the view of the traditional Akan people is made up of personal spirit beings, both human (ancestors) and non-human (gods). There are also impersonal or non-moral forces which manifest themselves in the working of magic, witchcraft and sorcery. Although the people seem to make a distinction between the spiritual and the physical this distinction as I have pointed out, is artificial because they at the same time firmly believe that these worlds are not separate entities but one (see Olupona, 2001), with the sacred or the spiritual showing itself through the physical. Again, in spite of the fact that the sacred and the profane or the physical are seen as one entity, the word 'sacred' is usually reserved for things that they view as having awe-inspiring or divine attributes.

²⁰ *Ngyedua* are large-leafed trees of the ficus family usually planted to serve as *genius loci* for the community, windbreak and for the beautification of the community.

²¹ A kind of *tumi* (spirit) believed to be residing certain flora and fauna.

Based on this conception of the universe, when the people of Berekum traditional society designate a place/space as 'sacred' they mean that place is capable of revealing that which is 'holy' and should be considered as such. That is, that space has or is imbued with religious significance. This means that among the people under investigation, a distinction is at times made between an ordinary space and that of a 'holy' or sacred space. This in a way may be said to be similar to how the Australian aborigines assign sacred or profane status to things as Durkheim's (2008) study among them revealed.

The sacred grove is a well-known phenomenon in Africa and elsewhere, particularly in various parts of Asia (Laird, 1999; Chouin, 2002, Fomin, 2008; Ntiama-Baidu, 2008, 1995). However, their history and evolution is unclear. Whilst some believe them to have originated relatively recently in historical terms, others think that some of these groves 'may be as old as humankind' (Kingdom, 1989, quoted in Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005). Thus, varied historical accounts are connected with the various sacred groves that are found around the world. Sacred grove in the study area is known as *kwaebennɔ*, a word that is constructed from two Akan words of the Bono dialect—*kwaɛ*, meaning 'forest', and *bennɔ*, meaning 'that which is not weeded'. In an interview with Nana Akumfi Ameyaw (7 November 2011), he explained that the word *kwaebennɔ* derived from the fact that those who have cultivated or attempted to cultivate such forests have either died or suffered misfortunes of some sort. Such beliefs led people to conclude that, 'we do not weed this forest', hence *kwaebennɔ*.

These groves are known by various different names among the Akan of Ghana, including *nananom mpow* (ancestral groves) (Adakwa-Dadzie 1997), *asɔnoyɛso/abosompow* (shrines), *mpayinpow* (ancestral forests) and *nsamanpow* (burial grounds) (Ntiama-Baidu, 2008). *Abusuapanyin* Yaw Nana Nkrumah (personal communication, 13 November 2011, Akroforo) explained that these groves were created by the forebears of their community long ago as a way of preserving nature. He explained that although most of these *kwaebennɔ* are relatively small, they nonetheless provided a modest means through which *nananom* attempted to protect and conserve nature for posterity. Studies on sacred groves across the world reveal that they are normally small, although some are quite large forested areas found near settlements (Kingdom (1989). Access to sacred groves is usually governed by strict taboos and customs (Lebbie and Guries, 2008), and research has

estimated that there are between 2,000 and 3,200 sacred groves scattered throughout Ghana (Tuffour, 1991; Gordon, 1992), constituting about 1% of the forest that remains outside existing reserves (Fetzner, 2007). In addition, most of the origins of sacred groves are connected with the religio-cultural beliefs and practices of the community concerned (Ntiamoah-Baidu, 2008). This is the case in the study area, with the histories of most of the groves there being linked to supernatural forces. The history of two of these groves – *Mfensi* and *Nyina Kofi* – will now be briefly presented, as representative illustrations.

5.2.2 The *Mfensi* *Kwaɛbɛnɔ*

Mfensi sacred grove is one of the most important sacred groves in the study area. It is located in Kato, a village lying about 1.5 kilometres from Berekum, the capital of



Figure 14 . Entrance to the *Mfensi* sacred grove

the Berekum Traditional Area. It is found at the south-eastern part of Berekum, and covers approximately 40 hectares of land. It appears to have not been disturbed for a very long time, although there were allegations approximately three decades ago that some of the elders in the village had connived with a Syrian timber contractor based at Kato to fell some of the trees in

the grove, and these rumours caused an up-roar in the village (Nana Siraa Ababio III and her elders, personal communication, 7 December 2011, at her palace in Kato).

Nana Afia Siraa Ababio III, the *Dhema* (loosely translated as Queen-mother) of Kato told me that when their ancestors first settled in the area as farmers, they decided to cultivate the place where the grove is now located in order to make farms. However, every time they decided to cultivate the land, they would hear a strange



Figure 15. The *Mfensi* grove's attendant offering a libation prayer in the presence of the researcher and Dr. Kevin Ward one of his supervisors within the grove.

voice saying '*mfa nsi hɔ*', an Akan sentence meaning 'do not put it there'. Moreover, she said that those who entered that section of the forest to set up traps (or for any other reason) would be warned '*Mfa nsi hɔ*'. This led the people come to fear the place, and to view it as the abode of a very powerful *sunsum* (spirit). This *sunsum* was named *Mfensi*, a name deriving from the warning that the spirit gave to those

who attempted to encroach upon it. As a result, this section of the forest thus became a 'no-go' area in the community, and later became a sacred forest for the people of Kato. The grove has been protected through unwritten regulations that were put in place by the elders of the community. A shrine was built within the grove, where the attendant appointed to oversee the management and protection of the grove must go from time-to-time to pour libation to *Mfensi*, the guardian spirit of the grove. The grove consists of tall trees that form a canopy with lianas, and dense undergrowth through which the *Bɔgyesɛ* stream flows.

5.2.3 *Nyina Kofi Kwaeb ennɔ*



Figure 16. The researcher in an interview with the *Nyina Kofi Kɔmfɔ* within the grove

This grove is located at Koraso, a village that lies on the north-western part of Berekum, about 5 kilometres from Berekum town. The grove was created because of an experience that a hunter called Nana Kofi *Pambo* had in that part of the forest during one of his hunting expeditions. According

to the *Nyina Kofi Bosomfoɔ* (the priest in charge of the grove) Nana Kwame Agyemang, when the hunter Nana Kofi *Pamboɔ*, their great ancestor, got to the spot where a large *onyina* (*Ceiba pentandra*) tree stood, he saw a lot of gold scattered under the tree. He took some of it, but then could not find his way back home. When he put the gold back from where he had taken it, he was able to find his way home again. According to the priest, he tried several times to take some of the gold home, but could not succeed. On returning home, he informed his elders about his experience in the forest. He was advised to consult an oracle for an explanation. When he did so, the answer he received was that the gold belonged to a powerful spirit that lived in the forest, and if the people would be ready to serve it, then the entire village would gain from its protection. He informed the elders of the community about what the oracle had revealed. They accepted it and the necessary rituals were performed. After the rituals, that portion of the forest was designated as a sacred grove, and a priest was appointed to be in charge of it. The grove was named after the hunter Kofi *Pamboɔ* and the *onyina* tree under which he had the experience. Hence, the name *Nyina Kofi Pamboɔ* sacred grove—although the *Pamboɔ* part of the name is not often mentioned. *Kofi* is also a name given to an Akan boy born a Friday, which suggests that it is believed that the protective spirit of the forest is a male.

Accorded to the priest, the promised help from the spirit came during the Berekum-Koraso war in 1930/31 when, despite the numerical strength of the Berekum people, the people of Koraso could not be defeated. Their success during the war was attributed to the spiritual support they received from *Nyina Kofi*. The priest mentioned that after the war, and to their surprise, they discovered that several bullets had been gathered under the *onyina* tree, and sap/juice was oozing out of the tree like blood. Upon oracular consultations, it was revealed that the bullets were those fired by their attackers during battle, which explained why they were not defeated during the war. The grove is thus very important to the Berekum people.



Another important *odum* tree in the grove is known by the local people as *Dum Abenaa* (literally ‘a female *odum* tree born on a Tuesday’), and this tree has a small shrine under it. *Dum*

Figure 17. The tall tree shown in the photo is the *Dum Abenaa*, the supposed wife of *Nyina Kofi*

Abenaa is believed to be the wife of *Nyina Kofi.*, which again shows the anthropomorphic nature of Berekum indigenous religion. There is an annual pilgrimage to the grove for rituals, which precedes the annual festival of the people of Koraso. Near to the *Nyina Kofi* grove can be found the water head of the River Koraa, the main water supply for the entire traditional area. It is important to stress that a lot of sacred groves are scattered in the study area, but only those close to the towns and villages are known to all the members of the towns or villages. Those further away from the towns and villages are known only to those who farm close to them. This implies that more of the sacred groves would be discovered if more of the people were interviewed.

From the interviews, I was able to compile a list of some of the sacred groves in the study area. I did not only ask for a list of them, but their location, the spirit being(s) associated with them, and their current status. I visited most of these groves and took photographs of the sites. Some of them were videoed. Information about the ones I found out about is presented in the following table.

Table 9. Some sacred groves in the Berekum Traditional Area

Community	Name of grove	Location/sacred site	State of grove	Associated Spirit (s)		
				Gods,	Ancestors,	Dwarfs, Legends
Biadan	<i>Adwame</i>	Kuromo	Wiped out	X	X	
	<i>Bokye mso</i>	Near River Koraa	Degraded	X		X
	<i>Dummonta</i>	Asuotiano road	Destroyed	X	X	X
	<i>Berekum kese</i>	Hiaa AreaAlong the	Degraded		X	X
	<i>Koraa Banim</i>	Koraa River	Preserved but isolated	X		X
	<i>Wamkonagya</i>	Asutia Road	Encroached	X	X	X
	<i>Kwagyemire</i>	Far away from the village	Degraded	X		X

Akrofor	<i>Boo kwae</i>	Near the village	Reduced	X	X	
	<i>Wuo kwae</i>	Near the village	Reduced	X	X	X
	<i>Nyinanatiamu</i>	Near the village	Reduced	X		
KutreNo. 1	<i>Boo Kwae</i>	Near the village	Destroyed	X		X
Mpatapo	<i>Owuo kwae</i>	Near the village	Reduced	X	X	
Koraso	<i>Nyina Kofi</i>	Near the village	Preserved	X	X	
Kato	<i>Mfensi</i>	Along the Berekum-Sunyani highway	Protected	X	X	X
	<i>Mpem,</i>	<i>Kwadwofooo behu</i> road	Reduced		X	
	<i>Botiso</i>	Near <i>Kwadwofooo be hu</i> <i>Adesu</i> area	Reduced		X	X
	<i>Bookofi</i>	<i>Kwadwofooo behu</i> road	Reduced	X	X	X
	<i>Nsereso</i>	<i>Kwadwofooo behu</i> road	Reduced	X		
Pepaase	<i>Nananompo</i> (Berekum Royal Mausoleum)	Along Pepaase-Kotaa road	Protected	X		X
Mpatasie	<i>Kontonkori</i>	Near the village	Destroyed	X	X	
	<i>Mangyina kwae</i>	Near the village	Substantially reduced		X	X
Jamdede	<i>Boo bon</i>	Near the village	Protected but reduced		X	X
	<i>Asuotiaso</i>	Near the village	Encroached	X	X	
	<i>Boamaso</i>	Near the village	Destroyed			X
	<i>KoraasoAsonoy ε so</i>	Near the village	Protected	X		X
Domfete	<i>Bentim kwae</i>	Along Domfete-Jinijini road	Substantially reduced		X	X
Senase	<i>Adeemmra kwae</i>	Near Akatim	Reduced	X	X	
	<i>Kwaabaa kwaebennɔ</i>	Near the village	Destroyed	X		X
	<i>Koraa asonoyeso or Banim</i>	Along the Koraa River	Protected	X		X
	<i>Atwiso kwaebennɔ</i>	Far away from the village	Reduced	X	X	X
Nsapor	<i>Asuonsapo kwaεbennɔ</i>	Along Nanasuano road	Encroached	X		X

Source: Author's Fieldwork Notes, 2012

An important feature of the sacred groves in the study area, together with those in most traditional societies, is that restrictions are placed on their entry. These are

regulated by taboos, and most of the groves also have accredited attendants, usually priests. These are the people who can enter the groves regularly for religious purposes, and do so on the sacred days dedicated to the relevant groves. The grove attendants I interviewed said that the groves also act as *asɔnoyɔso* (shrines), where people can go for supplication, to redeem pledges, and to remove or overturn the effects of *dubɔ* (curses / grievance imprecations). Even when people are allowed to enter the groves, they are only allowed to enter certain parts, which exclude what are referred to as the ‘holy of holies’—usually small areas within the groves that have been prepared to serve as the actual shrines. It is here that ordinary people (worshippers) are not allowed to enter, and those who visit the shrines within the grove are not allowed to touch anything there, although on rare occasions medicine men/women are allowed to take some herbs that are difficult to find outside the groves. Usually special permission must be given from the attendant before this can be done, and sometimes the attendant must check with the chief of the town or village before he or she can grant permission for herbs, bark or roots of plants to be taken from the grove. This is to prevent the over-exploitation of herbs. The restrictions that have been placed on entering groves have meant that they have provided sanctuaries for wildlife.

One important issue that I was interested in pursuing during the data collection from my key informants was whether the creation of sacred groves was informed, first and foremost, by conservationist or religious motives. I was keen to follow this up due to the debate that has emerged in academic circles regarding ‘whether conservation is a deliberate purpose of such groves or only a fortuitous coincidence...’ (Lebbie and Guries, 2008, p. 43. See also Githitho, 2003; Tomalin, 2002; Sarfo-Mensah, 2001). I therefore posed the following question to all my informants: *Some people are of the opinion that the conservational value of sacred groves in indigenous societies is mere coincidence, for their creation was influenced primarily by religion rather than by conservationist motivation. What do you think about this?* The recurring response from my key informants was that the creation of the sacred groves and the methods they have in place for dealing with environmental issues have a *primarily* conservationist motivation rather than a religious one. In other words, their attitude towards nature is informed by their quest to conserve and protect natural resources. They claimed that this resulted from the experiences that the forebears of their communities had acquired. My informants were unanimous

that religion was used to serve as an *enforcer* of conservation. That is, religion was used to ensure the effective enforcement of the rules and regulations made for promoting environmental conservation. Nana Akumfi Ameyaw—the *ex-Gyasehene* (chief in charge of the royal household) of the *Akwamuhene* of Berekum Traditional Area (personal communication, 7 November 2011, at his residence)—explained that in traditional Berekum society, as in many traditional African societies, religion is such a powerful institution that issues that have religious connotations are treated with respect and awe. Therefore, attaching religion to conservational rules is one of the surest ways to make people respect and abide by rules and regulations, even in solitude. In other words, religion is used a vehicle for achieving conservation goals.

My informants also grounded the existence of Berekum conservationist measures on the idea that they must show gratitude and respect for the Earth's resources for their own good (Korang-Amoako, personal communication, 15 October 2011, Berekum). This suggests that the people of Berekum are aware of the popular saying that 'when the last tree dies, then the last man also dies'. In other words, they seem to be saying, to borrow the Kenyan activist and 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Maathai's words, 'In the process of helping the earth to heal, we help ourselves' (2011).

It is important to point out that some of my informants reacted very strongly to the suggestion that the conservational values of sacred groves are mere coincidence. Nana Akumfi Ameyaw (personal communication, 7 November 2011), for instance, sums up the views of those who disagreed with the above suggestion:

Conservationist knowledge has been with us (Africans) for a very long time, before *Kwasi Broni* (Europeans) arrived in Africa. This is evidenced in our everyday speeches, proverbs, folktales, myths, etc. We vehemently reject this suggestion. If we did not have conservationist knowledge, we would not be socialising our children on the need to make use of natural resources in a sustainable way. This is a neo-colonialist view.

In fact, I saw evidence during my interviews that confirmed the above claim. For instance, I observed that from infancy in traditional Berekum society, the individual is socialised to see land as a sacred entity, grows up holding such a belief. Moreover, all the techniques for exploiting the land and other natural resources in a sustainable way are part of the socialisation programme among the people. This makes it

difficult to rule out conservationist motives for the people's actions and to argue that the ecological values resulting from such actions are simply a by-product of religious motives, as the 'skeptical religious environmentalists' do.

However, the evidence for an environmental motivation for the creation of sacred groves was not that strong either as, during the data collection stage, I discovered that the histories of all the sacred groves I visited had spiritual or religious beginnings. In addition, various stories were told at many of the communities I visited about the misfortunes that befell those recalcitrant individuals or groups who violated the taboos associated with places that have been designated as sacred groves or sacred places (*Okyeame* Okra, personal communication, 7 November 2011, Biadan; Agyei Fosu Hayford, personal communication, 14 October 2011, Jinijini; Nana Kwame Agyemang, personal communication, 11 November 2011, Koraso). This strongly suggests that religion was the primary motive for the creation of sacred groves, contrary to the claims my respondents made. There was only one exception in which no religious connection could be found for a sacred grove, which was for the *kwangyemire* grove that lies well away from Biadan town. I was informed that this grove was purposefully set aside for hunting, and there were rules and regulations in relation to how hunting could be performed there. Even here, one cannot wholly say that the *kwangyemire* grove was 'set aside' for conservational purposes, then. I was specifically interested to know or see a grove that had a clear conservationist motive for its beginning, but I could not find one.

I tried to discover why what my informants were telling me was different from the evidence on the ground. Nana Ansu Gyeabour (personal communication, 8 November 2011) explained that the conservationist idea first came from the chiefs and the elders of the various communities, who asked for the support of the *nananom*, *abosom* and other *asunsum* (spirit beings) of the community. For this reason, the community immediately designated a place as a *kwaebennɔ*, and prayer, libation, sacrifice and other rituals were performed to sacralise it. According to *Ɔkɔmfɔɔ* Agyemang, this sacralisation resulted in the population of the place(s) by the various spirit beings that punish non-conformists in the communities (personal communication, 14 October 2011, at his shrine in Jinijini. This explanation was also corroborated by some chiefs). Although this belief is held by many Berekum people, the evidence for it is not very strong, as the beginnings of the groves I visited all had religious undertones. However, whatever the *origins* of the groves, their *relevance*

for environmental conservation is another issue, as the analysis in the following section will show.

5.2.4 The ecological importance of sacred groves

It has already been noted that many scholars see sacred groves as being important for conservation, but whether their creation was motivated by conservationist motives has become the subject of debate. Using the Shona of Zimbabwe as a case study, Taringa (2006) argues that the influence of indigenous peoples' worldviews on human-nature relationships 'are primarily relationships with spirits and not necessarily ecological relationships with nature' (Taringa, 2006, p. 196). Closely connected to this is the debate concerning whether, due to their small size, sacred groves could be of any real ecological significance or value. Tomalin (2013) quotes Freeman (1994) and Kalam (1996) as drawing attention to the fact that sacred groves 'are not necessarily evidence of "environmentalism", and second, that there is not an ideal type of sacred grove that is constituted by "pristine forest"' (quoted in Tomalin, 2013, p. 199).

But scholars like Riiters, Wickham, O'Neil, Jones and Smith (2000) and Terborgh (1992) have acknowledged that research undertaken by Guindon (1996), Lugo (1995), Nkongmeneck et al. (2002), and Turner (1996) have shown that 'the level of diversity remaining in secondary and fragmented forests (sacred groves) still makes their conservation important as they may become the sole sources of native species for future restoration efforts' (Lebbie and Guries, 2008, p. 43). Because of this, I requested information from Mr. Asare (the forester attached to the Asuo Bomosadu Timbers and Sawmill (ABTS) Company in Berekum) about the types of tree species that are now extinct in the study area during my data collection phase. He listed the following trees: *Odum (Millicia excelsa)*, *Kokrodua (Pericopsis elata)*, *Papao (Afzelia Africana)*, *Kusia (Nauclea diderrichii)*, *Sapele (Entandrophragma cylindricum)*. He attributed their disappearance to over-exploitation by timber firms and illegal chain-saw operators (loggers). Interestingly, many of these trees were identified by the priests or attendants in the groves I visited. I also observed many species in the groves that were abundant when I was a child, but are now significantly reduced in number in the area; and not only trees, but also several species of insects and butterflies (among other animals), which are important agents

for pollination and seed dispersal. This makes sacred groves indeed, a potential sanctuary for flora and fauna.

Although table 9 (p. 132 of this chapter) shows that the number of sacred groves in the study area has been significantly reduced, and that some of the existing groves have been encroached on for various reasons—just as Barre, Grant and Draper's (2008) study among the Tallensi-Nabdum people of northern Ghana showed – the possibility of the cumulative worth of the remaining groves for the local environment should not be dismissed (see Amanor, 1994; Gyasi, 1997; Arhin, 2008). For instance, Palmer (1992) points out that even 'one hectare of forest may have between 100 and 200 hundred tress species [...] the vegetation feeds and provides shelter for huge number of invertebrates and large animals'(1992, p. 83). I also found that numerous groves in the study area have rivers and streams flowing through them, with many of these being situated where the heads of rivers are located. In addition, I saw evidence from the ground that most of the sacred groves serve as places where traditional medical practitioners fetch medicinal materials that are rare in the communities. For instance, *atwerenantam* (literally, "under the frog's toe"), a useful plant for medication in the area, was found in the *Mfensi* grove.

Another interesting finding noted by my informants is that people in the communities that have their houses close to groves do not have their roofs ripped off during heavy storms, as others communities whose groves are located far away from their settlements do, apparently because the tall trees in the groves act as windbreaks. In reference to the ecological importance of sacred groves in Ghana, Agyarko (2001) argues 'these sacred groves, as they are called, have various underlying beliefs and prohibitions, but the common denominator is that cutting of trees for timber is prohibited. These groves add considerable value to the protected area of forests of high genetic value'(2001, p. 7).

A numbers of studies have argued for the ecological importance of sacred groves. For instance, the Buabeng-Fiema sacred grove in the Brong-Ahafo Region is a sanctuary for more than 500 Campbell's Mona and 200 Geoffrey's Pied Columbus Monkeys, as well as numerous other species of animals and plants (Akowuah et al., 1975; Fargey, 1991; Attuquayefio and Gyampoh, 2010). Ntiamo-Baidu (2008) study of marine turtles and birds in coastal Ghana also indicates that within those communities in which turtles and birds are protected by local taboos and beliefs, the population density and the sizes of the animals are greater than in those areas in

which they are used as food (ibid.). Similar findings are noted in other studies in Ghana (Dorm-Adzobu et al., 1991; Decher, 1997) and other parts of Africa. For instance, Byers et al.'s (2001) study of sacred forests in Zimbabwe shows that 'the amount of forest cleared is dramatically less in forests that are now considered sacred, or were in the past connected to these sacred forests, than in forests that were not formerly connected to a current sacred forest' (2001, p. 5). Nwosu's (2010) study among the Okonkwo society of eastern Nigeria elicited similar findings.

Gordon (1992) suggests that sacred groves could serve as the 'basis for environmental and public awareness campaigns' in Ghana, and it was on this basis that Decher (1996) contended that the continued conservation of sacred groves (and perhaps all natural habitats and wildlife in West Africa) will ultimately depend on an understanding and appreciation of their ecological functions. The ecological importance of sacred groves has also been acknowledged by global bodies like the IUCN—the world's largest conservation network—and UNESCO. UNESCO stresses that:

Sacred groves have served as important reservoirs of biodiversity, preserving unique species of plants, insects, and animals. Sacred and taboo associations attached to particular species of trees, forest groves, mountains, rivers, caves, and temple sites should therefore continue to play an important role in the protection of particular ecosystems by local people.

It is important also to note that, UNESCO has not just recognised the potential of sacred grove in biodiversity conservation, but has concretely gone into partnership with some local communities worldwide to ensure the preservation and conservation of such sacred sites, and to document both these community or indigenous-based conservation models and the biodiversity of these sites. Two of such UNESCO projects are the '*Jaagbo* sacred grove' in the northern Ghana under the auspices of the Cooperative Integrated Project on Savanna Ecosystems in Ghana (CIPSEG). The sponsorship was from 1993 to 1996. A preliminary study from the project revealed that the grove and its buffer zone had approximately 220 plant species, in comparison to 60 in outlying areas (Corbin 2008). The *Anweam* sacred grove in the Esukawkaw Forest Reserve is another UNESCO project in Ghana. This suggests that the ecological importance of sacred groves cannot be overemphasised.

5.2.5 *Akyeneboa* (Totem)

The Berekum word for the phenomenon of totemism is *akyeneboa*. This Akan word literally means ‘an animal that one leans upon or relies on for spiritual support or inspiration’. My respondents explained that although *akyeneboa* is defined as being connected with animals, plants and other things are also included in their conception of totemic objects (*Abusuapanyin* [family head] Yaw Nkrumah, personal communication, 13 November 2011). Therefore, in traditional Berekum society, *akyeneboa* is used to refer to the animals, plants, symbols, emblems or images representing a clan or a group of people.

Totemism has been the focus of much discussion within anthropology and religious studies (McLennan, 1869-70; Frazer, 1910; Freud, 1912-13; Evans-Pritchard 1989 [1965]; Rose et al., 2003; Durkheim, 2008 [issued]). Some of the key issues of discussion have revolved around the distinction between civilisation and savage, and between culture and nature (Rose et al., 2003, p. 6). Secularisation and the Darwinian theory of evolution by natural selection have also influenced the discussion. The phenomenon of totemism is conceptualised as ‘a relationship of mutual life-giving between human beings and natural species (or rarely, other natural phenomena)’ (Rose et al., 2003, p. 5).

The term ‘totem’ derives from the North American *Ojibwa* word, *ototomen* meaning ‘maternal relatives’. Many scholars have contested the validity of using the term ‘totem’ in other cultural contexts, since the term is derived from a specific North American *Ojibwa* word (Rose et al., 2003, p. 5). Rose et al. (2003) stress that the terms ‘token’ and, in many parts of Australia, ‘dreaming’ are used interchangeably with ‘totem’. (Rose et al., 2003, p. 2). Some scholars even consider the word ‘totem’ to be offensive. Nayutah and Finlay (1988) are cited by Rose et al. (2003, p. 2) as maintaining that the term ‘totem’ is still used by some Aboriginal people in New South Wales today. It is interesting to note that the Aboriginal people of New South Wales’ understanding of the phenomenon of totemism can be said to be similar to that of the traditional Berekum people, and that of the Akan of Ghana more generally.

In the words of Parrinder (1961, p. 172), totemism may be viewed as ‘the use of images and emblems by groups and clans to represent some animal or plant after

which the clan is named', and Smith-Asante's (2002) study reveals that the *Bakwena* and the *Batloung* tribes of Botswana are named after *Kwena*, the crocodile, and *Tlou*, the elephant, respectively.

Among the people of Berekum Traditional Society, the origins of *akyeneboa* are expressed in myths, perhaps to help people to remember the facts, which concretely manifest themselves in rituals, ceremonies and festivals. My informants explained that the relationship between a group and its totemic animal or plant can result from:

- a) Their ancestors tracing their origin to that animal or plant;
- b) The *akyeneboa* helping the forbears of the ethnic group, or the forebears benefitting from it in a special way, or;
- c) The totemic object disclosing itself (through revelation) to the head (or other members) of the ethnic group concerned (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012c).

It is this close intimacy that Rose et al. (2003, p. 1) view as a kind of kinship and caring 'between people and particular parts of the natural world' or, simply put, a 'kinship with nature' (ibid., p. 5). These *akyeneboa* are important to consider, because their status confers an ethical position upon a number of animal and plant species. It is therefore no surprise that many taboos have been designed by traditional Berekum people to ensure that acceptable or responsible relationships with their totemic objects are maintained, thereby conserving nature. Thus, this human-nature relationship that exists among the people of Berekum portends the ecological dimensions of the phenomenon of totemism, mirroring Strehlow's (1970) findings in his study of totemism among the people of central Australia.

There is also a special relationship between a clan or a community and its *akyeneboa*, which enjoins the clan or the people to protect their *akyeneboa* as it is part and parcel of the group²² (see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012c). Ali Mazru (1986, p. 50) puts this idea succinctly: 'their readiness to see a little of themselves and a little of their God in their surroundings made them shrink from abusing totems to satisfy an appetite'. One of my interviewees explained that, historically, when one accidentally killed a totemic animal, one needed to organise a funeral for it, just as if a human being had died. The *Onyini* (python) was mentioned in connection with this

²² This is a commonplace belief in the traditional Berekum society.

tradition (*Obɔfoɔ* Yaw Barima personal communication, 8 October 2011, at his residence at Mpatasie). This protection ensures that the kinship relationship between people and their totemic object is maintained. For instance, many of the farmers I interacted with stressed that when they are preparing a new farm and their totemic plant happens to be where the farm is being made, care is taken so as not to burn the plant(s) during the burning stage of the farm. This demonstrates the kind of relationship between the people and their totemic objects. Nana Ameyaa (personal communication, 15 October 2011) observed that the destruction or extinction of a family or clan's *akyeneboa* implies the extinction of the family or clan concerned. Thus, the protection of *akyeneboa* is an important obligation for the people of the study area.

Trees that are believed to be spiritually powerful are usually found to be *akyeneboa* of Berekum clans and families, and thus they (and other clans within the Akan) view many plants, shrubs and climbers as totems. The origin of the *akyeneboa* and their presence among the Berekum and the Akan is generally thought to be restricted to the religio-cultural sphere. However, it is obvious that their attitude towards *akyeneboa* also underpins the sustainable use of natural resources in the traditional milieu. In this context, we can see how a worldview has been translated into practical ethical conduct through a set of simple actions. Thus, the application of totemism has become one of the major traditional strategies for the conservation of flora and fauna among the traditional Berekum people. In other words, the use of *akyeneboa* among members of the traditional Berekum society provides a framework for respecting and conserving nature.

Abusuapanyin Yaw Nkrumah (personal communication, 13 November 2011) explained that every individual in Berekum must belong to one of the eight clans of the Akan. This was corroborated by other family heads. A major characteristic of these clans is that each has its own *akyeneboa*, which means that each person in Berekum must have a major *akyeneboa* in addition to the *akyeneboa* of his or her individual families. Table 10 below lists the Akan clans and their respective *akyeneboa*.

Table 10. Akan Clans and their Totemic Animals

Clan	Totem/Local Name	English Name	Scientific Name	Symbolic Quality
<i>Aduana</i>	<i>Ɔkraman</i>	Dog	<i>Canis domestica</i>	Skill
<i>Agona</i>	Ako (awidie)	Parrot	<i>Psittacosis erithacus</i>	Eloquence
<i>Asakyiri</i>	<i>ɔpɛ tɛ</i>	Vulture	<i>Neophron monochus</i>	Cleanliness
<i>Asenie</i>	Apan	Bat	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Diplomacy
<i>Asona</i>	<i>Kwaakwaadabi</i>	Pied crow	<i>Corvus albu</i>	Wisdom
<i>Bretuo</i>	<i>ɔ sebɔ</i>	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Aggressiveness
<i>Ɛkuɔna</i>	<i>Ɛkoɔ</i>	Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	Uprightness
<i>Ɔy Ɔko</i>	<i>Akrɔ ma</i>	Falcon/Hawk	<i>Falco columbarius</i>	Patience

Source: Adapted from Conservation International, 2003, p. 2.

Aside from totemism, the people's beliefs in certain other phenomena are also used to conserve nature, including their beliefs about the earth, water bodies and unusual landscapes, which I will now discuss.

5.2.6 *Asaase Yaa (Land/Earth)*

The concept of the earth or the land among traditional Berekum and traditional African societies in general derives from their worldviews. During an interview, one Berekum chief observed that '*Asaase no ye nananom ne nkyirimma dea yen deɛ ye rehwe so kɛkɛ*', which translates as 'the land belongs to the ancestors and the generation yet unborn, we are only care takers'. This is similar to something that Danquah (1928) says about the Akyim—that the land belongs to the ancestors and future generations, but is not the property of the living. The sacredness of land among Africans is also something that Dikirr (2005) found in his research among them.

The value that the traditional Berekum people attached to the land led them to view it as a spiritual entity and goddess, with the name *Asaase Yaa* (Earth Yaa). *Yaa* is an Akan name given to a female girl born on a Thursday. This explains why the Earth is known as *Asaase Yaa* in the study area, as well as in many other Akan societies. Explaining the femininity attached to the earth, Nana Ameyaa said that ‘the land nurtures human beings like the way women do to their children’ (personal communication, 15 October 2011). This emphasises the anthropomorphism in Berekum traditional religion.

Assigning femininity to the earth is not peculiar to the Berekum people, but is a common practice in traditional Ghanaian societies, as Asiama’s (2007) study finds: ‘land ownership in Ghana is characterized by religious beliefs and practices. [...] To the Akan, land is a supernatural feminine spirit with Thursday as its natal day, which can be helpful if propitiated and harmful if neglected’ (2007, p. 5).

In the words of Nana Agyemang Tuffour, ‘*Asaase Yaa* and her resources are viewed as a divine gift to the social group or communal property which the living must hold in trust for their ancestors and the future generations, therefore, the individual is socialised to accept this view’ (personal communication, 10 October 2011). Other studies among indigenous communities have generated similar findings (Sarfo-Mensah and Oduro, 2010; Asiama, 2007; Byers et al., 2001; Appiah-Opoku and Hyma, 1999; Omari, 1990; Busia, 1968). It is thus unsurprising to find that land is not a sellable commodity among the people of Berekum Traditional Society. The only circumstances under which a piece of land can be sold is when this is necessary for solving an urgent problem, such as the defrayal of stool debt resulting from land litigation with other communities (Nana Taa Seinti II, Chief of Abi, personal communication, 11 November 2011; see also Busia, 1968). Throwing more light on the use of land in the Berekum Traditional Society, Nana Taa Senti II explained that although an individual may acquire land and have rights over its usage during the course of her life, she still does not own the land as such, but rather simply enjoys its usufruct.

In view of the sacredness attached to the land by the Akan and the traditional Berekum people, certain actions are considered as *hateful* to *Asaase Yaa*. These include tilling the land on a Thursday (*Asaase Yaa*’s natal day), murder (spilling innocent blood on the land), having sexual intercourse in the bushes, giving birth in

the bushes, burying a pregnant woman without removing the foetus, and digging a grave without offering libation to the land first (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a, p. 265). All these taboos are common knowledge in the study area. Busia (1968) and Opoku (1978) have made similar observations in their studies among the Akan. All these acts are deemed to be a defilement of the land, which may result in drought or infertility of the land unless purificatory or propitiatory rituals are performed – a point that all the chiefs and traditional priests that I interviewed stressed (see also Frazer, 1926; Sarfo-Mensah and Oduro, 2007).

The traditional people's conception of land in the study area and throughout Ghana has resulted in people holding matters concerning land very dear to their hearts, and they are prepared to go all-out to defend their ancestral lands as this is viewed as a sacred duty. The spiritual connectedness to land has been seen as invoking extreme conservatism towards its protection and management (Mufeme, 1999). However, others argue that this has made the ownership and distribution of land in Ghana problematic (Goldstein and Udry, 2008; Amanor, 2001), affecting all policies in Ghana concerning it (Awuah-Nyamekye and Sarfo-Mensah, 2011). This is sometimes seen as anti-development as it makes the acquisition of land for development difficult, which has led some to call for radical land reforms in which the central government would take full control over all the land. My key informants oppose this on the grounds that the sacredness and the sanctity attached to land would be lost if the government (which is influenced by secular views) took control of all the land in the country.

5.2.7 *Nsuo* (Water bodies)

In an interview with Nana Ansu Gyeabour and Kwaku Asamoah, Nana Gyeabour said that because water is crucial to human life, the people of Berekum Traditional Area have designed certain measures to protect water bodies. For instance, it is a taboo to defecate near water bodies, particularly rivers, or to farm close to river channels (Nana Ansu Gyeabour and Kwaku Asamoah, personal communication, 8 November, 2011; see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009b). These restrictions are used to protect rivers. Sarfo-Mensah, Fredua Anto and Oduro's (2010) study among other Akan people has confirmed this finding.

For both Berekum and Akan people in general, rivers, lakes, lagoons, springs, and ponds are viewed as sacred entities, and are considered to be *nsuo abosom* (river/water deities). *Asuo Koraa*, (The River Koraa) is the principal river in the study area, and runs through several towns and villages there. The local people consider *Asuo Koraa* to be female, and the fishes in it are seen as her children. Fishing is therefore strictly banned in *Asuo Koraa* (Maame Akua Donko, Koraa sacred grove attendant; see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a). Those who flout this injunction have suffered for it according to local stories. An account from a joint interview during the data collection phase of this research is presented below:

I quite remember some time ago, one Anthony—a Syrian timber contractor at Kato—doubted this by saying that it was just an “African belief”, and ate some of the crabs. After that he felt that something like one of the hands of the crab has choked his throat. He went to hospital for treatment but the problem persisted. He was even sent out of the country for medical operation but could not get well. There were series of operations but the medical doctors could not diagnose the source of the problem. Finally he came back to Ghana to confess eating a crab from the river Koraa. He had to pacify the river god before he got healed. My own father was involved when they were performing the rituals which restored Anthony’s health (Nana Ansu Gyeabour, personal communication, 8 November 2011).

This belief in river deities is still very strong among the people. Several *asɔnoyɛso* (shrines) can be seen dotted along the course of *Asuo Koraa*, and the land that it flows through is considered as a sacred grove. Friday is designated as the sacred day for *Asuo Koraa* and, on this day, all her designated attendants go to the shrines along the course of the river to offer her libation prayers and food (Maame Akua Donko, Koraa sacred grove attendant). As part of the activities, people from all over the area come to visit the shrine to present their petitions or to redeem vows they previously made to the river goddess. Fishing is not common in the Berekum area as there are few other big rivers, and those who fish in the small rivers have to use appropriate methods. For example, it is a taboo to use any chemicals for fishing (Nana Ansu Gyeabour and Kwaku Asamoah, personal communication, 8 November 2011, in Senase).

All the rivers in the study area are treated with a degree of reverence, but this is gradually diminishing (as a result of the influences discussed in chapter three).

However, one may argue, based on the foregoing discussion, that the traditional Berekum people’s attitude towards water bodies—particularly the way in which they ensure the protection of the catchment areas of water bodies and the marine life in them—provides an active and positive approach to the conservation of nature.

5.2.8 Unusual Landscapes

In an interview, Nana Kwasi Agyemang (the *Twafoɔhene* of Namasua) informed me that traditional Berekum people ascribe sacredness to landscapes that are unusual or extraordinary. This is due to their belief that the very nature of certain natural objects is hierophanic – i.e. capable of attracting spirits or revealing the divine (personal communication, 10 October 2011, at his residence in Berekum). This has resulted in a kind of existential connection between the local people and the sacred landscapes, which promotes the conservation and preservation of these landscapes. The table below lists a few such landscapes in the traditional area.

Table 11. List of some the revered landscape in Berekum Traditional Area

Type of sacred species	Its Nature	Examples/Location
Cave	A long and narrow cave	At <i>Kuum</i> near Koraso-Nkantanka
<i>Odomankoma nsa</i> (God’s hand)	A stone with five fingers like those of a human being inscribed on it	In between Nanasuano and Ayimom
A stone	A huge strange stone	In the <i>Adeemmra</i> sacred grove at Senase
<i>Boɔ Kofi</i> (a stone)	A huge stone	At Adesu near Kato
<i>Bokyɛm</i> (a stone)	A huge flat stone	Near Biadan

These landscapes are potential tourist destinations that could be developed to enhance the socio-economic development of the area.

5.2.9 The Institution of *Nkyida* or the *Nnabɔne* (Taboo days)

The institution of taboo days among the traditional Berekum people also has a bearing on the management of natural resources. The words *nkyida* and *dabɔne* (*nnabɔne* [pl.]) are used interchangeably in the Berekum community to denote what is now translated by anthropologists as ‘taboo days’. *Nkyida* is a combination of two Akan words – *kyiri*, (to hate) and *da* (day). Thus, ‘*nkyida*’ literally means ‘hateful day’. Similarly, *dabɔne* comes from the two Akan words, *da* (day) and *bɔne* (bad or evil). However, according to *ɔpanyin* Kyere Kwame (2011, personal communication, 6 November, Berekum) *nkyida* or *nnabɔne* are sacred days for the gods and ancestors of the various communities in the traditional area, despite their odd-sounding names, and hence no work is permitted on such days (except in emergencies, such as going to one’s farm to get food for domestic use). There are countless stories about people who have suffered various misfortunes (and even death) for violating these religio-cultural injunctions. According to my informants, although *nkyida* or *nnabɔne* are sacred days on which cultic attention is given to objects of worship, they are viewed as hateful or bad days (hence their names) because of the harm that one can suffer for any infringement on them, as well as because of the restrictions that are placed on people’s freedom on these days (*ɔkyeame* Yankyera, personal communication, 14 October 2011, Jinijini; see also McCaskie, 2002, p. 153). The reckoning of these *nkyida* or *dabɔne* /*nnabɔne* is based on the Akan calendar. This calendar is based on what is known as *adaduanan–da* meaning ‘day’, *aduanan* meaning ‘forty’—i.e. the forty-day cycle.

Although the cycle is known as *adaduanan*, a close examination of it shows that it contains forty-two different days, with the forty-third representing the start of a new cycle (Bartle 1978). There are four special days within every *adaduanan*, and it is these special days that the traditional Berekum people refer to as *nkyida* or *dabɔne* /*nnabɔne*. Two of these *nkyida* or *nnabɔne* are called *adae* (literally translated sleeping place), and obviously referring to the sleeping places of the ancestors, since *adae* is connected with the ancestors²³ (*ɔpanyin* Kwame Anane, a herbalist, personal communication, 7 October 2011, at Mpatasie). Thus, on *adae*

²³ For details on the Akan calendar, see Rattray, 1923, p. 115; Bartle, 1978, pp. 80-4; McCaskie, 2002, p. 152.

days, the ancestors are bathed, anointed, fed and clothed by the reigning chiefs. That is, the chiefs visit the stool rooms²⁴ to: pour libation and to clean/wash the stools (bathing); slaughter either a sheep or a fowl and allow the blood to drain on the stools (anointing); use the carcass to prepare food for the ancestors (feeding them); and then re-cloth the stools (clothing them) and place them at their respective positions until the next *adae* day (Nana Kwasi Agyemang, personal communication, 5 October 2011, Berekum). It is important to note that the stools are placed in order of the chiefs' seniority. That is, the stool of the first chief of the community comes first, then the second one etc. The reigning chief's stool goes to the stool room only after his/her death (a ritual that was confirmed by all the chiefs that were interviewed).

In addition to refraining from working on the farm, no funerals are permitted on *adae* days either. The other two *nkyida* or *nnabɔne* are *fɔdwo* (on Mondays) and *fɔfie* (on Fridays). In addition to these four special days, both the state gods and those of the various communities also have sacred days, and these should be observed as holidays for those within the relevant communities (Nana Kwasi Agyemang, personal communication, 5 October 2011, Berekum). Certain rivers and lands may also have sacred days that prevent those who farm near those rivers or lands from working on those areas during the sacred days. For instance, no farming activity is permitted on Fridays for those who farm around the catchment area of *Asuo Koraa* in Berekum (Nana Ansu Gyeabour and Kwaku Asamoah, personal communication 8, November 2011, Senase).

These restrictions placed on the use of natural resources by *nkyida* or *nnabɔne*, although potentially inconvenient and difficult for the Berekum people, nonetheless help to promote the sustainable use of the natural environment. In the study area, as many as nine *nnabɔne* could occur within one *adaduanan* cycle. Resting for nine

²⁴Among the Akan, every chief is supposed to have a stool, known as *asesɛdwa*, which is usually made from *sɛsɛdua* (*Funtumia* sp.). It is this stool that is blackened and placed in a special room called *nkondwafieso* ['stool room'] after the death of a chief. Therefore, all the important rituals connected with the ancestors centre around these stools. In fact, the stool is the symbol of a chief's office. Any chief whose stool is not blackened and placed among those of his or her predecessors is not a recognised chief among the Akan (Nana Kwabena Wusu, personal communication, 12 October 2011, at Nana Takyiwaa's palace in Senase).

days within an *adaduanan* cycle, apart from being good for people's health, can also give the land and other parts of the natural environment some respite to regenerate itself. It is in this light that one can see the ecological value of the institution of *nkyida* or *nnabɔne* for the people of the study area, and throughout Ghana, as *nkyida* or *nnabɔne* are observed in every traditional society within Ghana. Thus, it can be argued that the institution of *nkyida* may have some scientific underpinning, since it provides nature with a respite to regenerate itself.

5.2.10 Planting of *Ngyedua*

The practice of tree planting in Berekum Traditional Area dates back as long as the community itself. It is a common sight to see species of plants planted in the principal streets of all the towns and villages in the traditional area in order to divide the streets and improve their aesthetics. Also, every important occasion in towns and villages climaxes with the planting of a tree in order to help with the reckoning of dates in Berekum society (*ɔpanyin* Yaw Mensa, an 80 year-old man, personal communication, 10 October 2011, Fetentaa). Such trees are referred to as *gyedua* (*ngyedua* [pl.]).

The trees provide good places for the youth to meet and enjoy fresh air, as well as to play games such as draughts, *oware* and others. Even one of my focus group



Figure 18. The researcher in a key informant interview under a *gyedua* at Fetentaa

discussions took place under a *gyedua* plant at Fetentaa village (see fig. 18). At times, settlements of disputes take place under these trees. Although planting trees in the towns and villages used to be very common in Berekum, many of these trees

have been felled to make way for the erection of electricity poles (*ɔkyeame* Okra, personal communication, 7 November 2011, at his Biadan). Whatever the case may be, planting *ngyedua* is a traditional strategy which can be used to address the problem of environmental degradation in Berekum and in Ghana more general. Furthermore—and more importantly—the traditional Berekum and the Akan people believe that

certain plant species have the ability to ward off evil spirits. Therefore, plants serving as the *genius loci* can be found in every Akan village as the founding ancestors of communities would plant such trees there for this purpose (*Ɔpanyin* Yaw Mensa, an 80-year old man, personal communication, 10 October 2011, Fetentaa).²⁵ A ritual known in Akan as *gyinae* normally accompanies the planting of such trees. This ritual is seen as a foundation for beginning a settlement (a town or village) among the Akan, and has preceded the beginning of every Akan settlement—a fact attested to by all my key informants. Trees such as the *Nyamedua* (God's tree), *Sinuro* (*Alstonia gongenis*), *Sume* (*Costus afer*), and the fig tree are usually used for such purposes.

Unlike those areas in which trees are used for beautification purposes, people are usually restricted from entering places where *ngyedua* are used for *genius loci* purposes (Kwasi Dartey 2011, personal communication, 23 September, at his residence). Many *ngyedua* trees are large-leafed ones of the ficus family. A common one in Berekum is known as *amangyedua* (literally translated as state tree). Since such trees serve as *genius loci* for communities, the community members (especially the gerontocracy) take proper care of them as the death of such trees is seen as a bad omen for the entire community. Hence the places where such trees stand also become shrines for the entire community (Nana Opong Seinti II and his elders 2011, personal communication, 11 November 2011, at his palace in Abi).

The ecological importance of these indigenous practices may be seen in the fact that some species of plants are planted to serve as windbreaks for protecting the environment. Thus one can argue that, in addition to the religious underpinnings of indigenous ecological practices, some of them also have practical and scientific underpinnings.

5.2.11 Belief in *Sasa*

Another basis for indigenous ecological practices that have a religio-cultural underpinning is the belief in *sasa* -- *tumi* (spirit) believed to be living in certain

²⁵ Parrinder (1974, p. 52) and Rattray (1923) also described this practice in their studies.

plants and animals (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a, p. 4; 2009a, p.269). The traditional Berekum people, like other Akans and traditional Ghanaians, perceive certain species of flora and fauna to be sacred, believing them to possess *tumi* (spiritual power). *Sasa* is the Akan word used to denote the kind of *tumi* suffused in those flora and fauna (*Ɔpanyin Kwasi Broni*, an experienced hunter, personal communication, 8 November 2011, Senase; see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a; Rattray, 1927;1959; Warren, 1973). In the traditional Berekum worldview, the created world is composed of countless individual beings and objects that nonetheless exist in a unitary form due to their possession of *sunsum* (spirit), which is believed to ultimately derive from the *Onyame* (Supreme Being), the Creator, sustainer and source of all existence. Those individual beings with higher *sunsum* are termed as *sasa* (*Ɔpanyin Kwasi Broni*, personal communication, 8 November 2011, Senase). An important feature of *sasa* is that not all spirits are of equal standing, with some *sasa* seen as being more powerful than others. Hence, there are *sasa a eye hare* (*sasa* which are light or not heavy) and *sasa a eye duru* (*sasa* which are heavy) (*Ɔpanyin Kwasi Broni*, (personal communication, 8 November 2011, Senase; see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a; McCaskie, 2002).

Those trees and animals that are believed to have light *sasa* are perceived to be harmless to humans, but those with heavy *sasa* are perceived to be dangerous, as they are seen as having the capacity to be vindictive (this is a widely held belief among the Akan – see McCaskie, 2002). As such, the people tread cautiously with such plants and animals. In the study area, the following plants were mentioned as some of those that have heavy *sasa* suffused in them: *Odum* (*Chlorophora excelsa*), *Esa* (*Celtis mildbraedii*), *Abeko* (*Tieghemella heckelii*), *Tweneboa* (*Entant drophragma*), *Onyina* (*Ceiba pentandra*), *Homakyem* (*Dalbergia saxatilis*), *Odii* (*Okuobaka aubrevillei*). The animals include: *Trɔmo* (*Tragelaphus euryceros isaacii*), *Oyuo* (*cephalophus niger*), *Kuntun* or *Pataku*—striped jackal (*Canis adustus*), and *Ɔkoɔ* (buffalo) (see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a, p. 4). Sarpong (1974) notes that plants with *sasa* are seen as creating the ‘residential areas’ for spirits and gods, and thus they must not be felled without the appropriate rituals being performed.

It is not only some of the animals and plants that are believed to possess *sasa* in the study area, but some of the human beings as well. However, in human beings, the *sasa* are believed to be potent only when the individual is dead, and they are

believed to be especially potent in people who die in violent ways or whom have had unbecoming burial rites performed on them. However, the issue of *sasa* in human beings is outside the purview of this study.

To see why Berekum people (and traditional Ghanaians in general) are cautious about entities they believe to have *sasa*, I will now provide two examples to illustrate how this belief operates in the lives of the traditional Berekum people. One plant believed to possess *sasa* is the *Odi/du* (*Okuobaka aubrevillei*)—ne of the most respected and feared plants among the traditional Berekum people and other Akan. *Odi* is considered to be the ‘king’ of all plants in traditional Akan societies (Opanyin Kwame Anane, a herbalist, personal communication, 7 October 2011 at Mpatasie, see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a).

Many of my informants said that it has no fallen leaves under it, and it was explained that only very few animals can pass under it—any animal that is not spiritually powerful will die instantly if it passes underneath. The hunters I interviewed claimed that they see many bones of dead animals under the tree. They said it is only the *Okusie* (Giant rat) and the *Apesee* (*Artheerus africanus*) that could pass under the *Odi* without any problems. This implies that those animals are believed to have strong spiritual powers. Paradoxically, however, these two animals are those that are often the most hunted in the Berekum area. Unfortunately, my informants could not explain why this is so. It may be due to the palatable nature of the meat of these two animals or it may be due to , as Cox (2000) and others have commented, because of the rate at which local knowledge systems are disappearing, we may not even know what purpose, if any, such practices have (Brodt, 2001; Pandey, 2003). In the study area, medicine men and women use the bark of the *Odi* to treat various ailments, including skin diseases and venereal ones like syphilis, but it is commonly believed that only spiritually powerful traditional medical practitioners can produce medication from them.

Another plant that it is believed to possess *sasa*, and which thus commands awesome reverence, is the *Homakyem* (*Spiropetalum heterophyllum*). This plant is a type of liana. My informants claim that the sap in this plant is the colour of blood, and the hunters I interviewed claimed that this plant could talk like a human being during the night. Medicine men and women in the study area believe that *Homakyem* has a very high medicinal value, but say that only traditional medical practitioners

that are spiritually fortified can cut this plant for medication. It was said that even those who are capable of using parts of this plant for medication have to do so either early in the morning or late in the evening, because if one's shadow falls on it whilst one is cutting it, one will be spiritually cutting oneself. Therefore, this plant has to be cut when there is no sunshine to cast a shadow. The medicine men and women added that because of the fear attached to this plant, those who cut it have to propitiate it before doing so. (see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a, p.5). Research that McLeod (1981) and Falconer (1992) carried out among Akan communities support this finding. *Nkosua* (eggs) and *nsa* (drinks—generally alcohol) are usually used in accompaniment with prayer as part of this propitiating ritual (see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a, p.5).

5.2.12 Animals believed to possess *sasa*

Among the people of Berekum Traditional Area, the *trɔmo*—the bongo antelope—is the animal most feared by hunters due to the dangerous *sasa* that it is believed to



Figure 19. The *trɔmo* (the bongo)

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bongo>

possess – a claim made by all the hunters I interviewed. McCaskie (2002, p. 220) and Rattray (1959, p. 182) generated similar findings among the Ashanti. The *sasa* of this animal is believed to be more powerful than the *sasa* of any other animal in the animal kingdom, and it is held that when it is killed, its *sasa* can haunt the hunter until it is



Figure 20. The side-striped jackal

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Side-striped_Jackal.jpg

exorcised through a special ritual bath. The hunters that I interviewed were unanimous on this matter. It was said that when one is affected by the *sasa* of a *trɔmo*, one suffers from hallucinations, through which one will keep shouting the animal's name—'*trɔmo! trɔmo! trɔmo!*' The hunters claimed that an affected hunter could even mistake a human being for an animal and shoot at them. This, they said, could lead one to make false confessions (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a, p. 7).

There is a popular saying among the Akan that runs: '*Yenni sasa aduro a yennkum*

trɔmo’, which translates as ‘If you do not have *sasa* medicine you do not kill the bongo’ (see Agyemang 1994, p.144). Another saying runs: ‘*Sɛ wobɛ kum trɔmo na w`adware sasaduru deɛ, gyae no ma ɔnfa ne mmrantesɛm nante kwae ase*’, which translates as ‘If you kill the bongo its spirit will haunt you until you exorcise it; you better leave it to roam about in the forest’. Because of the mystery surrounding the *trɔmo*, many hunters in the area avoid it altogether during their hunting expeditions (*Ɔbɔfoɔ* [hunter] Yaw Barima, an experienced hunter, personal communication, 30 August 2011, Mpatasie).

Another animal that hunters of the study area avoid is the *Kuntunu* or *Pataku*—the side-stripped jackal (*Canis adustus*) (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a)—again, because of the dangerous *sasa* it is believed to have. It is even said that its presence can bring about confusion in the community. My informants hinted that a sorcerer can cause a serious fight to break out in a community for no justifiable reason by just shaking the tail of a dead side-stripped jackal (*woso Kuntunu dua*). For this reason, hunters are hesitant to hunt this animal (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2012a, p.7). In the study area, many other animals, such as elephants, leopards, pythons, buffaloes, crocodiles, and black duikers, must have their *sasa* propitiated when they are killed to prevent them haunting the killer (*Ɔbɔfoɔ* Yaw Barima, personal communication, 30 August 2011, Mpatasie; see also Rattray, 1959, p. 183). Parrinder’s (1974) study across Africa confirms these findings. Thus, it may be argued that the belief in *sasa* has the potential to contribute to the protection, conservation and sustainable use of certain trees and animals in both the study area and Ghana as a whole.

It is important to state that because the above discussed traditional ecological measures have religious undertones, the infringement of any of them is viewed as a taboo or a ‘sin’ in the life and thought of the people under investigation. The measures can also be viewed as traditional or indigenous ecological laws. This is because anyone who infringes any of them in spite of the belief that one may suffer the consequences spiritually, one is also punished by the leadership (chief and elders) of the community, which in most cases is in the form of payment of a fine and/or provision of specified items for sacrifice to appease the ancestors or the spirit entity that is involved. This means or confirms the view that in traditional Berekum society and as it is the case in other traditional African societies, religion and politics are mixed (Odotei, Awedoba and Albert. 2006; Owusu Brempong .2006, Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009).

As pointed out in the introduction, some literature takes issue with parts of the religio-cultural practices above. For instance, critics of religious environmentalism argue that there are numerous examples of the (so-called) nature religions (including African traditional religion) that only concentrate on certain aspects of nature, such as trees, forest or rivers, in contrast to the focus of modern environmentalists, who attend to the entire environment (see Tomalin, 2013). In the words of Taringa (2006), ‘this means not all aspects of nature play a pivotal and vital role in their beliefs about salvation ... [since] some aspects are treated with [the] least care and reverence’ (2006, p. 211). Although my interviews revealed that the people of Berekum Traditional Society place more emphasis on trees, forests and rivers than on other elements of creation, they also revealed that they perceive the whole of nature to be interconnected, and thus requires human attention to ensure that harmony is maintained. Although they take human subsistence needs to depend more on certain elements of nature than others, and thus exploit some of these aspects of nature for their own survival, they do so only in a way that does not pose an overall danger to nature. Thus, they interact with nature in a sustainable way. *Ɔpanin Kyere Kwame’s* and *Nana Akumfi Ameyaw’s* statements in chapter five (p. 93; 100) address some of the concerns of the critics. A repetition of Nana Akumfi Ameyaw’s explanation here may be relevant:

In God’s creation, there are things that can be used (destroyed) and other that cannot be used, so the destruction of such things constitutes a sin. Even those that can be used have the right time for their use. Anything short of this is considered as a sin in our tradition. This is to ensure that we make sustainable use of natural resources (personal communication, 7 November 2011).

Some of the Berekum proverbs that were presented in chapter five also confirm that the critiques of religious environmentalism discussed above hold little sway in relation to the people under study, who clearly understand what goes into their environmental ethics. In view of this, it is contended that the arguments put forth by critics of religious environmentalism do not find purchase in all indigenous societies.

In spite of the above explanation, it will be misleading to deny the ambivalent way in which indigenous Africans relate towards nature. In other words, some of the religio-cultural practices may be seen as injurious to the environment. That is,

aspects of ambivalence are embedded in indigenous Africans' religio-cultural practices which raise issues with the view that indigenous African religion is 'environmentally friendly' (Schoffeleers, 1978). This in a way makes such a claim an idealised or romanticised. For instance, among the people under investigation and indeed throughout Ghana, there is less respect towards non-totemic animals or plants. The only non-totemic animals or plants that are treated with awe are those, as has been pointed out earlier, believed to possess *sasa*. This seems to confirm Taringa's (2006) view that environmental friendliness of indigenous Africans is selective. Also among the Effutus of Ghana, their major festival is *Aboakyere* (lit. animal catching) during which the deer is hunted for as part of the major rituals of the festival. This indeed puts the life of deer in the community in danger. Furthermore, the *Bugum Chugu* (Fire Festival) of the Dagomba people of northern Ghana is a potential source of bush fire. This is because one of the main rituals of the festival is where the participants gather usually in a spot at the outskirts of the town with everybody holding high his or her long burning torch. These torches are made of dry grasses specifically prepared for the occasion. The dry nature of the grasses makes it more serious since the vegetation of the place is overwhelmingly grassland and usually dry due to the dry weather condition in the northern part of Ghana.

5.3 Summary

This chapter has focussed on how Berekum people have been influenced by their indigenous religion and culture in relation to the conservation of nature. These people hold a firm belief that human beings live in a relationship with other creatures of the universe, and thus need to establish an acceptable way to sustain this relationship for their own benefit. Armed with such a belief, they have used mechanisms such as sacred groves, *nkyida*, taboos, reverence for land, water bodies, the belief in totems and *sasa*, and the planting of *ngyedua* to help them to relate positively with the environment with a view to conserving it.

The origins of sacred groves—an important traditional conservation strategy—and the reasons for their establishment were not very clear, however. Although the people claimed their creation represented a quest for conservation, the evidence for

this is poor, as stories and myths about their origins seem to point to religious motivations rather than conservationist ones. It is thus unsurprising that scholars are divided concerning the motivations behind the establishment of this institution, as well as the ecological importance of such groves. Despite the debate, it was found that sacred groves do have some ecological importance, as other studies have confirmed. For instance, notwithstanding their size, they are found to serve as sanctuaries for the wildlife inhabiting them.

Both the fear and the respect for certain plants and animals grounded in the belief in *sasa* and the practice of totemism, respectively, also serve as concrete ways for conserving a variety of species. In much the same way, reverence for land and water bodies, as well as the practice of planting trees, were identified to have positive ecological values in the study area. In spite of these positive religio-cultural practices that enhance the weal of the environment, there are other religio-cultural practices that do not support environmental conservation. In the next chapter, the means by which Berekum people create and transmit indigenous ecological knowledge will be examined.

CHAPTER 6 TRADITIONAL/INDIGENOUS WAYS OF CREATING ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN BEREKUM

6.1 Introduction

Wangari Maathai, (2011) argued that ‘you cannot protect the environment unless you empower people, you inform them, and you help them understand that these resources are their own, that they must protect them’. This claim is apt with regards to the life and thought of the people of Berekum Traditional Area, where measures have been put in place to ensure the sustenance of their indigenous ecological knowledge. Understanding the value of education that imparts environmental knowledge and behaviour, traditional Berekum people use different methods to pass on their ecological knowledge to the youth. This section examines some of these methods, of which there are several. The most important ones are discussed below.

6.1.1 *Mmɛbuo* (Proverbs)

The Akan word for proverb is *ɛbɛ* [*mme* [pl.], whilst the practice of using proverbs is referred to *mmebuo*. Nana Kyere Kakari (personal communication, 13 November 2011) explained that *mme* are used in context, and that in order to use them effectively, one has to be knowledgeable about Berekum culture, particularly the language of the community. In corollary, the listener has to also be well versed in the culture, particularly in the idioms of his society so that he can appreciate the importance of the message being conveyed in the proverb(s). Consequently, traditional Berekum people make sure that their youth become proficient in the use of the idioms of their community. Makilah describes a proverb as ‘a saying that expresses an experience that is considered an apparent truth within a particular community’ (Makilah, 2003, p. 1; cited in Omare, 2010, p. 90). Because the youth are prepared to appreciate the use of *mme*, the use of *mme* provides a common tool for imparting knowledge to them. *Mme* are used to create an awareness of other creatures through reference to their natures and particular characteristics. For

instance, the word *ako/awidie* (parrot) is used to emphasise oration or eloquence. It is common to hear expressions such as ‘*na`no ate se ako/awidie*’, meaning ‘he/she is as eloquent as the parrot’. According to Nana Kwabena Wusu (personal communication, 7 November 2011), some of the *mme* advise people to be wary of certain plants and animals due to the magical powers or evil spirits that are believed to be associated with them. For instance, the following two proverbs (which I have already mentioned) are commonly used in the study area: ‘*Yenni sasa aduro a yennkum trɔmo*’—‘If you do not have *sasa* medicine you do not kill the bongo’; and ‘*se wobekum trɔmo na w`adware sasaduru deɛ, gyae ma ɔnfa nemmrantesem nante kwae ase*’—‘If you kill the bongo its spirit will haunt you until you exorcise it; you better leave it to roam about in the forest’.

These *mme* are used to warn people to be wary of the bongo. Because Berekum people are fully aware that the continuous survival of humans is possible only if natural resources continue to be available to them, the *mme* are sometimes used to draw attention to the sustainable use of resources. This explains why it is common to hear a proverb such as ‘*adi daa ye sen adi preko*’—‘it is not good to eat all that you have in a day’, or ‘*wo sum boɔdeɛ a sum kwadu*’—‘when you support the plantain plant against the wind, do the same for the banana plant’. *ɔpanyin* Kwame Kyere (personal communication, 5 January 2012, Berekum) explained that the contents of the *mme* are usually compounded with those of personal experiences, observations, and information about the reality of natural phenomena. That is, every *ebe* in Berekum is meant to teach a lesson or draw attention to something. Therefore, all the *mme* that say something about natural objects create awareness about their existence. It is therefore not surprising that a lot of *mme* abound in this traditional society, and provide prescriptions about how humans should relate with natural phenomena.

The following table provides some examples of common *mme* in the study area that relate to the human-nature relationship. It was compiled during the interview sessions with my key informants.

Table 12. Samples of human-nature proverbs in Berekum Traditional Area

Proverb	Literal translation	Kind of relationship involved	Meaning /Relevance
<i>Nnua nyinaa tutu a ebε ka abε.</i>	It is only the palm tree that is able to withstand the strength of a destructive storm.	Plant-plant	Dependability
<i>enam dua so na εma homa hunu soro.</i>	It was through the help of the tree that the vine was able to reach the sky.	Plant-plant	Cooperation
<i>Ayɔnko gorɔnti na ama ƆƆƆ enya tiri.</i>	It was having too many friends that caused the crab its head.	Animal-animal	Carefulness in friendship
<i>Abosua tese kwae wogyina akire a εbomu koro wobεn ho a, na wo hunu sε dua bia wo ne sibrε.</i>	Family is like a forest; when viewed from afar it looks as if all the trees are one, but when you get close you will realise that each tree stands alone.	Human-plant	Cooperation, but self dependence is important
<i>Ɔbonto nfa woho mmɔ nkaawa.</i>	<i>Ɔbonto</i> [a kind of fish] do not compare yourself with <i>nkaa</i> [another fish, believed to be very cunning].	Animal-animal	Be selective in friendship
<i>Dua bata boɔnetwa ye twa na.</i>	It takes the wise person to cut a tree that is attached to a stone.	Plant-stone	Perseverance and carefulness
<i>Kwae a agye wo no ye nfrε no kwaewa.</i>	Do not be ungrateful to the forest that has saved you.	Human-plant	Gratefulness
<i>Dua koro gye mframa a εbu.</i>	An isolated tree cannot stand the might of a strong wind or storm.	Plant-wind	Cooperation
<i>Aserewa su ayankuku su a neto pae.</i>	When <i>Aserewa</i> [a tiny bird] tries to imitate the cry of <i>ayankuku</i> [a bigger bird] its anus bursts.	Animal-animal	Be wary of over ambition

<i>Sɛ wo bribi ne abob Ɔnnua a ɛnka wo bɛtɔ akuma ama no</i>	You would have bought an axe for the woodpecker if it had been one of your relations.	Human-animal	Sympathy
<i>Aboa a Ɔnni dua Onyame na ɛpra ne ho.</i>	It's God that drives away flies for the tailless animal.	Animal-God	Concerned /Care for the needy

What may be drawn from the table above is that the contents of many Berekum proverbs are derived from human-plant/animal relationships, plant-plant relationships, and animal-animal relationships. This implies that the contents of proverbs help to create or emphasise the idea that human existence depends on the existence of non-human creatures. Asante-Darko's (2006) study of the relationship between Asante proverbs, poetry and environmental knowledge produces similar findings. For instance, the proverb '*kwaɛ a agyɛ wo no yɛnfrɛ no kwaewa*'—which literally means 'do not be ungrateful to the forest that has saved you'—covers a wide range of issues. Wienecke's (2005, p. 88) study also recognises the positive value that proverbs can have in inculcating the need to conserve natural resources.

Socially, proverbs are used to impart a sense of gratitude in the youth. Philosophically, they advise against showing ungratefulness to any phenomena that one's life depends on. The use of the word 'forest' in the above example reinforces its ecological importance, as livelihoods depend on the land (forest) in traditional societies. Thus this proverb is clearly cautioning both the young and the old to be grateful to the forest as it is an important natural resource, and as such needs to be used sustainably.

The proverb, '*dua koro gye mframa a ɛbu*'—which literally translates as 'an isolated tree cannot stand the might of a strong wind or storm'—is used to stress the social need for cooperation in all aspects of human life. The need for cooperation in the worldview of the people under study is not limited to human beings, but is also important for other constituents of creation. This view is expressed in another proverb, '*dua koro nyɛ kwaɛ*' ('one tree does not make a forest'). The ecological lesson these two proverbs emphasise is that a lot of trees are needed in the same place if you want to get the full benefits from them. Each of the proverbs in the table above will, in one way or another, emphasise the fact that human survival is tied to

the rest of nature, and particularly to trees. Thus, all Berekum proverbs that make reference to elements of nature can be used to impart ecological knowledge.

The awareness that proverbs create about nature has accordingly influenced the traditional Berekum people's attitude towards the non-human creatures that play a meaningful role in their lives. It should be noted that I am not suggesting here that environmental anthropocentrism (valuing nature solely for its benefits to humans)—an approach that deep ecologists fervently oppose (Sessions 1995, Naess 1973)—is the main driving force for Berekum people's attitude towards nature. The proverbs exist in this traditional milieu to show because they value nature through a holistic understanding of it, not because they are purely instrumental tools for promoting the self-interest of Berekum society. For instance, traditional Berekum people believe that everything God created is good. They express this proverbially as: '*Asansa se nea Onyame abɔ nyinaa ye*'—'The hawk says all that God has created is good'—which is a commonly used proverb among all the Akan of Ghana (Opoku, 1978).

6.1.2 Myths

Opanyin Kyere Kwame (a.k.a. Kwame Kɔkɔ) explained that within the Berekum traditional worldview, myths are classified under the broad term *anansesem*²⁶ (Spider's stories). He quickly added that myths are *anansesem* with a difference. This is because *anansesem* are ordinary stories told to entertain, educate or to teach a particular lesson, whilst myths are generally believed to be true stories in the community in which they are told. He observed that myths offer the "why's" and "how's" of the existence of religio-cultural beliefs and practices, as well as of other important elements in a community. This view was supported by Nana Kwabena Wusu. However, in an interview with Nana Agyemang (personal communication, 6 October 2011), he claimed that there is no specific local term for what we now refer to as myths, and that is why they are loosely classified under the term *anansesem*.

²⁶The spider is one of the most important characters in Akan folklore and West African folklore more generally. In the Akan and traditional Berekum mythology, *Ananse's* character is ambivalent, standing for both wisdom and trickery because of its ability to adjust craftily to situations (see Rattray, 1930). For that reasons, Akan, folklores are called *anansesem* (i.e. they are named after the spider).

He added that myths, unlike *anansesem*, are not ordinary stories, and this may explain why only a few people (mostly the elderly and ritual specialists) are capable of narrating the myths of a particular community.

The above explanation corroborates the literature on myths, where there is no unanimity over their definition among folklorists (Bascom, 1965). Bascom for instance, defined myths as ‘prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past’ (Bascom, 1965, p. 4). He explained further that myths give account of the origin of the universe, humankind, death, the nature of some animals, or of any natural phenomena, and may explain the origin of a ritual or a taboo (Bascom, 1965, p. 4), while the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* explains that a myth ‘is a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief.’

Thus, one may argue that myths are usually used by indigenous people to explain the beginning of events, and traditional Berekum people are able to use them to educate the youth about the rituals and origins associated with the beliefs and practices of the area. For instance, there is a myth among the people of Berekum that explains why fish and crabs in the River Koraa are not eaten. Maame Akua Donko (the attendant of the *Koraa* sacred grove) ‘recounts’ how ‘in the olden days’, a serious war broke out between the Berekum people and their neighbours, the Dormaa people. But the River Koraa miraculously saved the Berekum people by overflowing its banks whenever the opposing army tried to launch an attack on them. The people of Berekum considered this a miracle because it was during the dry season that the river’s banks overflowed. She said that prior to the war, the people could eat fish and crabs from the river, but immediately after the river saved them, they began to experience stomach upsets whenever they ate either a crab or a fish from the river. An oracular consultation revealed that the river did not want her ‘children’ (fish and crabs) to be destroyed. This explains why fishing is strictly prohibited in the River Koraa. The people now go to the riverside to watch the fish as they swim beautifully in the stream (Maame Akua Donko, *Koraa* sacred grove attendant, personal communication, 7 March 2009; see also Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009a, p. 260).

The above story shows how myths can be used to explain why certain ecological practices exist in a particular community. LEAF (2009) cites Arnes Naess as advising against viewing scientific knowledge as being completely incompatible with myths, recommending: ‘Let us value both the myths and the scientific studies in order to develop clearer understandings about our precious forests’. Myths, by their nature, can enable ecological knowledge to be passed on to younger generations through explanations of the origins of human beings, the cosmos and its constituents, together with the provision of guidance about how humans should relate with these features of the universe. Herein lies the importance of myths in generating and transmitting ecological knowledge, particularly in indigenous societies.

Just like myths, folktales are used by the traditional Berekum people and the Akan in general to explain the existence and origins of natural phenomena, thereby giving an account of human beings’ relationships with them, and it is to these cultural devices for transmitting knowledge that we now turn.

6.1.3 Folktales

Discussions with my key informants revealed that folktales are also classified as *anansesem*. Folktales are stories that elders in the community use to impart knowledge and entertain younger members of the community, usually during the evening (*Ɔpanyin* Kyere Kwame, personal communication, 6 November 2011). In some of the folktales, elders are able to create an awareness of natural phenomena and human beings’ relationships with them. The following folktale attests to this:

Once upon a time, there existed a close friendship among three animals – *Tatia* [ant], *akra* [cat] and *asono Kokroko* [the almighty elephant]. The friendship grew in strength. One day, the friends decided to discuss how each would honour his mother when she died. *Tatia* was first to speak. He told his friends that his mother was so dear to him that when she died, he would give her a special honour by laying her on a skin of a human being. *akra* also said he would kill a human being to honour his mother when she died. *asono* said, when the mother died, he would honour her by destroying all the trees around him to show that he has the strength and power over everything in the world. Sooner than later, *Tatia* lost his mother. He was able to honour his promise by indeed laying

his mother in 'state' on a skin of a human being. All the mourners became surprised at this feat. *Tatia* was asked to explain how he managed to get the skin of a human being. He explained that he got it from the peeling offs of the skin of human. He explained further that any time a human being gets a wound or a burn, and it is getting healed, part of the skin where the wound or the burn occurred peels off. He said that it was these peel offs that he laboriously gleaned over the years. It was from the piles that he made the 'mat' (human skin) on which his mother's body was laid in state. *Tatia* was applauded for his tenacity, ingenuity and dexterity by all the friends and sympathisers at his mother's funeral. This also explains why it has become the character of the ant to always move slowly picking items from the ground. *akra*'s mother was second to die but he was unable to kill a human being in honour of his mother as promised. He was booed at for failing his mother. Out of disgrace, *akra* decided to make amends by promising to rub his body against the body of any human being he comes across. This explains why *akra* is fond of rubbing his body against humans' bodies all the time. When *sono Kokroko*'s mother died, he started destroying trees around him as promised, but he could not pull down the *odum* [*Chlorophora excelsa*] tree. He tried several times but to no avail. He became disappointed and ashamed. He also was booed at by his friends and sympathisers at the funeral for failing to honour his promise to his mother. He was told that it is honourable to be modest in one's promise and that one should not be deceived by his or her mere size to claim to be invincible (Stephen Effah Mensah, personal communication, 27 January 2012).

Although there is a strong emphasis on social lessons in the above story, an ecological lesson is also implied here, as the protagonists of the story are animals dealing with human beings and flora. In the words of Asante (2005), 'the animal and plant characters in folktales are presented to allow the narrator and audience to stand back and contemplate the fact that they have lived in close contact with them' (Asante, 2005, p. 106). In other words, through the use of 'characters of both animate and inanimate things interacting, the audience is being reminded of all the biodiversity that is outside them yet forms part of this arena of their world and constitutes a basis of their lives and sustenance' (ibid.). Furthermore, Mbiti (1966, p. 23) suggests that the use of non-human creatures in folktales implies that 'they [non-human creatures] contain a portion of humanity just as humanity contains a portion of them, and none is independent of the other'. Also, the very presence of flora and fauna in the story facilitates the smooth impartation of socio-moral lessons to the

members of the community, implying that flora and fauna are necessary ingredients for human existence and survival, and thus placing a perceived obligation on humans to protect them. Finally, the idea of recycling could be promoted by the ingenuity of the ant.

In addition to such types of story, Berekum adults use everyday examples to educate their young about environmental issues. For instance, when dealing with a difficult or dicey situation, one will sometimes hear an elder from Berekum say, ‘*Aɛ sɛ santrofi anoma. Sɛ wokum no a, woafa mmusuo; sɛ wogyae no nso a, wagyae seradeɛ*’, which literally translates, ‘the situation is like the nightjar [a nocturnal bird], which, when you kill it, you invite misfortunes on yourself but, when you leave it, you have missed a delicacy’. Although this saying is intended to advise people to be very careful when taking a decision, it also has the potential to warn people to avoid this kind of bird.

6.1.4 *Bragorɔ* (Puberty Rites)

Certain rituals are also used in Berekum culture to impart ecological knowledge to young people. Three of these rituals—*Bragorɔ*, *Afahyɛ* and *Yerepra yadeɛ*—will be discussed here.

*Bragorɔ*²⁷ is an important event and occasion for teenage girls in Berekum Traditional Area as it is a formal means for integrating teenage girls into the community. The rites for this ceremony are performed as soon as a girl experiences her first menses (Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa, *Senasehemaa* (queen mother of Senase) and *Kuronthemaa* of Berekum Traditional Area, personal communication, 12 October 2011, at her palace in Senase). This may be described as being both an initiation and a separation ritual, as the girls are simultaneously being separated from the domain of childhood and introduced into adulthood. Thus, it is a formal way for inducting girls in Berekum into the customs and traditions of their people.

²⁷For details on Akan *bragorɔ* see Sarpong, 1977 *Girls Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Cooperation. Also, see Appiah-Sekyere, P & Awuah-Nyamekye, S .2012. ‘Teenage pregnancy in the life and thought of the Akan: Moral perspectives’, *Sociology Study*, vol. 2, no 2, pp.129-138.

During the ceremony, the girls are secluded for a period of time, during which they are educated in matters of sex, marital and family matters, and the taboos of the land, especially the environmental ones. Nana Takyiwaa explained that although the primary importance of *bragorɔ* rites is the provision of an official platform on which a girl is declared matured for marriage in traditional Berekum society, the occasion is also used to teach the girls the “dos and don’ts” of their community in general. For instance, they will be made aware of why they should not go into rivers and streams, and why entry into certain places is restricted to women during their menstrual cycle, as well as why certain foods should not be eaten during pregnancy. Therefore, *bragorɔ* rites are meant to aid girls in their transition into the adult community. This information was corroborated by Nana Ameyaa (a ninety year-old woman) during a separate interview (personal communication, 15 October 2011, at her residence in Berekum).

There is no formal event to induct boys in the area into adulthood, but a boy must follow his father closely and learn the customs and traditions of the land. For instance, as he follows his father, he will learn what animals and plants not to kill, either because of totem or fear of the *sasa* within them. For instance, the teenagers in the study area would be told not to kill a *pomponyin* (lizard) to avoid getting a swollen umbilicus (navel). According to *ɔpanyin* Yaw Owusu (personal communication, 11 November 2011, Biadan), the only important milestone signifying the maturity of a boy in Berekum is when his father buys him a gun and a cutlass. This is significant because it means that the boy is now mature enough to take a wife. It is interesting to note that Driver (1941) has found very similar initiation rites for girls and boys entering adulthood among Native North Americans.

6.1.5 *Afahyɛ* (Festivals)

Afahyɛ are annual events that traditional African peoples celebrate. Most *Afahyɛ* are for honouring and remembering the founding fathers of the community concerned, or for honouring their gods, although they sometimes also serve to re-enact important occasions connected with the society concerned (Nana Okofo Dartey III, personal communication, 14 December 2011, at his palace). Some of these *Afahyɛ* are connected with the agricultural practices of a people, and may either mark the

beginning (planting) or the end (harvesting) of an agricultural season. One such example is the *Hɔmmɔwɔ* of the Ga of Ghana. Among the people under study, *Kwafie*—the principal festival of the people of the Berekum Traditional Area—is celebrated to honour the founding fathers of Berekum (Nana Okofo Dartey III, *Gyasehene* of Berekum Traditional Area). In addition to *Kwafie*, every town or village in the traditional area has its own local festival, with its own particular purposes. I was able to compile information about some of these festivals, which is presented in the table below.

Table 13. A table of Festivals in Berekum Traditional Area

Name of Town/Village	Name of festival	Time of celebration	Purpose/Objectives
Abi	<i>Abofogyā</i>	Between Nov. & Dec.	To ask for the blessings of the ancestors
Akroforo	<i>Afuofu</i>	Between Nov. & Dec.	To ask for a bumper harvest and the protection of the town
Ayimom	<i>Kwafie</i>	December	To pacify the gods and ancestors and ask for protection and a bumper harvest
Berekum	<i>Kwafie</i> (the main festival of the traditional area)	Between Nov. & Dec.	To pacify gods and the ancestors and ask for their continuing protection
Biadan	<i>Kwafie & Tankwasi</i>	December	In honour of the ancestors and the Tankwasi god, to ask for a bumper harvest and protection
Jamdede	<i>Koraa afahyɛ</i>	December	In honour of the river Koraa for protecting the community throughout the year
Jinijini	<i>Munukwasie</i>	September	To taste the 1 st yam of the year and ask for a bumper harvest in the following year and the protection of the community
Koraaso	<i>Munufie afahyɛ</i>	Between Nov. & Dec.	For celebrating a bumper harvest
Kato	<i>Mfansī</i>	Every Friday	To ask the gods for the protection of the community
Kutire no. 1	<i>Fofie</i>	January	To ask the gods for a bumper harvest and the protection of the

			community
Kutire No.2	<i>Munufie</i>	Between Dec. & Jan.	To ask the gods for a bumper harvest and the protection of the community
Mpatapo	<i>Fofie</i>	January	In honour of the gods and ancestors, and to ask for a bumper harvest and the protection of the community
Mpatasie	<i>Krufie afahye</i>	December	To remember their ancestors and solicit their protection
Senase	<i>Tansie</i>	January	In honour of the Tansie god to ask for a good yield and the protection of the community

During festival periods, most of the citizens of the area return home to honour the occasion, from both near and far. As part of the celebrations, the history of the community is recounted, the dos and don'ts are re-emphasised, and those that need amendments or repeals are revised. This annual ritual reminds the people of their responsibilities and rights in the community and enables them to learn or re-familiarise themselves with the tenets of the community, including those connected with environmental conservation (Nana Oppong Taa Senti II, personal communication, 12 November 2011). More importantly, as part of the preparation for the *Kwafie*, all the roads leading to the rivers and streams are cleared, anything that is considered filthy is removed from every household, and choked drains are desilted. This is part of the celebration of festivals throughout the traditional area, and is meant to safeguard the health of the people in the community (all the chiefs and the elders I interviewed stressed this important fact). *Kwafie* also has important social aspects. It is a period in which all the disputes among the people are supposed to be settled, and provides an opportunity for the youth to select their life partners (since all the citizens are to be present during the festive occasion) (Nana Afia Siraa Ababio III, *Katohemaa*, personal communication, 13 December 2011).

Thus, festivals have multiple functions in Ghana, and this has led the government to show an interest in some of the major ones. They accept invitations from the traditional leaders of the communities concerned as they view the festivals as good platforms for disseminating government policies and sharing national

resources. It has recently become fashionable for politicians, particularly government officials, to announce new projects for communities during festival times. These officials also take the opportunity to reiterate the need to protect the environment, whilst the chiefs and their people use the occasion to make formal requests to the government for new projects. This platform serves as a good forum for further interaction and for the integration of local knowledge into modern ways of conserving and protecting the environment. Clarke-Ekong's study on festivals in contemporary Ghana fits with the findings of the current research (Clarke-Ekong, 1997).

A new position has recently been created in the chieftaincy institution – that of the *Nkɔsoɔhene*, which is a chief in charge of development. This innovation has ecological relevance, as one of the roles of the *Nkɔsoɔhene* is to ensure that the development that takes place does not neglect or undermine the sustainable use of natural resources in the area.

6.1.6 *Yerepra Yadeɛ* Ritual

A clear example of the environmental consciousness of Berekum people is provided by what they refer to as the *Yerepra yadeɛ* (literally 'we are sweeping away diseases') ritual. This ritual is performed to prevent an outbreak of a disease in the community. *Maame* Mercy (personal communication, 2 January 2012, Biadan) explains that it is performed when the leaders of a community have good reason to suspect that an epidemic is imminent within the community. When the people are certain about the imminent danger, the chief of the area tasks his *Ɔbaapanyin/Ɖhema* (queen mother) to act by collecting an egg from each household of the village. A day is then set for the ritual, on which every household will bring the refuse for that day and assemble at a designated point. A libation prayer will then be made by the *Ɔbaapanyin/Ɖhema*, after which all the women will go around the entire village three times holding some *nsomme* (*Costus afer*) leaves, and the refuse will be brought out amidst shouting:

Yerepra yadeɛ oo!

Yerepra yadeɛ oo!

Yerepra yadeɛ oo!

Literally translated as:

We are sweeping away sickness

We are sweeping away sickness

We are sweeping away sickness

After the third round, the *nsomme* leaves and the refuse will be deposited at all the entrances to the village. This deposition is referred to as *mpanpim* (literally translated as ‘barrier’). The *mpanpim* is symbolic, blocking the impending disease from entering the village (*Maame* Mercy, personal communication, 2 January 2012, Biadan; this ritual was also referred to at Akroforo during a focus group discussion, 13 January 2012).

I have already noted that Berekum ecological knowledge is not as effective as it used to be, as a result of a multiplicity of factors. However, traditional Akan and Berekum people had complex indigenous mechanisms for managing biodiversity that were influenced by their religion and culture long before the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which was the result of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro ‘Earth Summit’ (Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005). It is against this backdrop that African indigenous religion has been referred to as ‘profoundly ecological’ (Schoffeleers 1978). This stands in stark contrast to Lynn White’s concept of Christianity, which he views as ‘the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen’ (1967, p. 1205). However, many authors dispute this portrayal of Christianity (see, e.g., Johnson, 2000; Harrison 1999; Joranson and Butigan, 1984). Johnson (2000), for instance, questions how Christianity can be predicated to be the root of modern environmental woes when regions of the world in which Christianity’s influence is very minimal are also facing environmental crisis. Harrison (1999) contends that a misreading or misinterpretation of Genesis, particularly 1:27-28 led Lynn White and his supporters to connect Christianity with the wanton exploitation of nature. It is also interesting to note that long before Lynn White’s statement, Aldo Leopold made a similar remark:

Conservation is getting nowhere because it is incompatible with our Abrahamic concept of land. We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. There is no other way for land to survive the impact of mechanized man, nor for us to reap from it the aesthetic harvest [that] it is capable, under

science, of contributing to culture. That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known, but latterly often forgotten (Leopold, 1949, p. viii).

This revealing statement from Leopold did not, however, attract the kind of criticisms that Lynn White's attracted. Moreover, Milton (1998) argues that:

People [indigenous people] who behave in non-destructive way that enable them to live sustainably do not necessarily respect their environment. [For] their material requirements may be such that they simply do not need to stretch their environment's capacity to support them. [...] To say that a community has ethics or an ideology of respect for their environment is different from saying that they act in environmentally benign ways (Milton, 1998, p. 87).

However, using the case study of traditional Berekum, this study has shown that conservationist considerations can be found in the beliefs and practices of indigenous or traditional peoples. Those who view the ecological values in traditional peoples' practices as mere coincidence, with the motivations for such practices deriving from religious considerations rather than conservationist ends, may have correctly identified the realities in *some* but not *all* indigenous societies.

6.2 Summary

I have thus far demonstrated that the relevance of methods for acquiring and transmitting knowledge within a society cannot be over-emphasised. I have pointed to the correlation between a society's capacity to develop and sustain itself and how it acquires and transfers knowledge. The analysis of the data collected in this study confirms that the Berekum people's religious worldview helps them to live in harmony with nature, as studies of the religious worldviews of other indigenous societies have also found. However, there is also evidence that indigenous methods for dealing with environmental problems have been impacted on as the result of cultural contact and modernity, which have weakened the effectiveness of indigenous means of handling environmental issues. The above problems

notwithstanding, the Berekum people's ways of creating environmental awareness and combating environmental problems provide a potential resource that can be tapped into, and refined where necessary, in order to complement scientific approaches to dealing with contemporary environmental problems. This is needed as historical evidence has shown that even with all its tremendous inroads, science has yet to adequately address the environmental problems of the world. This makes the synergy of both the indigenous and modern ways of tackling environmental issues an important end to pursue. The next chapter will now examine in greater detail the impact of colonisation and Christianity on the conservation of nature in contemporary Berekum society.

CHAPTER 7

INDIGENOUS BEREKUM LIFE WAYS ENCOUNTER WITH COLONISATION AND CHRISTIANITY AND ITS IMPACTS ON ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the impact of colonisation and Christianisation on local environmental management in the study area. In order to discuss this, we first need to look at how the experiences of colonisation and missionary activities have impacted on the institution of chieftaincy and traditional religion in Berekum. This is because the chiefs are the supervisors of local environmental management, and traditional ecological practices are also underpinned by the indigenous religion. Therefore, anything that affects these two institutions is bound to affect environmental management in the area as well. There is evidence that both colonisation and Christianisation contributed to the decline of both the powers of Berekum chiefs and the influence of the indigenous religion, which has implications for environmental management in the area.

A detailed account of the political life (chieftaincy) of the Berekum people was provided in chapter three, so here the focus will be on how the encounters with colonialism and Christianity impacted on chieftaincy. As has been explained, a chief is the living representative of the founding ancestors of the community in which he or she rules, and ancestors' consent is always sought through the medium of divination before a chief is appointed. Thus, the position of a chief is sacred, and among the Berekum and the Akan in general, a chief loses his or her legitimacy to rule if he reneges on his religious duties. This was confirmed by all the chiefs that I interviewed, and it suggests that it is implausible to separate the influence of religion from the state in traditional Akan society, as political leadership is intrinsically fused with spiritual leadership. The legal basis of the authority for the traditional ruler is embedded in the religious mentality of the Berekum people (see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009c).

The chiefs I interviewed stressed that there were very few problems involved in controlling the activities of the people during the pre-colonial era, as anyone who

dared to challenge the authority of the chief was deemed to be challenging the authority of the ancestors. Also, all the laws, customs, taboos and other codes of ethics enacted by the chief and his or her elders in the traditional communities were deemed to have divine backing, as they were believed to have been sanctioned by the *abosom* (gods) and *nananom nsamanfoɔ* (ancestors). This belief strengthened the enforcement of indigenous laws, including those regarding the environment. This set-up remained in place until the people of Berekum came under the combined influence of colonialism and Christianity during the early 20th century. It is misleading, however, to say that the environmental problems began with Christianity's introduction to Berekum in the colonial times, as it was only much later after independence that Christianity began to have a substantial influence in the area. However, my interviewees viewed colonisation and Christianity to provide the *basis* for the change in the Berekum people's attitude towards the indigenous ways of handling environmental issues.

7.1.1 The impact of colonialism on the traditional system of government

The indigenous political system began to lose its grip on Berekum people during colonial rule. This is because the legislation that was passed by the colonial administrators affected everybody, since the colonial power—Britain—had gained total control of the administration of the country. The governors introduced a series of laws called *Native Jurisdiction Ordinances*, which granted the indigenous rulers (chiefs) only limited powers to preside over cases (Buah, 1998; see Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009c). In 1927, Sir Gordon Guggisberg (1919-1927), the governor at that time, introduced the *Native Administrative Ordinance*, which created the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs, but this did not help much. Sir Alan Burns introduced a new *Native Authority Ordinance* in 1944, which was reintroduced in the governor's Constitution of 1946, and enabled a Native Authority to be appointed by the government. However, under the law, the decisions of the Native Authority could be reviewed or even set aside by the governor (Buah, 1998). Thus, although the policy of indirect rule involved the chiefs in the administration, the real power rested with the colonial administrators, since the authority of the chiefs operated under the general direction and control of the colonial district commissioners (Buah, 1998). Berekum was raised to paramountcy status by the colonial government of

Ghana in 1901. This is an indication that the chiefs were essentially under the control of the colonial administrators.

The events leading to the establishment of the Catholic Church in Berekum also show the extent of the colonial administrators' powers. The records of the Saint Theresa's Catholic Church in Berekum show that when the church elders approached Nana Kwadwo Banie—the *Omanhene* of Berekum at that time—to request suitable land on which to build their church, he refused. As a result:

Msgr. Hauger and Fr. Fischer therefore went to Sunyani to see the governor, the District Commissioner (D.C). Major Robertson went to Berekum and told the Omanhene to give the Catholic mission as much land as he had given to the Protestants. The Omanhene heeded and gave the land. Fr. Fischer also provided a bottle of whisky, one pound and five shillings to the Omanhene, officially closing the deal (Saint Theresa's Catholic Church in Berekum, Records, 2009).

The analysis of the above drama, especially the giving of the drink and the payment of one pound and five shillings to the chief, shows that the colonial administrators seemed to take the view that although the land belongs to the chief, he has no real authority over it. This appears to give credence to my interviewees' contention that the Ghanaian tradition which makes chiefs the custodians of their lands was given little respect during the colonial era. This also shows that the colonial administrators worked in close partnership with missionaries to control the colonised.

Many of the chiefs I interviewed stressed that although the disregard for the institution of chieftaincy began during the colonial era, it continued after the country's independence in 1957. This is evidenced by Ghana's post-independence history. Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP) government did not depart from the way that the colonial administrators treated chiefs after independence, and arguably devalued them even more, passing a number of parliamentary acts to reduce their authority between 1958 and 1961. The Ashanti Stool Act, 1958 (Act 28) and the Stool Lands Control Act, 1960 (Act 79) prevented chiefs from the regulation, collection and use of stool revenue. In the words of Odotei (2010), 'the Nkrumah government not only weakened the political and judicial roles of the chiefs but also made them appendages to the central government by breaking their financial backbone'. This, according to Nana Oppong (personal communication, 9

November 2011), has adversely affected the weal of the country, particularly in terms of its culture.

A good number of my respondents, most notably the chiefs, were not happy with the way that Ghanaian politicians hold on to the legacy bequeathed to Ghana by the colonialists, particularly with reference to economic policies. For instance, economic considerations are placed higher than environmental considerations in all the major policies in the country. This means that logging is increasing at an alarming rate, and mineral deposits are being overexploited throughout the country. The chiefs complained that the central government rarely consults them when taking decisions that affect them and their subjects either directly or indirectly. A common grievance amongst the chiefs concerned the award of timber concessions to contractors. A prominent chief in the study area said:

As a chief, you would be there only to see a group of people on your land cutting timber. When you ask them they would produce a permit from the Forestry Commission authorising them to cut the trees. This is an affront on us as custodians of the land. You will complain but nothing serious comes out of it. The government is only interested in the taxes it gets from the contractors. This explains the fast depletion of economic trees in this area today (personal communication, 17 December 2011).

The situation is not peculiar to Berekum area, with Boon et al. (2009) raising the same point in a study in another region of Ghana. Kendie and Guri make a related point:

Traditional institutions have always existed in Ghanaian society and have sustained society despite several years of external control by governmental institutions. State institutions tend to work outside of the traditional institutions. [...] The consequence has been the neglect of enriching ideas from local practice (Kendie and Guri, 2006, p. 333).

My findings showed that, in reality, the institution of chieftaincy is now under more threat than ever in Ghana. For instance, the law that established Ghana's decentralisation policy in 1988 stipulates that the chiefs of the area concerned will be consulted by the President before District, Municipal and Metropolitan Chief Executives are appointed in their area, but in reality, this rarely happens. The chiefs told me that they are usually cut off from such decision-making, and that things are

even worse for chiefs who are viewed as being sympathetic to the opposition party. They said that this attitude has trickled down to the District, Municipality and the Metropolitan levels. The decentralisation policy says that one-third of Assembly members should be appointed to the Districts, Municipalities or Metropolitan Assemblies by the government, and there is a specific clause in the law that says that chiefs of the area shall be represented in the Assembly. However, the chiefs were unanimous in saying that the ruling party members at the local level usually select the chiefs that they feel are 'in their camp', or sympathetic to the ruling government's policies and causes. This shows that although provision for decentralisation exists in theory, it is meaningless for the chiefs in practice.

Another important factor that Nana Professor Agyewodin Adu-Gyamfi Ampem (personal communication, 25 November 2012) made with reference to the threat to the authority of the chiefs was that Ghana's Supreme Court made a ruling in 2008 that said it is no longer obligatory for a subject to present him or herself before a chief whenever he or she is summoned to appear before the court of a chief. Interestingly this ruling was brought about through the actions of an ex-chief and legal practitioner, Nana Adjei Ampofo, who filed a writ at the Supreme Court in September 2008 against the Attorney-General and the President of the National House of Chiefs that challenged the constitutionality of the Section 63 of the Chieftaincy Act (Act 759). In his writ, he stated that sub-sections b, d and e of Section 63 – which stipulate that 'a person who being a chief assumes a position that the person is not entitled to by custom; deliberately refuses to honour a call from a chief to attend to an issue; and refuses to undertake communal labour announced by a chief without reasonable cause; commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine, or to a term of imprisonment, or to both' – contravened Articles 14 and 21 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution (which deal with the Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms of individuals). The Supreme Court upheld his objections, and this ruling has, seriously undermined and weakened the authority of the chiefs over their subjects.

The chiefs were also unanimous in holding that their authority has been taken away by the modern system of government. This is confirmed by studies elsewhere in Ghana. For instance, Odotei and Awedoba (2006) observed that 'traditional states now operate within the modern state and conform to the structures that the state uses to regulate its operation' (2006 p. 17). As has been noted, the state's manipulation of the institution of chieftaincy began during the colonial era, with the indirect system of rule adopted by the British making chiefs appendages to imperial power (Auwah-

Nyamekye, 2009c, p. 8). And this weakening of the authority of chiefs—particularly the transfer of decision-making from traditional authorities to the modern state-control institutions and agencies (see Migdal, 1974; Little and Brokensha, 1987; Venema, 1995) – has also occurred in other parts of Africa. Byers, Cunliffe and Hudak (2001, p. 194), quoting Derman (1996) on the chieftaincy situation in Zimbabwe, state that ‘the enactment of the Communal Lands Act of 1982, and repealing of the Tribal Trust Lands Act of 1979, shifted land allocation authority from traditional political leaders to District Councils’. They added that, ‘Traditional leaders have no legal means to compel modern leaders to respect traditional land use rules. The chiefs have no legal power to create and enforce rules on natural resource management in communal lands.’

However, during my interactions with the chiefs, it came to light that they were partially responsible for their current plight, as some chiefs have been involved in corruption. For instance, some chiefs mentioned that they know colleagues that are involved in multiple sales of land to developers. Some, they said, even connive with timber contractors to steal trees from sacred groves and other restricted areas. In the words of Nana Opong Taah Senti II, ‘chiefs are now not faithful to their duties, for the chieftaincy institution has been turned into a business venture’ (personal communication, 16 November 2011). Another disturbing issue that came out of the discussion was that fact that, as of now, some king-makers could collude with wealthy people that don’t belong to royal families and get them appointed as chiefs for a price. Moreover, they reported that the procedures for selecting chiefs aren’t always followed, even with those who are from the royal clans. All this undermines the authority of a chief. Chieftaincy disputes prevent the chiefs from being able to present a common front for dealing with the challenges before them.

7.1.2 The encounter’s impact on Berekum Traditional Religion

The chiefs’ loss of powers has had an effect on traditional religion’s hold over indigenous people as the chiefs both embody and are the custodians of the indigenous religion. During colonialism, a significant body of legislation was passed outlawing African religious beliefs and practices and, according to Nana Akumfi Ameyaw (personal communication, 7 November 2011), some of the policies the

colonial administrators adopted paved the way for missionaries to launch their onslaught against the host religion. Major targets of the missionary assault included ancestral veneration, divination, and rites of passage. Smith remarks that ‘the attitude of the missionary towards Akan religion and social customs was destructive [...] the Christian congregation came into existence in conscious opposition to the ancestral ways of life and thought of the rest of the community’ (1986, p. 86). Juhe-Beaulaton (2008) expresses similar concerns in relation to the Benin and Togo people of West Africa.

Ɔkɔmfɔɔ Agyemang mentioned that many aspects of indigenous religion were banned during that era, with laws being introduced against the practice of human sacrifice, the use of anti-witchcraft shrines, trial by ordeal, and *funusoa* (carrying the corpse to find out who was responsible for the death of a person) (personal communication, 11 November 2011). Debrunner corroborated this: ‘Traditional justice could not be carried out as before. The custom of carrying the corpse and poison ordeal with *odom* bark was prohibited officially and could only be continued secretly’ (Debrunner, 1961, p. 63). In respect of the ban, Rattray (1959) reported that:

In this modern example, typical of hundreds of such cases that once decimated whole villages, the tradition of centuries was so firmly instilled in the mind of the accused man that he seemed to have forgotten that he had only to appeal to the nearest European court to find redress (Rattray, 1959 p. 167).

My informants acknowledged that not all the colonial bans were negative. For instance, they applauded the ban on human sacrifice, which they said was not acceptable for any reason. And banning trial by ordeal is certainly a step in the right direction as well.

The following from the report on *The Native Affairs Department*, January 1922 to March 1923, describes the ban on anti-witchcraft shrines:

Owing to various reports from all parts of the colony and Ashanti clearly showing the distinctly harmful tendencies of the Fetish known variously as Hwenisu, Hwe Me So, Buani, Eguase, Kwana, Kwaku Mframa, Kwasa, Donkor, Brekum Akua, Sakra, the new cult, which had its stronghold in Akyem Kotoku, was suppressed by an Order – in – Council dated 9th December 1922 under the provisions of Section 14 of the Native Customs Ordinance. In January the Omanhene

of Akyem Kotoku sent special messengers to Accra to protest against the suppression of this Fetish that he attributed to misrepresentations against him by his Political enemies acted on without his being afforded an opportunity of defending his division and their fetish (cited in Assimeng, 1985, p. 174).

Early literature on the missionary venture in Africa shows that missionaries came to Africa with a preconceived notion of the African. For instance, early European accounts of the Akan by authors such as Bowdich, Dupuis and Bosman created the impression that they were full of cruelty as a result of the practice of human sacrifice, and that they were also very fetishistic (cited in Onyina 2002, p. 134). Writing about the Presbyterian in Ghana, Noel Smith pointed out that the Basel missionaries were constantly promoting the view that the government should legislate against what they termed as 'heathenism' by prohibiting traditional practices. 'Heathenism', according to the Basel Mission, includes fetish worship, polygamy, the power of the chiefs, and funeral practices (Smith, p. 89, cited in Onyina, 2002, p. 185). As has already been noted, the institution of chieftaincy is the embodiment of the Akan culture, and therefore attacking it implied that 'virtually everything of the Akan was evil and must be prohibited' (Onyina, 2002, p. 135).

The ban placed on anti-witchcraft shrines as well as some other traditional religious practices by the colonial powers not only affected the religious life of the traditional Ghanaian, but also the system of social control in traditional society. This is because traditionalists used divination as a mechanism for social control by utilising the widely held belief that diviners were capable of exposing evildoers and social deviants. Western ideas of social control were different from traditional African ones, and continue in some ways to influence post-colonial thought. This brief historical overview shows that there was a paradigm shift in Ghanaian's social practices and organisation as a result of their encounter with Western Europeans.

According to Nana Akumfi Ameyaw (personal communication, 7 November 2011), by attacking Ghanaian beliefs and practices, the missionaries were striking at the core of African culture, as 'African culture is a religious culture' and thus anything that affects its religion affects its culture in general. He said that Christians refused to comply with chiefs on several grounds, and Parrinder (1961) produced similar findings in his study African societies. The effects of Christianity on African Traditional Religion and Culture are expressed concisely by Nukunya (1986):

In order to understand the effects of Christianity on African culture, it is necessary to realise that traditional institutions never existed or functioned separately like discrete entities but dovetailed into one another. Religion for instance never operated independently of the kinship structure and the social control and vice versa. Any impingement on the religious beliefs, practices and organisations was, therefore, bound to affect not only that aspect of social life but also other elements of it (Nukunya, 1986, p. 87).

The impacts of impinging faiths on Berekum's traditional religion have been widespread. One traditional priest reported that he had not been able to celebrate his god's annual festival for years because his children, who used to help him during worship, have all become Christians. Some cults have ceased to exist and their shrines are now in ruins. Yaw *Kɔmfɔɔ* (personal communication, 13 November 2011) remarked that formerly powerful shrines such as *Tano Kwasi*, *Tano Yaw*, *Tano Panu*, *Brogya Kukuɔ*, *Diamono*, *Apomasu*, *Tigare*, *Nangro* and *Mframa*, which held centre stage in traditional African worship years ago, are now completely wiped out, either because there are not enough priests or not enough worshippers to assist the priests. This was confirmed at Kato by Nana Gyabaa, the *Abrafoɔhene* of Kato. He took me to places where two powerful shrines – *Ntoanfiri* and *Nana Gyabi* – used to stand and said:

These two shrines had played a significant role in the development of Kato, but since their priests died quite some time ago nobody has shown an interest in becoming their priests because everybody claims to be a Christian. The shrines have thus been neglected for years and now they are in total ruins (personal communication, 11 December 2011).

He added that the only people who still demonstrate any zeal in the indigenous religion are elders.



Figure 21 Ntoanfiri shrine in ruins



Figure 22 Gyabi shrine in ruins

Most of the younger generation show little to no interest in the indigenous religion, and few will attend formal traditional worship. He claimed that the real challenge to Berekum traditional religion will thus come when its aged adherents pass away. As the table on page 110 of Chapter 4 shows, there is only active cultic worship or attention at thirteen of the thirty-seven shrines listed there, with seventeen being dormant, and seven being completely unused. Thus, traditional religion—which forms the basis of traditional ecological practices—has been shaken to its very foundation. This means that the sacred groves which hitherto could not be entered by ordinary people, for instance, are now entered by many, and sometimes even logged by timber contractors. Because of the strong hold that Western culture and Christianity have on the people of Berekum, the use of the gods as police to enforce compliance and the ability of traditional leaders to guide young Berekums has been weakened.

One major factor which sustained membership in Berekum traditional religion was its priests' abilities to predict or reveal hidden things to its adherents. But today, many Christian prophets, prophetesses, evangelists, and Muslim clerics known as *mallams* (diviners) in the study area are seen as being able to do the same, leading many traditional Berekum religion believers to seek divine guidance from these priests and *mallams* instead. This has been another challenge to the sustenance of Berekum Traditional Religion in the 21st century.

One concern that almost all my key informants raised was that most of the young people in the study area that have received a Western education look down on traditional religion, with some even considering it as a religion of the illiterate folk. However, my informants noted that those with such opinions only say this when

things are going well for them, and secretly solicit help from traditional priests when crises befall them.

7.1.3 The impact of the encounter on environmental management

As has already been noted, the chiefs in the traditional area are the main enforcers of indigenous conservation laws, and thus there is a correlation between the authority of a chief and local environmental management. Many chiefs and key informants in this study maintain that the current environmental situation in Ghana can be directly traced back to the loss of the chief's authority.

Nana Akumfi Ameyaw (personal communication, 10 November 2011) emphasised that the colonial masters were to be blamed for the current over-exploitation of Ghana's natural resources, particularly its minerals and forest products. He contended that during the colonial era, the commercialisation of minerals (gold, diamond and bauxite) and timber became more pronounced in Ghana, and that these resources began to be exported in large quantities to the Western world. Cecile Jackson (1994) concurs: 'Early colonial policies were concerned with securing natural resources for European interests and introduced many environmental policies to achieve this end and regulate usage of natural resources' (cited in Amanor, 2001, p. 64). Nana Yaw Mensah (personal communication, 10 October 2011) also noted that the colonial masters' imposition of their way of life onto the African negatively affected indigenous people in many ways, in particular their ways of conserving nature. According to Koran-Amoako (personal communication, 11 October 2011), modern technology and industry create more environmental problems than they address. For instance, he cited the use of modern technology for logging, which has led to an increasingly rapid depletion of forest, and the use of chemicals and the creation of toxic by-products by industries, which are very harmful to both human beings and marine life. Similar opinions were expressed by almost all my respondents.

I have noted earlier that some of my respondents acknowledged that colonialism has left some positive legacies in Ghana, such as the modern National Forest Reserves, including the Tain II and Pamu-Berekum Reserves in the study area. However, they were sad that the role the reserves were supposed to play had not been wholly

realised because ‘proper consultations were not made by the colonial administrators before the land was taken from the local people and this explains why the people enter these reserves for the least opportunity to cut trees or poach’ (*Opanyin* Kyere Kakari, personal communication, 13 November 2011), with the result that both are now severely depleted. This points to some weaknesses in the modern means for conserving the environment, especially during the decision-making stage through to their implementation. Thus, while Berekums recognise some of the positives influences of colonialism, many of the older generations believe that the damage that has resulted from its impact on their culture is monumental.

My informants were unanimous in citing Christianity as a central cause of environmental degradation in the study area in response to the following question: *What do you think about traditional Berekum ways of conserving the environment and how effective are these ways of conserving nature today?* Almost every respondent said that the traditional methods had lost some of their effectiveness, and mentioned Christianity as a factor in this loss. The condemnation of Christianity was so overwhelming that it will be revealing to present some of the answers my informants provided for emphasis.

In a response to the above question, *Okra* Acheampong, the chief spokesperson of the *Akwamuhene* of Berekum Traditional Area said: ‘Christians have no regard for traditions. They flout local environmental laws with impunity, particularly those of the Pentecostal type’. A typical example of this is the encounter between the Seventh Day Pentecostal Church and the *Dman* (state) I pointed out earlier on’ (personal communication, 07 November 2011).

Yaw Komfoɔ contended that Christian condemnation of the indigenous belief that spirits reside in trees, fields, mountains, streams and other natural objects as paganism or idolatry undermined an important belief that promoted the protection of nature (personal communication, 19 November 2012), and claimed that this has ecological repercussions. Lynn White also pointed this out: ‘By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects’ (White, 1967, p. 1205). Nana *Komfoɔ* Serwaa Agyemang, a traditional African priestess added:

The problem could be attributed to the spread of Christianity in this area. Muslims are not like the Christians. The Muslims generally respect the traditional laws. In those days there was

respect for the elderly. Now there is no distinction between the elderly and the youth. Today, they will tell you “I attend Church or I am a Christian”. That is, they are not under traditional authority and, for that matter, traditional religion (personal communication, 15 December 2011, at her shrine).

According to Kwabena Yeboah, ‘Christianity condemns the old order but what it brought is also not followed’ (personal communication, 10 October 2011), while *Ɔpanin* Yaw Wusu said: ‘The youth of today do not respect our laws. They do what the land hates all in the name of Christianity’ (Yaw Owusu, personal communication, 11 November 2011). Similarly, *Ɔpanyin* Kyere Kwame expressed his frustration that:

Eneemafoɔ [the youth of today] do not regard our tradition anymore. When *Kwasibroni* (Europeans) came with their Bible all our gods were rendered ineffective. They said our gods were false gods. People now challenge tradition with impunity. The youth do not respect the elderly. They see tradition as old fashioned (*Ɔpanyin* Kyere Kwame, personal communication, 6 November 2011).

Nana Okofo Dartey, the Gyasehene of Berekum Traditional Area – who is also a Christian – criticised some of the attitudes that Christians adopt in Berekum, arguing that:

There are some Christians who go to the extent of condemning practitioners of African traditional religion. At times they go to the extent of insulting the chief priest. They describe anyone who practices African traditional religion as *kwasea* [a fool]. In my opinion this is not right and must be condemned (Nana Okofo Dartey, personal communication, 14 December 2011).

In an interview with the priest attached to the *Nyinakofi* sacred grove, he emphasised that:

Christians do not respect we the *akɔmfɔɔ*. They do not even regard us as human beings. Ironically we are the very people they run to whenever they are in deep trouble. Christianity condemns traditional practices and in fact, Christianity has made traditional laws less effective today. In those days nobody could enter this forest without authority but now people fetch firewood from here (Kwame Agyemang,

Nyinakofi Kɔmfɔɔ, personal communication, 11 November 2011).

Bemoaning the current situation, a ninety year-old woman said:

Many years ago—when a majority of us were attached to the religion of our forefathers—we did not have problems at all with the environment. There was plenty of rainfall for our crops and plenty of big trees and fresh air was in abundance. But now, the rainfall pattern has changed drastically. The rains do not come at the time that they are expected and when they come, they do not last as they used to. The worst of this is the excessive heat we are experiencing which has resulted in crop failure and strange diseases. This change in the weather has even affected our rivers. Those that used to be perennial are now seasonal. I blame this on the disrespectfulness that has characterised our society today. *Eneemafoɔ* are difficult to control. They have no respect for our customs and tradition. This started when Kwasibroni (the Whiteman) brought his school and religion to us. This has seriously affected the overall weal of our environment (*Maame Ackoma*, personal communication, 5 October 2011).

Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa, the queen mother of Senase—who is also a Christian—expressed her view that:

Due to Christianity all the *tete* things [customs and traditions] are fading away. Now *bragorɔ* [puberty rites] are not performed. We Christians do not respect our traditional ways of life but traditional way of life ensures environmental responsibility. Muslims are doing better than us [Christians] in terms of respect for traditional values. They respect traditions more than we do (Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa, personal communication, 12 November 2011).

Throughout the interviews, my key informants expressed the view that Muslims in the traditional area generally respect the local laws better than Christian do, with a number of Christians even acknowledging this, as the above interview excerpts show. A Muslim scholar that I interviewed contended that ‘the condemnation of traditional people’s way of conserving nature was not justified [under Islam], for a careful analysis of these methods points out clearly that they are the way Allah wants us to behave towards the environment (Mujib, personal communication, 12 November 2011).

Madam Felicia Gyamfi, the spokesperson of Nana Siraa Ababio III (the queen mother of Kato) also lamented:

I am a Christian. I belonged to the Pentecost Church but I am not happy at all with the way some Christians attack our customs and traditions, especially our indigenous religion. I believe this religion played a key role in ensuring environmental sanity some time ago, and it can still be of help today (personal communication, 9 December 2011, at Nana Siraa Ababio III's palace in Kato).

In a response to the above question, Mr. Augustine Gyedu, a forester in the study area, and also a Christian, said:

Traditional methods, though associated with traditional beliefs, they are found to be sustainable. But traditional beliefs are gradually losing their values to Christian beliefs and are now less effective (Augustine Gyedu, personal communication, 12 November 2011).

The general view of my key respondents was thus that Christians, particularly those of the 'penteco-charismatic' strand, show disrespect towards traditional beliefs and practices, breaking various taboos such as *nkyida* (the observance of rest days as sacred days or Sabbath for the traditionalists) with impunity. At times, some of the activities of the overzealous Christians become inimical to social stability.

Two important views can be deduced from the above responses. The first is that the people of the study area feel strongly that Christianity is to blame for the current environmental woes of the area, as Lynn White (1967) argued to be the case. The second is that some of the Christians in the area are not comfortable with the way that other Christians there condemn the traditional beliefs and practices in the area.

This is important, as it can be seen that the thrust of the interviewees' criticisms of Christianity were not directed to Christianity *per se*—i.e. they did not hold Christianity up as an anti-environmentalist religion—but rather towards Berekum Christians for their attacks on traditional religion. Both Christian and non-Christian interviewees alike viewed these attacks to have negatively impacted on traditional ecological practices, as attacking traditional religion implies indirectly attacking approaches to ecological management.

This apportioning of blame may not be as simple as my interviewees have presented it to be, however, and a more critical examination of these issues is needed. Certain questions still need posing, such as whether the local people can be absolved from blame given that it is they themselves that have adopted Christianity and are spreading it faster than ever before in the area. The available records, as was noted in Chapter 4, show that only two Christian missionaries—Rev. Parregaux and Rev. N. T. Clarke—visited Berekum, in September 1904, and these two alone paved the way for the establishment of the first Christian church (the Presbyterian Church) in the traditional area. And even here, Nana Kwabena Owusu—who was then *Omanhene* (Paramount Chief) of Berekum—was reported to have aided in Christianity's introduction Berekum. The records show that he even sent one of his sons, Atta Kwadwo, and his nephew Kwaku Agyemang to the school set up by the Presbyterian Church in Berekum (Centenary Celebration and Thanksgiving Service, 2006, p. 20). According to the history of the church in Berekum:

... Rev. Parregaux, then based in Kumasi, had taken a similar trip to Berekum. His reception by Nana Kwabena Owusu, the *Omanhene* of Berekum Traditional Area, appeared friendly, so he felt Berekum was a fertile ground for the introduction of Christianity. On his return to Kumasi, and hearing the report from Nkoranza, he set off to Nkoranza, where he convinced Rev. N. T. Clark of the welcome awaiting him at Berekum (Centenary Celebration and Thanksgiving Service, 2006, p. 16).

After this, there is no record of Rev. Parregaux and Clark visiting Berekum again, so it can be assumed that it was the local people who accepted the faith and spread it in the area. The histories of the Roman Catholic and the Methodist Churches in Berekum also show that it was the indigenes of Berekum that introduced the churches there rather than expatriate missionaries. Another important finding of this research was that the majority of the chiefs I spoke to reported being Christians. Some said they even delegate certain rituals associated with their office that they view as contradicting their Christians beliefs. It may be questioned whether such delegation undermines a chief's authority, since it had been pointed out -that a chief who refuses to perform the rituals associated with his office loses his moral right to remain in that office. There is also the problem of the tensions that exist between

such chiefs and their kingmakers.²⁸ If the adoption of Christianity is leading to the destruction of the environment, which is vital to the very existence of the people, then it is important to ask whether the people should continue to patronise and even expand their practise of it. Is this not a contradiction in terms?

Blaming religion for these problems would have been reasonable if Islam had been the culprit, as the local people have not shown any serious interest in Islam. After the demise of the first and the second generations of indigenous Berekum people who accepted Islam, their children generally repudiated it in Berekum. Although there is no scientific data to support this opinion, there is however, evidence in the study area. This can be seen from the fact that there are no Muslims at all in many villages in Berekum, whilst a significant amount of people can still be found that bear Muslim names (indicating that their parents were Muslims). Almost all current practising Muslims in Berekum are non-natives, mostly from the Northern Ghana, where Islam has stronger roots. The Muslim communities are found in the *Zongo*²⁹ areas of the big towns in the region. There may be a number of reasons for this decline in indigenous Muslims, but these are outside the purview of the current thesis. Although many Berekum people perceive Christians to be the major cause of the current environmental problems in the area, the evidence on the ground does not thus strongly support this conclusion, since Berekum people themselves have mentioned factors such as their over-reliance on scientific methods for conserving the environment, over-population, protracted chieftaincy disputes in the area, and a lack of patriotism. Also, and most importantly, the lack of contributions from Berekum Christians towards addressing the environmental woes of the area and their critical attitudes towards traditional practices which support environmental conservation are a major source of the problems.

²⁸This term is used to refer to the group of people who select and install chiefs in Ghana.

²⁹Zongo is a term used to describe the communities/quarters which are predominantly inhabited by Muslims in Ghana.

7.1.4 Christianity and nature conservation in Berekum

An important finding of the study was that the view of Christians pastors (especially those from the main line churches) towards the adherents of the traditional Berekum religion has changed. Those interviewed said that the traditionalists have kept their faith in indigenous religious beliefs and practices that are conservational in character, whereas Christians have not until recently begun paying serious attention to biblical verses that have conservational underpinnings. This suggests a delayed move towards adopting the view that, as Calvin DeWitt (2000) contends, ‘the Bible contains divinely inspired wisdom about creation, and if we pay attention to this text, we can learn to relate to other creatures as God intends’ (quoted in Baumann et al., 2011, p. 59). Rev. Kumi of the Presbyterian Church bemoaned the early missionary view that held everything about African religion was bad, including the description of the way that they interact with other elements of creation in terms of idolatry. Rather, he suggests, they should have investigated the philosophy behind the indigenous people’s actions, and done away with this early missionary legacy long ago (personal communication, 6 October 2011).

So what contribution have Berekum Christians made towards environmental conservation there? When I discussed Methodist contributions towards the mounting environmental problems in Berekum with Rev. Acheampong, he said that although the general perception on the ground is that Christianity is to blame for Berekum’s environmental woes, the fault that is attributed to it is exaggerated. He argued the church has not stood aloof, and has been doing what it can to eradicate the perception that the environment is unimportant, whilst also making some contributions to addressing environmental problems in the area. He mentioned that the church now has what he calls a ‘Social Gospel’, in which the focus of the preaching is on environmental consciousness, and the priest preaches about the need to preserve and conserve the environment. According to him, the church sees itself as having both social and religious responsibilities. This fits with DeWitt’s view that:

Authority over things belongs to the Author of those things: we have no authority to destroy what we ourselves did not create; destruction of a grand master’s work by its onlooker, beholder, or curator may be a disgrace to their creator (DeWitt, 2000, p. 297).

Rev. Acheampong added that Methodist priests in Berekum also touch on indigenous ways of conserving nature during their sermons. He said that they de-emphasise the religious underpinnings of these indigenous ways, instead trying to rationalise the philosophies behind the indigenous methods. This, according to him, has gone down well with members of his congregation, and perhaps this represents a good starting point for integration.

Rev. Father Augustine Twum Obour of the Catholic Church in Berekum was also full of praise for the traditionalists' attitude towards the environment, and was not happy with the attitude of some Christians—especially those of the 'pentecostal-charismatic' churches—towards the indigenous religion. He stated that they usually advise the pastors of the charismatic groups not to directly attack the traditionalists. According to him, this advice is given during their Local Council of Churches (LCC) meetings. He mentioned that the Catholic Church now has numerous tree plantations in many parts of the country. Although he admitted that the plantations were set up for economic reasons, he claimed that they still help to restore order in the environment, since not all the trees from the plantations are harvested (personal communication, 11 January 2012). This suggests that some of the mainline churches' attitudes towards the practices of the traditionalists have changed—a change that may be due to their recognition that they have a crucial role to play in the conservation of nature, given the inroads the church has made into Berekum culture and lives. However, the attitudes of the Pentecostals remain somewhat problematic according to many of the interviewees, as they are very critical of the indigenous people's religious life, particularly with regard to their belief in spirits.

However, I learnt that some of the Pentecostals have started rethinking their theologies with respect to their attitude towards the traditionalists. For instance, in my interaction with the head pastor of the Pentecost Church in Berekum, as well as with other junior pastors, it became clear that they are now not only seriously rethinking their theology, but they are also attempting to alter their members' attitudes towards the traditionalists, particularly with respect to their (traditionalists) ecological practices.

Another set of Christian practitioners that adopt a conservationist attitude in the study area is the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA). This is seen from their attitude

towards certain game animals. The SDAs, like Muslims, strongly believe that it is a sin to eat a strangled animal, and also believe that it is wrong to eat a *tote boa* (an animal whose hoofs are not divided). Therefore, they do not eat or kill animals such as tortoises, flying squirrels, monkeys, hares and many others. For this reason, members of the SDA are generally not hunters, as traps cannot be used to discriminate between animals that are acceptable to catch and kill and those that are not. Moreover, SDA's will not eat all types of fish. Elder Ofori (personal communication, 11 December 2012) says that this is based on God's injunctions about animals that are to be eaten and those not to be eaten as found in Leviticus Chapter 11.

The findings of this research also showed that despite over ten decades of Christianisation in the Berekum area, some of the traditional beliefs are still strong. For instance, the belief in the *tumi* (spiritual power) of plants like *homakyem* (*Spiropetalum heterophyllum*) and *odii* (*Okuobaka aubrevillei*) is still common. Also, as was noted earlier, very few Christians in Berekum would dare fish or eat a crab from the River Koraa because of their association of the *tumi* in these plants and rivers with demons (see Jackal, 2010) – a major focus of the 'penteco-charismatic' churches in the area. Also, only a few of my interviewees who were Christians said they would not mind killing or eating their totemic animal or destroying a totemic plant.

I have already pointed out that some Christians in Berekum are not happy with the way other Christians treat traditional religious beliefs and practices. Some of my key informants said they had no problem whatsoever with combining different faiths inasmuch as the marriage of faiths caters for both their spiritual and physical needs, just as Asamoah-Gyadu (2003, p. 3) has noted. This brings us to the issue of hybridity, which has become a common feature of the religious life of many people in the study area.

7.2 Hybridity

Hybridity is what some scholars refer to as 'syncretism'. I prefer 'hybridity' to 'syncretism' due to the negative connotations that syncretism has assumed today.

For instance, some people see syncretism as involving confusion, but in the view of the people under study, there is no confusion involved in combining different faiths, with Islam and Christianity being seen as useful supplements to the indigenous religion by many Berekum people. My key informants reported having no problem with combining different faiths, inasmuch as the marriage of faiths caters for both their spiritual and physical needs. This is expressed in a local proverb that ‘*enam dodoɔ nsei nkwan*’ [plenty of meat does not spoil the soup]. Olupona aptly points out that ‘African religious experience supports and encourages pluralism. Such eclecticism produces an attitude of tolerance and peaceful co-habitation towards other traditions and cultures (Olupona, 2000, p.xviii). This mindset is embedded in the African worldview. Mbiti and Burleson have argued that Africans ‘come out of African Religion but they don’t take off their traditional religiosity. They come as they are. They come as people whose world view is shaped according to African Religion’ (Mbiti and Burleson, 1986, p.12 cited in Gathogo, 2007, p. 251). This is similar to Aylward Shorter’s contention that the African Christian does away with ‘remarkably little of his former non- Christian outlook.’ (Shorter, 1975, p.7 cited in Gathogo, 2007, p.249). It is thus common to find a Christian or Muslim convert in the study area that fuses beliefs from these religions with his or her traditional religious beliefs. Some members of the community are even of the opinion that one may not be far from right in thinking that both Islam and Christianity can be perceived as an integral religious heritage of the people. For instance, it is very common to find items such as charcoal, pepper, and onions, in the rice, sugar and *gari* (a local staple food)—all these (charcoal, pepper, and onions) are believed by adherents of the Berekum religion to ward off evil spirits—being sold in the market by women who claim to profess religions other than indigenous Berekum religion. Explaining the basis of hybridity in the study area, an old man said:

Krakyɛ³⁰ yɛn som ne yɛn amanmrɛ nyinaa yɛ adekrɔ. Nson nsonoyɛ biara nnim. Saa nti na obi a wokɔyɛ Okristoni koraa a, ɔntumi ndwane mfiri abibisom ho no (Personal communication, 2011).

This is literally translated as:

³⁰ The local term for someone who has received Western education.

*Kraky*e our religion and culture are seen as one thing. There is no difference between the two. This explains why it is very difficult for even an African Christian to run away from his indigenous religion.

The ecological importance of hybridity lies in the fact that, given that people have not wholly abandoned their traditional religious beliefs and values, and Christians are rethinking their theologies, it is still thus possible to ground ecological practices on traditional beliefs and attitudes in the study area.

Moreover, as it is implausible to claim that Christianity has completely destroyed the local Berekum belief system and its associated ecological practices (or, indeed, the local belief systems in other Ghanaian communities—see Berkes, 2008), there must be other factors that have and are playing a key role in the environmental problems of the area. And although Christianity is responsible for the disintegration of traditional African religious values, some Christian leaders (academic Christian pastors) are at the forefront of championing the recovery of a respect for traditional religious values. This is evidenced by the fact that books and articles on African indigenous religion and values have been authored by Christians. There are Christian pastors who work in this area within academic publishing, including Mbiti (Anglican, Kenyan); Idowu (Methodist, Nigerian); Gaba (Evangelical Presbyterian, Ghanaian); Osei (Methodist, Ghanaian); and Peter Kwasi Sarpong (Catholic, Ghanaian). No one can talk about the study of African Traditional Religion without recourse to works like *African Religions and Philosophy* (Mbiti); *Introduction to African Religion* (Mbiti); *The Concepts of God in Africa* (Mbiti); *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Idowu); *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief* (Idowu); *Ibo Sacrifice* (Cardinal Arinze); *West African Traditional Religion* (Asare); *Divine Revelation and Traditional Religion* (Bekye), *Scriptures of an African people* (Gaba). The contribution of nationalists that are also Christians, including Jomo Kenyatta and J. B. Danquah cannot be ignored either. For instance, on Akan indigenous religion, no one can ignore J. B. Danquah's *Akan Doctrine of God*. The list goes on and on. What this hybridity and this refocusing of Christian attitudes relating to the importance of traditional values means is that there is the possibility, at least, of reviving some of the indigenous ways of protecting or conserving the environment that have indigenous religious underpinnings, and using these to complement scientific methods and approaches.

7.3 Summary

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the encounter between indigenous Berekum people, colonisation and Christianity has resulted in a change in the study area, particularly in the areas of politics, religion and environmental management. There is also evidence that the indigenous religion has shown resilience in some areas, and that this has manifested itself through the adoption of hybrid religious systems. Thus, the values of the traditional religion are not totally lost, for there can be a common ground for complementarism. That is, with the right approach, some traditional ecological practices with religious underpinnings can still be used to complement modern approaches to conserving nature. The indigenous Berekum peoples' ecological knowledge and practices can still contribute, however modestly, to fighting the current environmental problems that they face.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The central argument of this thesis has been that indigenous knowledge with religio-cultural underpinnings can help in solving contemporary ecological problems in Ghana. It has been established that the natural environment in Berekum has been highly degraded, and several factors have been shown to be responsible for this. The people of the area are very much aware of their environmental problems, and would like to do something to address them. The salient findings of the research, based on the views of my key informants, can be summed up as follows:

1. That indigenous ecological knowledge is currently under threat;
2. That indigenous knowledge provides a potential tool for addressing some of Berekum's current environmental problems.
3. That indigenous ecological knowledge alone is inadequate to confront contemporary environmental challenges;
4. That despite the importance of science and technology, they are not a panacea for dealing with the environmental problems of the world today.

I have also discovered that many Berekum people are unhappy about the way in which indigenous knowledge is currently being handled. The threat to indigenous knowledge in Berekum has been attributed to several factors, but the key ones among them—according to my informants—are the effects that the inroads of Christianity have had in the area, and the increasing intrusion of central government into local affairs at the expense of local initiatives and autonomy. I will summarise the effects of these two factors in turn.

My informants viewed Christianity and its effects—western education, science and technology—just as Lynn White argues, as being responsible for the decline of their indigenous knowledge, particularly their environmental knowledge. However, this view as I have argued, is overly simplistic and idealistic (see Dikirr, 2008), since the evidence on the ground suggests it is exaggerated. For instance, factors such as over-population and its attendant effects and the intrusion of central government into local affairs have also played a significant role in the decline in the use of indigenous knowledge and practices. Moreover, the data have also shown that some of the current environmental projects being undertaken in the study area,

such as tree planting, are faith-based initiatives, mostly being carried out by the churches. Furthermore—and more importantly—the churches are now rethinking their theologies with a view to encouraging their members to show more respect to traditional beliefs, especially those that are environmentally friendly. Many of my Christian informants denounced the way that some of their Christian colleagues criticise anything relating to traditional Berekum beliefs and practices, and feel that some aspects of traditional practices – especially traditional ecological practices—have something valuable to offer and thus need to be preserved. However, Christians who have some sympathy towards certain traditional beliefs and practices are now in a dilemma as to how to approach this need to preserve traditional values in the face of their Christian principles and the formidable competing values of modernity.

The government, on the other hand, is also blamed for an over-reliance on scientific means of addressing the ecological issues in the country to the exclusion of the use of indigenous methods that should be seen as being complementary to those of science. Interviewees from Berekum seemed to echo Lynn White's view that 'more science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one' (1967, p. 1206). However, negotiating these problems is not as simple as my informants think. One reason for this is the population rise in Berekum, which increased from 39, 374 in 1960 to 129,628 in 2010 (see Chapter 3, p. 81). This puts the government in a dilemma, as it also has to attempt to find a suitable way to ensure food security and shelter needs, which require more land for development, and this has to be balanced against environmental conservation.

However, the fact that the government has such responsibilities does not entirely absolve it from all blame. There is evidence that right from independence in 1957, successive governments have been aware of the potential of indigenous knowledge in managing environmental issues in Ghana, but have failed to give indigenous knowledge serious consideration in their policies. For instance, there is no mention of indigenous knowledge in Ghana's 'National Biodiversity Strategy' (Ministry of Environment and Science, 2002). I have pointed out that the recurring view expressed during the interviews was that before Ghana's contact with Europe, the Ghanaians had a way of relating to nature in a sustainable way, but that their attitudes towards and ways of relating to nature and the use of natural resources steadily changed as colonialism gained root, with traditional ways of managing

natural resources being ignored, demeaned and displaced by Western models. It is important to add that my informants were not suggesting that nothing beneficial emerged from colonialism. They recognise that increased literacy, improved healthcare, shelter, and potable water, amongst other things, came about because of the colonial experience. But what they emphasise is that, as Nana Yaw Mensah (personal communication, 23 February 2012) observes, ‘the imposition of the colonial masters’ way of life on the African negatively affected the indigenous peoples in many ways, and particularly with respect to the indigenous ways of conserving nature.

One problem, however, is that our grasp of what constitutes indigenous knowledge is incomplete, since many of the traditional mechanisms are under threat or in a state of collapse, and have not even been studied exhaustively (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2009b). Attuquayefio and Fobil (2005) have argued that many environmental conservation initiatives have not been effective in developing countries—particularly in countries in Africa—due to the tendency to downplay the critical link between traditional and scientific approaches to conservation. These scholars are alluding to the fact that traditional nature conservation methods and those of science are not mutually exclusive. I have already argued that a careful analysis of traditional methods may reveal some scientific underpinnings to them. For instance, the use of resting days and ban periods among the Akan fishermen gives the sea or river some respite during which younger fish can grow. Although these rest or ban periods have religious undertones, they coincide with the time that the fish lay their eggs. Kroma (1995) blames the current ineffectiveness of indigenous beliefs concerning nature conservation on Western education and values. The marginalisation may also be partly due to the view that indigenous knowledge is inferior, but this is contrary to the findings of many studies, which show that indigenous knowledge has the potential to be a resource for handling local environmental problems (Ntiamoa-Baidu, 2008; Attuquayefio and Fobil, 2005).

Indeed, it is evident from the data that a religio-cultural practice like the preservation of sacred groves can be of some assistance in the conservation of nature, particularly in the areas in which they are located. A report attributed to the Environmental Profile of Ghana (2006) claims that the numerous sacred groves throughout the country are mostly managed by local communities, and that the majority of them have no legal status. That is, state does not support the local people

by way of legislation to assist them in the enforcement of traditional ecological laws—religiously inspired environmental laws (see p.155-156). This does not give the local communities a strong motivation to enforce local laws regarding the management of the groves.

My informants, who are the key stakeholders in relation to environmental issues in their area, have argued that neither indigenous nor scientific methods are individually sufficient for addressing the current environmental problems there. This suggests that a new paradigm is needed to address the current ecological problems confronting Berekum people, which—according to my key informants—lies in a synergy of indigenous and scientific ecological approaches. Interviewees stressed that this integration may include:

1. Policy-makers facilitating and becoming actively involved in a dialogue in which indigenous people, and particularly experts on indigenous ecological knowledge, are invited to contribute to the discussions for formulating policies on environmental conservation in the country.
2. Government support for traditional authorities through legislation that helps them to enforce traditional ecological laws, such as the ban on entry into sacred groves, indiscriminate hunting, fishing and other restrictions.
3. The development of proper collaboration between local authorities and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). This could be in the form of joint efforts by the traditional authorities and the District/Municipal/Metropolitan authorities to protect rivers, sacred groves and other natural resources.
4. Closer collaboration between Agricultural Extension Officers and farmers on the benefits of so-called 'environmentally friendly' farming methods.
5. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), both secular and faith-based, being encouraged to team up with local authorities in the quest to salvage nature.
6. Policy-makers taking steps to include indigenous knowledge (particularly indigenous ecological knowledge) into the school curriculum at all levels of education so that indigenous knowledge can be understood and accepted in the country as a complementary resource for national development.

However, laudable as the above suggestions are, they would not be as easy to implement as my key informants believe, since numerous obstacles have to be addressed first. For instance, presenting a paper based on a UNESCO-sponsored project on Ghana to the International Workshop on the Importance of Sacred Natural Sites for Biodiversity Conservation held in Kunming and Xishuangbanna Biosphere Reserve in China, 17-20 February 2003, Thomas Schaaf stressed the important lessons that can be learnt from the conservation and management of sacred natural sites. Schaaf mentioned the following as important lessons and conclusions about the conservation and management of sacred natural sites revealed by the project:

- A sacred natural site is an important element linking nature and culture;
- A sacred natural site is often an anchor for cultural identity;
- A sacred natural site can constitute an effective means for environmental conservation as it is embedded in local and traditional belief systems;
- Sacred natural sites have great value for conservation ecology, for example:
 - as areas of high biological diversity,
 - as sanctuaries for rare or threatened species,
 - as sites that protect freshwater sources, and
 - as indicator sites showing potential natural vegetation in areas subject to environmental degradation (important for the restoration and rehabilitation of degraded ecosystems) (Schaaf, 2003, p. 15).

However, Schaaf (2003) also draws attention to the fact that cultural values are dynamic and can change substantially over time. Traditional belief systems can also change, resulting in the abandoning of sacred natural sites and the relinquishing of their associated protection by local communities. Nugteren (2009) puts the point succinctly:

If the public interest in conservation is made too dependent on religious sentiments and mythical associations, instead of on common sense and a general awareness of responsibility for maintaining a precarious balance, then who could predict what would happen to ecological activism once the religiously inspired concern would dwindle for one reason or another? (Nugteren, 2009, p. 160).

Two important facts may be deduced from Schaaf's research. The first is that it confirms my informants' beliefs that their religio-cultural beliefs and practices have ecological importance. The second is that, as Nugteren (2009) has also shown, a people's indigenous religion can be used as a basis for their ecological practices. Therefore, as was discussed in chapter six, when Western culture and religion (Christianity in particular) gained roots in the study area, the basis for the host culture's ways of managing the environment began to lose its ground, and this led to a change in their perceptions, with many of the younger generations not being interested in traditional beliefs and practices. Moreover, similar perceptions are held by most Ghanaian policy-makers, although there is a growing belief worldwide that inputs from indigenous peoples are valuable for addressing matters such as environmental degradation.

Thus, we need to reconsider the top-down approaches to both ecological and socio-economic issues by giving much importance to the bottom-up approaches. Such a move may succeed, as the local peoples will feel that they are partners in finding solutions to common problems and this may encourage them to open up. The value of this approach has already been recognised and evidenced in the activities of some international conservation organisations (see Tomalin, 2013 p. 178). For instance, as I have already pointed out (see chapter 5), UNESCO has an initiative that seeks to find ways to integrate both local and scientific means of addressing environmental problems (particularly in the area of sacred groves and sites). The importance of these initiatives lies in the fact that the government can build upon them, as they have with the *Jaagbo* and *Anweam* sacred groves sponsored by UNESCO in the northern and eastern regions of Ghana.

It is notable that the literature on UNESCO projects also points to the challenges involved in such collaboration (see Barre et al., 2008; Corbin, 2008; Ntiamoah-Baidu et al., 2003), which exist in the areas where conservation regulations are not undertaken in consultation with local people. In such cases, the local people tend to show little interest in collaborating, or even resist such projects as they feel that outsiders are trying to impose their will on something that has religio-cultural importance for them (the local people). The importance of the UNESCO initiatives is that, the challenges that have been identified from the implementation of the initiatives can serve as a guide for policy-makers to discover what they should avoid in order not to impede the progress of otherwise well-intentioned projects.

Collaborating with locals over such issues can enable policy-makers to gain the confidence of the local people for smooth cooperation and integration. Such cooperation may be undertaken as:

Sacred forests are the bedrock for people and communities' religious and spiritual beliefs and cultural identity. Hence, it is morally unjustifiable to remove the rights of peoples and communities to protect and manage such sites (Ntiamoah-Baidu et al., 2003).

An encouraging sign that such cooperation or integration could be achieved in Berekum is the collaboration that currently exists between the people of Kato and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brong Ahafo branch, where the latter has supplied over two million plant seedlings that have been planted around the *Mfensi* sacred grove to serve as a buffer zone to protect it. What still requires adding is the legal backing for this laudable venture. Also, a mention should be made of the NGO, the Ghana Association for the Conservation of Nature (GACON) of the Brong Ahafo Region, which has successfully partnered the community of Buoyem in conserving and managing the sacred groves of that area (Corbin, 2008).

One other obstacle is the institution of chieftaincy itself, which my informants' suggestions above seem to emphasise. This institution is currently riddled with disputes as wealthy people that are not from the royal clans can 'buy' a chieftaincy position by bribing king-makers. There are also some instances in which the procedures that have been laid down for selecting and installing chiefs are not properly followed (as seems to be the case in the study area), and this leads to unnecessary chieftaincy disputes. The attitude and behaviours of some of the chiefs are also sources of worry, and this means that the very people who are supposed to be the rallying point – and, for that matter, the main supervisors of indigenous knowledge – are found to be undermining their own authority by inappropriate behaviour, as was pointed out in Chapter 7. All these factors undermine the very institution that is supposed to guide and exemplify traditional authority, and also be the agent for development and resource management in the respective communities.

Moreover, there is an issue concerning the feasibility of my respondents' suggestions in the face of the highly globalised and complex world of today, which involves the market economy, over-population, science and technology. In addition, – and as noted earlier – Ghanaian political elites now heavily rely on Western

models for addressing environmental problems. Additionally, there is evidence that as far back as the early 1960s, an attempt by some African leaders to reinstate traditional values and practices through the movement of *Negritude* failed. However, I have argued that the philosophy of ‘*Negritude*’ did not achieve its goals because either the concept was not clear to the masses or it was just premised on a protest built on the resentment of foreign rule. However, the proposed changes to Ghana’s ecological values and approaches do not constitute a protest, and indeed border on being grounded in survival – for they offer protection against the destruction of the life-support system of the people. This may be the catalyst that can prompt stakeholders, particularly the government, into being pro-active on the issues now.

It may be contended that despite their limitations, the findings of this thesis and other studies support the idea that indigenous people still ‘can provide ecological, economical, political and socio-cultural information necessary for conservation’ (Stevenson, 2005; cited in Barre et al., 2008, p. 31). Using sacred groves and other sacred sites in Ghana as their basis, Ntiamoa-Baidu et al. (2003) have argued that in spite of the pressure on indigenous conservation practices, ‘sacred forests and groves have survived for many years and continue to this day throughout the African region. [...] This shows the strength of spiritual values for the creation and maintenance of a particular sacred space or species and is a very powerful force for nature conservation.’

The above difficulties notwithstanding, I do not think it is an option to abandon the possibility of using indigenous knowledge to help to address current environmental problems, especially where scientific approaches to addressing said problems have been inadequate as a result of abuse and misapplication. That is, we should not throw the baby away with the bath water. Although it has been argued that factors such as formal education, foreign religions and global capitalism pose a serious threat to the survival of indigenous ways of handling ecological problems it is also true that despite the impact of Western culture and Christianity, the indigenous Berekum people have not entirely abandoned their traditional beliefs and practices, as the discussion has shown. This means the indigenous beliefs and practices still have an influence on Berekum people, and there is an increasing

awareness there, as well as in Ghana as a whole (and even throughout Africa³¹) that local knowledge needs to inform policy decisions.

Moreover, as Nana Nketia (personal communication, 10 December 2012) observed, there is one important thing that we should not forget as we attempt to find solutions to the current problems, and this is that every culture provides the means for its members to handle their pressing issues. The logical implication of this is that, as long as there are different cultures, there will be diverse approaches even to similar problem(s) just as Sutton and Anderson (2010) have pointed out.

Nana Adjei (personal communication, 18 December 2012) has also argued that environmental policies in Ghana have failed to achieve their desired goals because, as he puts it, 'they all failed to factor in the perspectives of the local people.' Nana Adjei was emphatic in arguing that 'any environmental conservation policy document that does not recognise the input of the local people is bound to fail, for the local people are those who are on the ground and not the initiators of the policies who sit in their offices in Accra [the national capital]'.

In conclusion, the analysis of the research data suggests that although we should be cautious of the romanticisation of the potential for indigenous knowledge to address environmental problems, and consider the complex nature of attempting to integrate indigenous knowledge with modern conservation methods, the evidence on the ground makes it difficult to ignore the potential contribution that indigenous people could make to environmental conservation agendas. Also, and more importantly, as it stands now, neither modern (scientific) nor traditional modes of addressing current ecological problems are adequate to do the task required from them, and it is against this backdrop that the synergy of the two modes of addressing environmental problems becomes imperative. A case in point is where government legislation alone could not stop people from using dangerous chemicals for fishing, but the chiefs and elders were able to by pronouncing curses on potential offenders.

Stressing the similarities between the two systems for conserving nature (indigenous and modern scientific) rather than their differences may provide the best way to begin considering how best to integrate these two diverse systems of

³¹ Dikirr (2005) who, although critiquing the romanticisation of indigenous ecological knowledge, also accepts its potentials.

knowledge. This will require designing a strategy, and thus further funding and research should be pursued to gain a better understanding of indigenous peoples' conservation practices. This should explore which elements of indigenous ecological knowledge and practice are applicable today, and the best ways to remove the obstacles to their application in order to pave the way for the integration of the two epistemologies that are required to successfully address the contemporary ecological problems of Ghana, and perhaps of Africa as a whole.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

Interview Guide for Research into the topic: “Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana: The Role of African Traditional Religion and Culture- A Case Study of Berekum Traditional Area”

Interview Guide for Chiefs/Queen-Mothers/Traditional Priests

Dear Nana,

Request for Interview

I am a PhD student of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. I am conducting a research into the above mentioned-topic.

As a stakeholder in environmental issues in this traditional area, would you be able to share your views on these important issues with me?

I would like to assure you that the information you will share with me in the interview will be confidentially and anonymously treated and will be used solely for the purpose of the study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye

Contact:

Phone: 0244508518

E-mail:kwasi.nyamekye@yahoo.com

Biodata

i) Name.....

ii)Age..... iii) Nationality.....

iv)Marital Status.....v) Religion.....

vi) Educational background.....

vii) Town/Village..... viii) Occupation.....

1. What religion do you practise?
2. For how long have you been practising this religion?
3. Could you tell me what roles you have as a religious leader?
4. How do you perceive the universe in terms of its creation and purpose?
5. What do you think human beings' place is within the universe, based on your religious beliefs?
6. Do you know of any other religion(s) that operate alongside your religion in this traditional area?
7. If yes, could you tell me what they are?
8. What is relationship between your religion and the one(s) you have mentioned?
9. Does your religion provide an account of the creation of the universe?
10. If yes, could you briefly share (one of) them with me?
11. What is your impression about the general environmental situation in Berekum Traditional Area today?
12. Do you have any specific cultural/traditional/religious way(s) of promoting environmental conservation?
13. If yes, could you tell me what they are?
14. Could you also explain how they work?
15. In your opinion, how effective are these way(s) of conserving the environment in the present today?
16. So far, have you encountered any challenges in applying your methods for conserving the environment?
17. If there are any, could you share them with me?
18. In your opinion, how could these challenges be addressed?
19. African Traditional Religion (ATR) has often been described as an environmentally friendly religion. Do you agree?
20. If you answered yes or no to 19, could explain why?

21. Some people think that the so-called environmental friendliness of ATR is just an implicit rather than an explicit reality. How do you react to this opinion?
22. Do you know of any other means of conserving the environment which is/are different from yours?
23. If yes, could you share some of them with me?
24. Is there a possibility of combining your methods of conserving the environment with those new ones you have just mentioned?
25. If yes, how could this be done?
26. Is there anything else that you would like to say about your work, or do you have any questions with regard to our discussion?
27. If yes, please ask.
28. If no,

Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX 2

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, UK

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

Interview Guide for Research into the topic: “Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana: The Role of African Traditional Religion and Culture- A Case Study of Berekum Traditional Area”

Interview Guide for Rev. Ministers/Pastors/Imams

Dear Rev. Minister/ Pastor/Imam,

Request for Interview

I am a PhD student of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. I am conducting a research into the above mentioned-topic.

As a stakeholder in environmental issues in this traditional area, would you be able to share your views on these important issues with me?

I would like to assure you that the information you will share with me in the interview will be confidentially and anonymously treated and will be used solely for the purpose of the study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye

Contact:

Phone: 0244508518

E-mail:kwasi.nyamekye@yahoo.com

Biodata

i) Name.....

ii)Age..... iii) Nationality.....

iv)Marital Status.....v) Religion.....

vi)Educational background.....

vii) Town/Village..... viii) Occupation.....

1. What religion do you practise?
2. For how long have you been practising this religion?
3. As a religious leader could you share with me some of your roles?
4. How do you perceive the universe in terms of its creation and purpose?
5. What do you think is the place of humans in the universe based on your religious beliefs?
6. Do you know about African traditional Religion?
7. If yes, what is relationship between your religion and African Traditional Religion?
8. Is/ are there any myth/myths in your religion regarding creation of the universe?
9. If yes, could you briefly share any one of them with me?
10. Do you have any specific way(s) of ensuring environmental conservation based on your religious beliefs?
11. If yes, could you mention it/ them to me?
12. Could you explain how it/ they works/work?
13. In your opinion, how effective is/are this/these way(s) of conserving the environment today?
14. Do you know of any method(s) of conserving the environment which is /are usually used by traditional Berekum people?
15. If yes, could you mention some to me?
16. How is/are your method(s) of conserving the environment different from those of the traditional Berekum people?
17. How effective is/are the traditional ways of conserving the environment?
18. Do you see any link between the traditional people`s ways of conserving the environment and their religion?
19. If you answered yes or no, could you explain briefly?
20. African Traditional Religion (ATR) has often been described as an environmentally friendly religion. Do you agree?
21. If you answered yes or no, could you explain why?
22. Some people, including social scientists, researchers, some NGOs and the traditional African peoples blame your religion (Christianity/Islam)

for current environmental woes because of your religion's attacks on Traditional African Religion, which the believers say plays a role in their environmental conservation strategies. How do you react to this allegation?

23. In your view, is there a possibility of blending your environmental conservation methods with those of the traditional African people's?

24. If yes, how?

25. If no, why?

26. Do you have anything else to say about your work, or have any questions with regard to our discussion?

27. If yes, please ask.

28. If no,

Thank you very much for your time.

APPENDIX 3

UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS, UK

Department of Theology and Religious Studies

Interview Guide for Research into the topic: “Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana: The Role of African Traditional Religion and Culture- A Case Study of Berekum Traditional Area”

[Interview guide for Herbalists/Farmers/Hunters/Foresters/Saw-millers/Environmentalists/Etc.]

Dear Sir/ Madam/ Officer,

Request for Interview

I am a PhD student of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. I am conducting a research into the above mentioned-topic.

As a stakeholder in environmental issues in this traditional area, would you be able to share your views on these important issues with me?

I would like to assure you that the information you will share with me in the interview will be confidentially and anonymously treated and will be used solely for the purpose of the study.

Thank you for your assistance.

Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye

Contact:

Phone: 0244508518

E-mail:kwasi.nyamekye@yahoo.com

Biodata

i) Name.....

ii)Age..... iii) Nationality.....

iv)Marital Status.....v) Religion.....

vi) Educational background.....

vii) Town/Village..... viii) Occupation.....

- 1 For how long have you had your current occupation?
- 2 Do you have any special experience pertaining to your work that you would like to share with me?
- 3 How do you perceive the universe in terms of its creation and purpose?
- 4 Is there any relationship between humans and nature?
- 5 If yes, could you explain this relationship to me?
- 6 Does your occupation have any *positive* influence or affect on the environment?
- 7 If yes, could you outline and explain it/them to me?
- 8 Does your occupation have any *negative* influence or affect on the environment?
- 9 If yes, could you outline and explain it/them to me?
- 10 How do you think it/they can be addressed in order to promote the sustainable use of natural resources?
- 11 What is your impression about the general environmental situation in Berekum today?
- 12 Do you agree with the suggestion that the environmental situation in Berekum can now be described as a crisis one?
- 13 If yes or no, please give reasons for your answer.
- 14 Do you know of any ways in which traditional Africans conserve their environments?
- 15 If yes, can you share some of them with me?
- 16 Do you know how traditionalists pass their conservationist knowledge on to the younger generations?
- 17 What do you think about traditional African peoples' ways of conserving the environment?
- 18 In your opinion, how effective are these ways of conserving nature today?
- 19 Are there any religious act(s) performed by the traditionalists that you consider to be anti-conservationist?
- 20 If yes, kindly share it/them with me.
- 21 African Traditional Religion (ATR) has often been described as an environmentally friendly religion. Do you agree?
- 22 If yes or no, could you explain why?
- 23 In your view, would it be possible to blend today's methods for conserving nature with those of the traditional people?

24 If yes, how?

25 If no, why?

26 Do you have any suggestions about how to address the current environmental problems in the Berekum Traditional Area?

27 Is there anything else that you would like to say about your work, or do you have any questions with regard to our discussion?

28 If yes, please ask.

29 If no,

Thank you very much for your time.