



Transformations in Beliefs and Practices of Ecological Inviolability: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Mamfe-Akuapem Sacred Forest in Ghana

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Abstract

Sacred forests, also known as ethnoforests or forest groves, in Africa are a part of the construction of the cosmology of Africans and their effort to seek ecological harmony and biodiversity equilibrium. In sum, sacred forests are sites of deities and ancestors; ritual discourse and genealogical affirmations; and superstructures of social formations, ontology and eschatology. Much of what we know about sacred forests in Ghana and their significance comes from botanists, environmentalists, agriculturalists, anthropologists and archeologists. For their part, historians have shied away from studying sacred forests because of the paucity of written sources: colonial reports and Euro-Christian missionary accounts did not have cogent narratives on sacred forests. At best, colonial agents and Christian missionaries marginally framed African sacred forests in pejorative connotations and dismissed them as atavistic monuments of fetishised sites. What is not in doubt, based on oral history and oral tradition, in fact, major historical sources, is that African sacred forests have utilitarian uses as sites of sustained conservation. This article examines the history of transformation in beliefs and practices associated with a 150-year old sacred forest in Mamfe Akuapem, Ghana. The central thesis that informs the study is that African sacred forests, broadly framed as forest conservation, were closely intertwined with deification of land reserved for biodiversity and shaped by ontological beliefs.

Abstract

Les forêts sacrées en Afrique, également connues sous les noms de forêts ethniques ou bosquets forestiers, font partie de la construction de la cosmologie des Africains et de leurs efforts dans la recherche de l'harmonie écologique et l'équilibre de la biodiversité. En somme, les forêts sacrées sont les sites des

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divinités et des ancêtres; des discours rituels et des affirmations généalogiques; des superstructures des formations sociales, de l'ontologie et de l'eschatologie. La majeure partie de nos connaissances sur les forêts sacrées au Ghana et leur importance provient des botanistes, des écologistes, des agriculteurs, des anthropologues et des archéologues. Pour leur part, les historiens se sont éloignés de l'étude des forêts sacrées en raison de l'absence de sources écrites: les rapports coloniaux et les comptes rendus des missionnaires euro-chrétiens ne contenaient pas de récits convaincants sur les forêts sacrées. Au mieux, les agents coloniaux et les missionnaires chrétiens ont légèrement décrit les forêts sacrées africaines de manière péjorative et les ont qualifiées de monuments ataviques des sites fétichisés. Selon l'histoire orale et la tradition orale, qui sont en fait les principales sources historiques, il ne fait aucun doute que les forêts sacrées africaines sont à usage utilitaire en tant que sites de conservation durable. Ce chapitre examine l'histoire de la transformation des croyances et des pratiques associées à une forêt sacrée de 150 ans à Mamfe Akuapem, au Ghana. La thèse centrale qui informe cette étude est que les forêts sacrées africaines, largement décrites comme une conservation forestière, étaient étroitement liées à la déification des terres réservées à la biodiversité et façonnées par des croyances ontologiques.

Introduction

The eclectic development of sacred sites known as forest reserves and forest groves in precolonial African societies was not based on microcosmic exceptionalities of everyday life, but was central to the normative order. This study deals with the oral history and oral traditions of a sacred forest or a forest grove in Mamfe Akuapem which has existed for about 150 years. Mamfe is a small town located in the Akuapem district of southern Ghana in the area known today as the Eastern Region. Paying attention to socioeconomic change and economic transformation, the study examines temporal and spatial changes of the forest grove. Divided into five main parts, the first portion looks at the comparative literature. The second section discusses land resources and ecological balance informed by climate, vegetation and economic activities of Mamfe from the precolonial era to the period of the consolidation of British colonial rule in the early twentieth century. Thus, it surveys the utilitarian dynamism of the cultural ecology of the people of Mamfe, part of which was the evolution of the sacred forest. For its part, the third part deals with the history of the sacred forest encompassing religion, ecology and social formation. The fourth segment investigates the ways in which Euro-Christianity unleashed social change that transformed beliefs and practices associated with the uses of the sacred forest. The final part considers contemporary perspectives and challenges associated with the sacred forest, essentially emerging attitudes that have threatened the very existence, or have violated the sacred forest.

The central thesis that informs this study is that African forest groves, broadly framed as forest conservation, were closely intertwined with communal worldview, ontological and eschatological beliefs, and social formations that involved dynamic processes devoid of ‘relics of climax forests and peak cultural efflorescence’ (Sheridan 2008:16). This means that the construction of the forest grove was not temporal, but entailed perpetually active processes of structuration underscoring the community’s perspectives on the sacred forest or grove in terms of change, renewal and continuity (Giddens 1984). Alison Ormsby and Craig Edelman in a study of Tafi Atome monkey forest sanctuary in Ghana note in their introduction that ‘for generations, communities in Ghana have protected small forest areas for cultural reasons. Many of these sacred forests ... are considered to house local gods ...’ (Ormsby and Edleman 2010:233). Similarly, the Mamfe sacred forest underscores the community’s housing of a deity and their quest for an ecological harmony. The capacity of the people of Mamfe to develop their own ecological worldview is due to the fact that they acquired and transmitted ‘traditional ecological knowledge’, which simply defined, refers to a society’s ability to understand its environment and put it to good generational uses over time (Berkes 2008).

In the precolonial period, the people of Mamfe, like other Akuapem communities, had used religious sanctions to configure a forest that included not only ecology and nature, but also defined aspects of social formation, religion and eschatology to sustain their daily lives. With the introduction of Euro-Christianity, social and religious sanctions that once safeguarded the forest grove were blunted by the inexorable and antipodal dynamics of social change, diffusion of cultures and modernity in the mindset of Euro-Christian agents and recipients of the Christian faith as ‘Westernism’. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, a substantial number of the inhabitants of Akuapem, including Mamfe, had converted to Euro-Christianity. As a result, the agency of Euro-Christianity became so powerful and encompassing that even those who adhered to the indigenous religion tended to come under the sway and spell of Euro-Christianity. This was to the extent that perceptions and practices associated with the forest grove were placed in crucibles of alteration and change. In this regard, Michael Sheridan is right in asserting in his case study of Tanzania that the ‘functionalist assumption that sacred groves exist primarily as indigenous forms of conservation is mistaken’ (Sheridan 2009:73–74). Indeed, as H. N. Pandey insists ‘biodiversity has been conserved and survived against the forces of destruction due to strong ... sociocultural values attached to sacred groves which happen to be the store house of biodiversity’ (Pandey 2009:8). These observations speak to our case study of the Mamfe Akuapem grove.

The material for this work, mostly oral history, was gathered in the 1990s and early 2000s. As M. A. Kwamena-Poh, the author of the seminal and the most comprehensive history of Akuapem illustrates, much of the history of precolonial Akuapem is based on oral history and oral traditions (Kwamena-Poh 1973:x–xi). Thus, I interviewed knowledgeable people who knew the history of the town and its sacred forest. Structured interview techniques enabled me to address specific questions, but also allowed my respondents to illuminate their answers with varying details. The architecture of oral history and oral traditions provides empirical pillars for this study. The acceptability of oral history as evidence on the African past is largely the work of several scholars and institutions (Lentz 2000:191–214). Certainly, the use of oral history interrogates the written sources on African history that tend to be lopsidedly laden with perspectives chronicled by non-Africans in the precolonial and colonial periods. Admittedly, written sources have their hegemonic slant, while oral history and oral traditions have their fluidity and mutability. But oral history and oral traditions, at least, restore African voices to the history of the continent, provide alternative truths and serve as some epistemological distillation of Eurocentric-bound African history. This work has benefited immensely from the application of oral history and oral traditions.

For this particular project, search of the Ghanaian archives did not yield any written sources, thus it is wholly dependent on oral history counterpointed with local and comparative historiographies. In fact, many studies of sacred sites that had their beginnings in the precolonial period rely on oral history and oral traditions. Summing up this in his study of sacred groves in southern Ghana, Gerard Chouin states that ‘sacred groves are never mute. There are always a number of stories attached to them about characteristics and wonders of resident spirits and sometimes about those who violated the forest’s taboos’ (Chouin 2002:183). Chouin concludes that ‘every sacred grove is therefore a historic object but could also be considered as a historical source, for there is a specific kind of discourse attached to it and which disappears with it’ (ibid). This theoretical forte is applicable to this study which is framed with oral history and oral traditions.

Comparative Literature Review: Sacred Forest or Forest Grove

Sacred forests according to Sandra Greene ‘were locations defined as much by their physical properties as by the spiritual forces that the Anlo believed occupied and operated from these locations’ (Greene 2002:1). In his work on sacred forests in India, H. N. Pandey notes that sacred groves ‘manifest the spiritual and ecological ethos of local indigenous communities ... Sacred

groves throughout the world are associated with a range of traditional and cultural values related to forests, rituals and taboos' (Pandey 2010:2–3). For their part, Bas Verschuuren et al. conclude that at sacred sites 'nature and humanity meet, and people's deeper motives and aspirations are expressed through what is called "the sacred" ... Sacred and natural sites, therefore, concern the well-being of nature and humans and encompass the complex intangible and spiritual relationships between people and our originating web of life' (Verschuuren et al. 2010:1). In sum, interest in sacred natural sites has grown in recent years because they are recognised for their biodiversity in the form of animals and plants that support ecosystems and ecological dynamics. Verschuuren et al. state that 'While sacred natural sites are connected to the human spirit and intangible heritage they also have strong material components. In addition to being places where animals and plants species survive, sacred forests provide resources such as water and medicines and other ecosystem services, they are the locations of events and ceremonies, and traditionally are sites of education' (ibid., p. 5) Also Nigel Dudley et al. stress that '[m]any sacred natural sites function partly as sources for valuable plants, particularly medicinal plants, and other ecosystem services; they may be managed to enhance survival of desired species' (Dudley 2010: 25) Local conservation of sacred forests occurred before national governments established policies on environmental and biodiversity conservation. In sum 'ancient forests and trees provided, and continue to provide people with shelter, food and medicine, but also helped shape their consciousness (Barrow 2010:42–43).

Sacred forests serve as epicentres of biodiversity, ontological negotiations and ritual performance between the representatives of the communities sanctified as deities and the cosmological world beyond humanised boundaries of the earth and its cyclical agencies of rain, sun and wind, all elements that shaped the forest grove. Thus, the notion that 'many groves in Africa are by definition fragments or patches of vegetation in largely agricultural landscapes' (Sheridan 2008:18–19) may be true from secularised and spatial standpoints, but untenable in temporal and sacred sense. In their introduction to *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, David Michael et al. write that 'To say that a specific place is a sacred place is not simply to describe a piece of land, or just locate it in certain position in the landscape. What is known as sacred site carries with it a whole range of rules and regulations regarding people's behaviour in relation to it, and implies a set of beliefs to do with the non-empirical world, often in relation to the spirits of the ancestors, as well as more remote or powerful gods and spirits' (Michael et al. 1994:3).

Focusing on Africa, Sheridan notes that 'sacred groves exist throughout tropical Africa and typically serve as places for rituals of initiation and sacrifice' (Sheridan 2008:74). Sheridan adds that the 'term *sacred* does not imply, however, that these sites are purely religious institutions, separate from politics, social organization, and land tenure' (ibid.). Indeed, African sacred forests were not only about religions and ritual performance, but also reflected the political and social life of individual societies. Sheridan is, however, right in arguing that African sacred forests are bastions of political power, 'and as such they are critical sites in the ideological and material struggles that generate political legitimacy, ethnic and gender identities, and access to resources' (Sheridan 2009:74). Additionally, African sacred forests were not only about plant life, but animal ones as well, the latter in the Western imaginings came to be associated with exotic, primitive Africa, devoid of utilitarian validation of conservation, (Garland 2008:51–52), in fact, what Peter Castro has aptly described as 'ethnographic curiosities' (Castro 1990:277).

Furthermore, sacred forests are sites of conservation of biodiversity which preceded colonial policies of forest conservation. Unfortunately, like some aspects of African history, the literature privileges European agency and as a result the history of conservation in Africa tends to tilt in favour of policies implemented in the colonial period (Anderson and Grove 1987; Rajan 2006); von Hellermann and Usuanlele 2009:223–246). Indeed the establishment of forest reserves in colonial Africa unleashed African resistance (Guha 1989). What should be clearly delineated is that forest conservation was not alien to some parts of colonial Africa and that if Africans rose up against colonial forest conservation policies, it was not because it was foreign to African communities, rather it was due to the fact that such colonial policies constrained their way of life by compromising meaningful land use. What is not in dispute is the fact that in the Gold Coast colonial rule 'promoted concessions scramble and land alienation' triggered by economic exploitation (Ilegbune 1976:17–31).

Land Resources and Ecological Balance: Climate, Vegetation, and Economic Activities

As noted, Mamfe is located on one of the highest peaks of the Akuapem mountain range. The climate of the Akuapem area is semi-tropical and the area experiences two rainfall seasons annually. Unlike other parts of southern Ghana, Akuapem is relatively colder. It has hot and humid days and cold nights. During the rainy season, the days are very warm, while the nights are cold. The dry season known as '*harmattan*', the result of cold dry winds blowing from the Saharan region, is cold. Today, the vegetation has a

semblance of tropical forest. It is made up of tall trees with shrub-like undergrowth. The more cultivated areas have shrub-like vegetation with short trees. The slopes of the hills are dotted with short trees amidst the savanna-like grassland. The undergrowth is thick with lush vegetation, a composite signifier of the fertility of the soil.

Land tenure in precolonial Akuapem was based on usufruct use of family land. This means that family members had the right to use lands designated as ancestral and extended family property with caretaking rights vested in lineage elders or heads of families. Theoretically, all lands belonged to ancestors and since the chiefs are the spiritual bridges to the ancestors, land and its resources were placed in the hands of chiefs as custodians. Changes in indigenous land tenure occurred especially with the genesis of export cash crop production and mining in the nineteenth century. This is what Kojo Sebastian Amonor has described as 'leading to the evolution of atomistic family farms, freely buying and selling land on markets according to their needs and changing resource endowments' (Amanor 2010:104). Economic change led to the commodification of land with individual property rights. In this regard, Chouin has argued that 'in communities practicing land-consuming farming techniques such as clearing by burning and fallowing, the revealed presence of a spirit is often a reason for patches of forest not to be cleared' (Chouin 2002:178; see also Kwamena-Poh 1973:2–3). For their part, Dudley et al. argue that sacred forests 'are often the only remaining patches of natural or semi-natural habitat in cultural landscapes and can contain rich biodiversity, sometimes exceeding nearby protected areas and forest reserves' (Dudley et al. 2010:19; see also O'Neal-Campbell 2005:151–169). These theoretical perspectives mirror the economic practices and the cultural ecology of the precolonial inhabitants of Mamfe and their establishment of the forest grove.

The forest in Akuapem has gone through several phases. During the nineteenth century, from about the 1830s to the 1880s, the major economic activity was the oil-palm industry: the harvest of oil palm fruits and the extraction of oil from the fruit and its kernel for export to Europe. This formed the basis of the 'legitimate' trade, or the non-human commodity trade between West Africa and Europe that replaced the slave trade to the Americas ((Kwamena-Poh 1973:3; Dickson 1969:144–150; Law 1995). Southern Ghana, including the Akuapem area, is naturally populated with palm-oil trees (Dickson 1969:72–74 and 144–150). The palm-oil industry did not change the forest because the palm tree grew wild and one did not have to clear the land to cultivate it. Also, the palm-oil fruit was harvested without cutting down the palm tree. Thus, despite the vigorous oil-palm

industry and economy, the forest was hardly transformed. Starting from the 1880s, however, the cultivation of cocoa altered the forest.

Unlike the oil-palm economy, the cocoa industry necessitated the clearing of the forest to make way for planting. The cocoa tree took about seven years to bear cocoa fruits. Thus, in order to enable cocoa saplings to make full use of soil nutrients devoid of competing with other plants, the undergrowth was regularly cleared. Overall, cocoa cultivation had drastic effects on the Akuapem forest of the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. The land, having been cultivated for several decades, had lost its fertility (ibid., pp. 165–171; Hill 1963 and Ilegbune 1976:23–24). Consequently, from about 1910 forward, Akuapem farmers, including those from Mamfe, bought lands in the Densu-Birim in Akyem Abuakwa for farming cocoa. These had two major effects. First, in the long term, the main economic activity of the inhabitants of Mamfe remained staple crop cultivation, including cassava, plantain, yam, banana, cocoyam and vegetables. Second, the outcome of the staple crop cultivation defined by shifting cultivation enabled the forest in Akuapem to regain its fertility. Thus, today the forest in Akuapem is lush and evergreen (Dickson 1969:74–80; Kwamena-Poh 1973:4–5).

Although the cultivation of these staple crops was based on subsistence, some farmers produced surplus food for the local markets. Farm sizes were comparatively small, ranging from one to a few acres, therefore, staple crop farming did not have devastating effects on the environment. Additionally, normative farming practices of shifting cultivation enabled the land to regain its fertility, but the forest did not bloom the way it was in the pre-cocoa period: much of the original semi-tropical forest has given way to patches of forests. Shifting cultivation and bush fallow entail clearing the land and allowing a few days to pass so that the felled trees and twigs would be suitably dry for burning.¹ Not every plant or shrub was cut down and burnt. For example, some medicinal plants and shrubs, slated for possible future use, were left untouched and protected from fire during the burning process. Also, tall trees were left unscathed because they would serve as canopies to protect the saplings of crops from the sun.² Planting occurred in the same farmland for about three years. Thereafter, the farmland was abandoned in the next several years, enabling it to fallow before the farmer returned to the same land. This allowed the farmland to regain its fertility and other organic ecological features.³

Another important practice of conservation that was closely associated with staple food crop production was gathering firewood, the source of energy for cooking in most homes then. There were two methods. First, homesteads obtained firewood from the twigs and trees that had been felled

and dried during the process of burning twigs that preceded the planting season. The second method was felling dead trees, or fetching dead trees that had fallen down on their own.⁴ The first method had some impact on the environment in terms of depleting forests, but given the small population size and its demands for firewood, the impact was not devastating. According to my informants, specific trees were designated as suitable for firewood and such trees had relatively quicker maturing periods. Overall, the use of firewood did not harm the forest.⁵

Hunting and fishing were also important aspects of the economic activities of the people of Mamfe. Both practices help explain the environmental and ecological forces that shaped social constructions of conservation and sustainability of natural resources.⁶ My informants surmised that while specific families and individuals engaged in hunting, overall, hunting was not a major occupation of the townsfolk.⁷ Although, Mamfe was endowed with several rivers, streams and ponds, fishing was mostly done by boys who used it as a pastime and for peer-group interaction. In fact, Akuapems, including the people of Mamfe, obtained their supplies of fish from the Ga-Adangbe littoral and the Lake Volta in the southeast.⁸ It is clear from the above that the people of Mamfe used their land and forest resources to survive. The land benefited staple food and cash crop production, and also provided forest resources, for example, medicinal plants and firewood. All these activities over time did not degrade the environment and ecology. If anything at all, the people of Mamfe like most African societies, were able to harmonise the organic relationship between humans and the environment,

The History of the Sacred Forest or Grove: Religion, Ecology and Social Formation

My informants could not pinpoint the exact origin and timing of the Mamfe-Akuapem sacred forest. However, all were of the opinion that the establishment of the forest grove may have occurred during the consolidation of the town in the mid-nineteenth century. According to them, the forest grove has been there as long as the town has existed.⁹ The size of the forest grove is about seven acres. Prior to the rapid expansion of the town, it was located at its northernmost periphery, but today it is in the central portion of the town, flanked by homesteads, businesses, a market, a school, a church-building and a police station. My informants conjectured that even parts of these build-ups and structures now occupy the ancestral and royal cemetery.¹⁰ It should be stressed that today the portion of the sacred forest that served as the royal cemetery is separated from the portion dedicated to Topre, the chief deity of Mamfe. My informants explained that in the past there was no

physical separation between the royal burial ground and rest of the sacred forest until a trunk road was constructed through the sacred forest by the British colonial government in the nineteenth century. The construction of the trunk road through the sacred forest elicited a popular protest, but at the end of the day, the corrosive dictates of colonial rule held sway.¹¹

According to my informants, the sacred forest is dedicated to Topre ((McCaskie 1990. 139). The only person who had access to the sacred forest was the priestess of Topre. She alone could visit the sacred forest during the annual Ohum festival to collect firewood to prepare food for the deity.¹² The priestess could also collect herbs from the sacred forest and use them for the purposes of ritual healing and performance. These normative practices have been identified for other parts of the Africa, for example, in a study of ancestral beliefs and conservation in Cameroon, Sebastien Kamga-Kamdem writes that 'In all sacred sites orderlies are carried out ... Certain people are allowed to collect non-timber-products, especially healing products. There are specific days and period of access to sacred areas ...' (Kamga-Kamdem 2010:123). In fact, my informants could not agree on whether the priestess had normative rights to visit the sacred forest anytime or could only do so on specific occasions, for instance, during the celebration of the annual Ohum festival, which called for a ritual performance that involved the intangible forces of the sacred forest.¹³ Exegetical interpretation of the oral evidence shows that the priestess could visit the sacred forest as regularly as she wanted because she had to collect herbs for healing as long as there were patients who needed care.¹⁴ Overall, the evidence suggests that the priestess had unlimited access to the sacred forest due to the fact that she was the custodian of the traditions of Topre.

In spite of the priestess's unlimited access to the sacred forest her activities in the forest grove were guided by social sanctions and taboos.¹⁵ For example, she could not authorise anyone to do the work required of her in the sacred forest. This means that she alone could collect herbs and perform rituals in the sacred forest. Additionally, she could not visit the sacred forest on Sundays and Mondays because both days were set aside for Asase Yaa, the earth goddess to interact with Topre and the ancestors.¹⁶ The rationale is that during these important ritual negotiations between the gods/goddesses and the ancestors, humans were not allowed because it could disturb the ensuing solemn interactions. The priestess could also not sell or dispose of any portion of the sacred forest because, in reality, she was the custodian, not the owner. There was also the strong belief that any form of abrogation of social sanctions and taboos that protected the sacred forest could lead to calamitous consequences, not only for the individual culprit, but also for the whole inhabitants of Mamfe.¹⁷ In a broader sense, therefore, social sanctions and

taboos that safeguarded the sacred forest were not only meant for the priestess and other officiants of sacred duties, but were also for the whole populace.

The forest grove was the home of Topre, and hence was also inhabited by Topre's children namely sacred animals, including monkeys and pythons. The sacred monkeys dangled in the tall trees or hopped about in the peripheral areas of the sacred forest and, as a result, were visible to the townsfolk. Also during the annual Ohum festival that celebrated Topre and paid homage to the ancestors, the sacred monkeys were ritually lured to visit the festival grounds in the town. On the other hand, the sacred pythons were hardly seen. The sacred monkeys and the pythons were never hunted or killed.¹⁸ As late as the 1960s, the monkeys were in the sacred forest. Today the monkeys, and certainly the sacred pythons, are no longer available; they deserted the sacred forest long ago, and none of my informants could explain what happened to them or the area of their relocation. One reason for the departure of the sacred monkeys and the sacred pythons is that spatial developments and other human activities encroached on their exclusive habitat. The second reason is that Euro-Christianity, economic transformation and social change undermined the indigenous religion and delimited ritual performances that honoured Topre. As a result, the 'children' of Topre, namely the monkeys and pythons, departed, exemplifying not only their disaffection in the spiritual sense, but also their inability to co-exist in an environment of seismic corrosive change and its unsuitable continuities.¹⁹

Other species that inhabited the sacred forest included squirrels, snails, tortoises, birds, grasscutters and antelopes. There were no specific restrictions or social sanctions against hunting these animals when they traversed the boundaries of the sacred forest. But their collective survival was assured because of the fact that the sacred forest, their prescribed habitation, was protected and remained inaccessible to the townsfolk.²⁰ My informants explained that the population of animals that inhabited the sacred forest grew considerably because hunters did not have access to them. The population explosion of the animals was illustrated during the biannual rainy seasons when massive numbers of snails were seen in the peripheral areas of the sacred forest. Also, compared to the larger environment, more tortoises, antelopes and grasscutters roamed the peripheral regions of the sacred forest in search of food.²¹ Thus the sacred forest nurtured and protected animal species from excessive hunting. It is patently clear that the Mamfe people's concept of a sacred forest included the preservation and protection of animal species. Indeed, there can be no doubt that the sacred forest was a site for the sustainability and protection of animal species as their kind outside of the forest grove remained easily accessible to hunters. Even if one made the argument that the species outside the sacred forest were in danger of extinction

due to hunting, it could be said that their kind in the confines of the sacred forest served the purpose of sustainability by ensuring their survival.

Although people were not allowed to freely access the sacred forest, such limitations were not imposed on animal species. This means that animals went back and forth into the sacred forest, consequently, as the population of the animals in the sacred forest increased, they were able to move out of the sacred forest to the surrounding forests where hunters could trap or kill them for food. My informants, stressing conservation, explained that the chief hunter applied vigorous religious sanctions to restrict hunting in the immediate confines of the sacred forest during the gestation periods of animals.²² Thus, the sacred forest and its immediate environs, in the words of an informant, ‘served as an enclosure where animals were controlled, nurtured and eventually became available to the world beyond the sacred forest. This way the survival of the local animals was assured’.²³

Additionally, the sacred forest helps explain how the people of Mamfe re-domesticated plants and animals. The forest grove was the site where the townsfolk, supervised by the priestess of Topre, quarantined and nurtured new plants and animals. My informants stated that anytime a citizen of Mamfe returned home with a new plant or an unknown animal the sacred forest was where it was deposited and nurtured under the auspices of the priestess.²⁴ The composite role of the chief hunter and chief farmer was to learn more about the plant or the animal before allowing it to be a part of the local environment. When asked to specify some of the plant and animal species that had been nurtured in the sacred forest, my informants could not mention any except cocoa. They explained that when cocoa, which has remained Ghana’s major perennial cash crop, was introduced in the locality in the late 1870s, the cocoa saplings were first planted in the sacred forest. Once the cocoa saplings survived, the priestess then distributed them to farmers who went on to plant them, eventually paving the way for the large-scale cultivation of cocoa in the area.²⁵ My informants clarified that when new plants and animals were nurtured in the sacred forest, the sacredness of the forest grove provided the plants and animals with spiritual nourishments.²⁶ Additionally, because the sacred forest was not accessible to the townsfolk, there was no human interference in the ability of the new plant or animal to thrive in its new environment. Thus, one reason for the existence of the sacred forest is that it served as a site where new plants and animals were quarantined, studied, nurtured and later made available to the Mamfe community.

Another reason for the establishment of the sacred forest is that it serves as a royal mausoleum (Chouin 2002:181–182). In the words of one informant, ‘*Kwae no ye mpanyinfo pow; eho na yekora ahenfo*’.²⁷ Translated, this means

that the forest is an ancestral sacred site; it is the burial place of the royalty. Choun writing about archeological sacred forests in Ghana notes that ‘Much evidence attests that the spatial correlation between old settlement sites and cemeteries and the existence of sacred groves is no coincidence. Old settlements were frequently turned into burial grounds and gradually recolonized by forest’ (Chouin 2002:179). Thus, it illustrates how the people of Mamfe ordered the hereafter to reflect the social structure of this world: the hereafter included social distinctions, hence the physical demarcation and social construction of the hierarchical difference between the burial places of commoners and royals. In effect, the sacred forest was also home to the memorialised spirits of the deceased royalty of the town. This explains the honour and respect accorded the forest grove because it was not only the home of the deity, but also an abode of the royal ancestral spirits that negotiated between the living and the dead.

The time-honoured custom of interring the deceased royalty in the sacred forest entailed elaborate ritual performances. Specific groups of people, normatively from a lineage called ‘*banmufo*’, literally ‘graveside’ people, were assigned the role of burying the deceased royal in the sacred forest. In fact, the *banmufo*, excluding the family of the deceased royal, took part in the ritualised royal burial ceremony. The burial procession from the place of the funeral to the sacred forest began around midnight.²⁸ The timing, that is, midnight, was meant to prevent people from laying eyes on the funeral procession. My informants explained that in the past, any living thing, be it a person or an animal, that encountered the funeral procession on the way to the sacred forest was ritually killed. In order to prevent anyone from encountering the funeral procession, the *banmufo* pall bearers and others accompanying them sang dirges, mouthed appellations of the deceased royal, and also called out incessantly and loudly, ‘*Wonhyia oh! Wonhyia oh! Nana reba*’, which translated means: ‘It is a taboo to encounter us. Do not encounter this procession. Give way to the royal.’²⁹ The secrecy surrounding the burial was meant to prevent potential grave looters from knowing the exact place of burial in the sacred forest. More important, the secrecy of the burial process added mystery to the royalty even in death, therefore, solidified their unique place and role in society and ancestordom.

At the burial site in the sacred forest, rituals were performed to harness the final journey of the deceased royal to the hereafter, constructed as a cyclical path of rebirth of the deceased. Material possessions of the deceased, for example, tools, clothes, gold ornaments and beads are placed in the coffin and buried with the deceased. Also prepared local dishes, fruits, earthenware and water were left beside the grave. Additionally, my informants revealed that in the distant past when human sacrifice was practised, the grave could

contain the decapitated bodies of servants and slaves, who in the ontological worldview of the people, had to accompany deceased royals, mostly rulers, to the hereafter to serve them as they did during their lifetime. The grave site was simple, marked with stones and covered with thorny twigs to prevent animals from desecrating it.³⁰ Apart from the sacred nature of the sacred forest, the material wealth that was buried with the deceased royalty in the sacred forest was protected from grave looters by the use of powerful religious sanctions.³¹ In sum, the material wealth and sacrificial victims that accompanied deceased royals and other items left on the grave illustrate several things. First, they show how the people of Mamfe constructed this world and the world beyond the reach of humans by using the sacred forest as the ritual site for the preservation of the human spirit. Second, the grave site with its material wealth served as a monument for the memorialisation of the royal dead. Third, the materiality, spirituality, mysticism of the forest is a testimony to its generational living force. Finally, the graveside was an osmotic site where the royal spirits and nature negotiated and merged into an organic whole that sustained the ecological balance between the secular world and the sacred hereafter.

Euro-Christianity and the De-Memorialising of the Forest Groove

Kwamena-Poh writes that the 'last of the external factors and the one which had perhaps the greatest impact on the history of Akuapem was the missionary enterprise ...'.³² T. C. McCaskie's discussion of Nananom Mpow, a sacred grove of the Fantes of southern Ghana, also shows that the Euro-Christian enterprise combined with colonial rule in the nineteenth century accounted for its gradual decline and ruin (McCaskie 1990:143–147. Sheridan has also concluded that the 'threatened status of African sacred groves has been recognized since the continent's colonial days, and recognition of this threat forms part of the standard argument in favor of their conservation' (Sheridan 2008:75). Thus in so many ways, from the early nineteenth century forward, the combined forces of attrition unleashed by Euro-Christianity and colonial rule reshaped the genealogical beliefs of the Mamfe sacred forest. These theoretical positions sustained by empiricisms speak to the Mamfe sacred forest. As noted, cash-crop cultivation, for example, cocoa, in the colonial period, primarily the work of African farmers, also fuelled by the agricultural work of the Christian missionaries, brought about dramatic transformations in the Akuapem environment (Kwamena-Poh 1973:118–120). Apart from cash-crop production that compromised pre-existing forests, rapid

urbanisation and infrastructural build-up, impacted the Akuapem environment and ecology.³³

Indeed, by the noon of colonial rule in the post-First World War period, a considerable portion of the precolonial Mamfe environment had been altered. The extent to which these facets of colonial rule impacted forest of all kinds in Ghana remains to be fully studied, but Greene's work on Anlo brings ample evidence to the fact that colonial rule redefined sacred sites (Greene 2002:2–9). Greene writes that 'Shaped by the European Enlightenment that defined the material and the spiritual as not only distinct but completely separate of existence and convinced of the superiority of their own beliefs, they attempted to impose their understandings on Anlo. They used their schools, churches, and hospitals as well as colonial policy and individual exhortations to challenge the ways in which the Anlo viewed themselves and their environment' (ibid., p. 2). But what is obvious is that apart from the physical alteration of the environment based on economic exploitation, other effects of colonial rule that transformed the environment were social in character. Overall, colonial rule negatively transformed African perceptions of indigenous way of life, for example, attitudes toward local deities, ancestorhood and sacred forests. This occurred through an accompanying agency or a pathfinder to colonial rule in African: Euro-Christianity that stimulated social change, diffusion of cultures and social mobility, and inferiorised the African psyche of the self.

That social change, diffusion of cultures and social mobility radically transformed perceptions of the forest grove was agreed upon by my informants.³⁴ The Euro-Christian influence in Akuapem began in 1835 when the Swiss Basel Mission settled in Akropong-Akuapem. In 1855, they established a small church and a primary school in Mamfe, which was then about three miles away from Akropong. Thereafter the Basel Mission established a mission station at Mamfe which became known in the local parlance as *sukuum* or the school sector of the town. As in many areas of Africa, indigenous peoples who initially converted to Euro-Christianity in Mamfe tended to be commoners or people of servile background. They readily converted because the Euro-Christian ideology and community promised them equality, better opportunities, and acceptance and a place to feel at home. With their newfound association with the Euro-Christian missionaries, not to forget the increasing opportunities of social mobility available to them through Western education, the Mamfe converts overnight became powerful in the colonial society in flux. They used their radically transformed status to undermine the indigenous social formation and worldview that had hitherto marginalised and oppressed them by promoting

the Euro-Christian values that were obviously antithetical to the indigenous ontology and cultural ethos.³⁵

As the *suku* developed with its powerful Euro-Christian traditions and symbolisms, including attractive spatial layouts, unique architecture and European mannerisms, it attracted not only those in the margins of society, but the royalty as well.³⁶ This cauldron of change manifested even as the two distinct and polarised communities, namely the indigenous African quarter or *manmu* and *suku* developed apart.³⁷ Oral evidence shows that local converts, who for the most part relocated to the *suku*, whose social and political activities intersected *manmu* and *suku*, violated indigenous norms, including religious sanctions. Supported by the Basel Mission, the local converts openly flouted indigenous authority and since the Basel Mission had the strong political backing of the British colonial authorities, the indigenous rulers of Mamfe could do very little to enforce normative sanctions that were being openly flouted by the local converts.³⁸ In sum, Euro-Christianity undermined the indigenous way of life, in particular, weakening the indigenous worldview and ontology which among other things underscored the preservation of the forest.

One area impacted by Euro-Christianity is the eventual abandonment of the forest grove as a royal mausoleum. Although, the forest grove for generations was still considered as a burial place for the royals, it ceased to be the norm. My informants could not wrap their minds around when the norm of interring royals in the sacred forest gave way. However, broadly put, they hazard that the norm somewhat abated during the early twentieth century by which period Christianity had broken grounds in Akuapem. In fact, burial of the deceased royals in the forest grove has become so infrequent that my informants conjectured that the practice no longer exists.³⁹ The reality is that most deceased members of the royal family have been buried in the cemeteries of the various Christian denominations. Members of the royal families are highly educated and practising Christians. Thus the practice of burying the deceased members of the royal family can be traced to the early twentieth century and it was the result of conversion to Christianity and having Western education. Also, burial in the forest grove is now looked down upon; in fact, it is reserved for the poor and illiterate non-Christian royalty. There have been occasions when deceased royals who hardly patronised the church were buried in Christian cemeteries because they were wealthy and influential during their lifetime.⁴⁰ Thus, as a result of Euro-Christianity, the forest grove no longer serves as the only place where deceased royals are buried; the Christian cemeteries are the preferred sites of burial among the royalty.

Another area affected by Euro-Christianity was the Ohum festival which was publicly celebrated annually to honour the ancestors and the local deities, the most important being Topre. The Ohum festival was directly associated with the forest grove, because it was the home of Topre and the ancestors, the nurturers of ecological sustenance of seasons of life-giving forces exemplified by bountiful agricultural harvests. Today, the Ohum festival is still celebrated, perhaps with more pomp and pageantry than in the past, because it has become more touristic than an event dedicated to supplicating and honouring Topre and the ancestors. Presently, rituals of celebration associated with the sacred forest are not fully performed because of the corrosive effects of social change. For instance, the Topre priestess no longer goes into the forest to perform elaborate pre-festival rituals, and as noted, the sacred monkeys no longer inhabit the forest grove and hence do not visit the town during the Ohum festival.⁴¹ True, these developments may be due to forces other than the agency of Euro-Christianity, but there can be no doubt that the sum total of Euro-Christianity has formed the powerful epistemological tools that have continued to shape the consciousness of the people of Mamfe, modifying their worldview on and the perceptions of the forest grove.

The Future of the Forest Grove: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges

Since the 1990s, African sacred forests like others elsewhere have attracted both academic interest and governmental attention regarding the growth of environmental and conservational movements that use sacred sites as instruments delineating and preserving ecological balance and sanity (Sheridan 2008:9–10). Local communities also apply the essences of their indigenous ecological epistemologies to consecrate such sites as negotiations to protect forests. To this end, Sheridan writes that ‘Sacred groves epitomize contemporary conservation policy’s goal of grassroots participation, sociocultural legitimacy, and demonstrated ecological efficacy’ (ibid., p. 10). It is well to note that Verschuuren et al. also state that ‘Many sacred natural sites have been well protected over long time periods and have seen low levels of disturbance.’ (Verschuuren et al. 2010:5). In sum, sacred forests provide intersecting ecological boundaries between the past and the present and call for periodic negotiations to sustain them. S. Joseph Wright notes that ‘forest stewardship is the responsibility of local people and governments. Protected areas are a key means of discharging this responsibility. Protected areas can be managed strictly for the conservation of nature, for cultural, recreational, and extractive use ...’ (Wright 2010:1195, 18).

It is obvious that the above propositions would be acceptable were it not for the grinding forces of social change and economic transformation over time. About this, Jane Hubert rightly asserts that there 'is no doubt that many sites, throughout the world, are currently under threat from many sources' (Hubert 1994:9). Also Sheridan avers in this regard that 'Africa's sacred groves are still disappearing today because of social and religious change, but community-based conservation promises to conserve these sites of bio- and cultural diversity' (Sheridan 2008:15). Apart from Sheridan's stress on social and religious change, one major threat to the preservation of the sacred forest comes from spatial and commercial developments in the form of roads and bridges, shopping centres, housing and industries (Hubert 1994:9). In sum, comparative perspectives on other parts of Africa bring us to the conclusion that sociocultural change and economic transitions have shaped people's attitudes toward forest groves (Githitho 2005:62–63).⁴² Thus sacred forests in Africa face great challenges and about this Sheridan, discussing the potential ruin of sacred forests in some parts of Africa, notes that 'Yet it is often the groves' poor fit with the secular and religious institutions of the contemporary nation-state that threatens their destruction. The sacredness of African groves, then, is not embedded in their trees and plants, but rather in the diverse social institutions that sacred groves manifest in particular African landscapes' (Sheridan 2008:74).

The above conclusions epitomise the problems facing the Mamfe forest grove, but the challenges transcend social institutions and include economic development defined by both the nation-state and local forces. In spite of the overwhelming challenges, the elders of Mamfe royal families are determined to preserve the sacred forest at any cost. According to my informants, the sacred forest embodies the history and culture of the town and hence is worth preserving. Also, given the rapid deforestation in Akuapem, the sacred forest promotes ecological balance in the area. Above all, the destruction of the sacred forest would desecrate the sacrosanct abode of the deities and ancestors.⁴³ Jane Hubert has rightly posited that there 'are many different kinds of sacred sites, perhaps, that have become one of the major causes of controversy in many parts of the world. What has come to be the "reburial issue" has focused attention on a wide range of issues concerning attitudes to burial sites, the relationship between the living and the dead ...' (Hubert 1994:14–15).

Contemporary discourses on the sacred forest have assumed a dichotomy of class conflict. The royal families want to preserve the sacred forest as an historical living force and a sacred monument. On the other hand, rich commoners wish that they could use the land area of the forest grove to build houses and infrastructure because the sacred forest is no longer confined

to the distant periphery of the town, but is now in the busiest section of the town, virtually flanked by homes, a hotel, a market center, a bank, a bakery, community centre, church-buildings and a school. But the royal families of the town are not willing to consign the forest grove to developers because they see the sacred forest as a transcendental extension of their lineage. In the words an informant '*Obi nfa ne nsa benkum nkyere n'agya dabere so*'.⁴⁴ This means that no one points to his father's eternal resting place with his left hand because it connotes gross disrespect for one's royal forebears and ancestors.

According to my informants some influential members of the town, especially rich commoners, have argued that the sacred forest should give way to modern developments because most of the taboos and sanctions associated with the sacred forest are either evanescent or are no longer vigorously enforced. Additionally, the sacred monkeys and pythons, the consecrated children of Topre, as well as the other animal species that inhabited the sacred forest, have disappeared without a trace.⁴⁵ Neither is the forest grove being used to nurture plant and animal species, nor does it serve as a site for the collection of herbs for healing. Furthermore, the priestess of Topre no longer plays very significant social and religious functions. In fact, she exists as a religious relic of the distant past, whose prominence is brought to the fore only during the celebration of the annual Ohum festival. Even then, her religious role is symbolic and her political presence can only be described as aesthetical, adding to the touristic and temporal nature of the neo-celebrations.⁴⁶ In sum, the supernatural entities that crystallised into the grooming and the conservation of the forest grove are rapidly becoming a thing of the past.

Oral history adequately points to the fact that there is a generational gap regarding the significance of the forest grove. While the elders attach significance to the sacred forest in the political economy of the town's history, the youth have nothing substantial to consider. The elders were able to discuss the sacred forest as the sanctified home of Topre, as a place where animal and plant species were nurtured, as the burial place of the aristocracy and the town's founding families, and as a monument of history and culture.⁴⁷ The singular composite point of view expressed by the youth was that the forest grove used to be a cemetery.⁴⁸ These two dichotomous perspectives portray the problem of memory, history and epistemology, as well as the ways in which oral history and oral traditions of the sacred forest are not being rigorously disseminated for their very preservation. Above all, the different perspectives affirm the potential threat of the destruction that awaits the sacred forest because the young people, the leaders of tomorrow, have the least understanding and remembering of the sacred forest as a site of

memory, religion and history. Thus, it is very likely that future generations may have very little to argue for the preservation of the sacred forest as social change and diffusion of cultures continue to reshape people's consciousness regarding how the past is perceived, constructed and applied.

Increasingly, social change and social mobility have eroded the foundations of ascription that placed the royalty over and above commoners.⁴⁹ Therefore, the royalty's ability to maintain the forest grove, not only as an exclusive eternal resting place of their ancestors, but also as an epistemological site to propagate their power and memory is becoming compromised. It is obvious from the oral data amassed that rich commoners, whose social standing and political influences are based on achievement rather than ascription, are forcefully putting pressures on the royal families to give up the land on which the forest grove stands for infrastructural developments. As the mechanics of achievement become stronger than ascription, it is likely that the influence of rich, powerful commoners will win over royals who wish to preserve the forest grove.

Furthermore, the sacred forest has encountered spatial challenges. Today pathways crisscross the precincts of the sacred forest, suggesting that people trespass the once sacred grounds because of accessibility devoid of effective social and religious sanctions. Spatial developments have virtually entombed the sacred forest except the majestic presence of the time-tested trees whose tall, imposing branches overpower the sky and hence overshadow the buildings around it. Another challenge that faces the sacred forest is that wealthy, influential and land-hungry people are agitating for its demise, and they pose a real threat because they can use their wealth and social standing in society to influence communal decisions on land management.⁵⁰ Closely linked with spatial problems are some topographical issues and development indices. As noted, Mamfe is located in a mountainous area. This topographical problem makes it difficult to put up structures. In fact, the Mamfe town has grown to the extent that the inhabitants are now building on the steep precipice of the mountains. On the other hand, the place occupied by the sacred forest has no hills. Thus as the population grows and space for building homes becomes limited, the land area of the sacred forest will become the preferred choice for developers who need land to build. Also, the sacred forest is on the periphery of the most developed and economically vibrant part of the town. Hence, the growing population will likely put popular pressure on the royal families to accede to the demands of the townsfolk. Additionally, Mamfe is a nodal town in the Akuapem area, and the expansion of the Accra-Mamfe-Koforidua trunk road in recent times is likely to swell up both traffic and human population because of the possibility of increased commercial and

social activities in the nodal area. In the event that this occurs, it will not bode well for the preservation of the sacred forest due to additional population pressures.

Already, the evidence shows that encroachments on the forest grove that take several forms are not vigorously questioned. This has contributed to the hunting and defaunation which is a problem affecting forested regions worldwide (Wright 2010:8–10). Unlike in the past, today children are bold enough to gather fruits, including mangoes, oranges, pawpaws and berries that grow wild in the botanical world of the sacred forest. Also, poaching of animals, including squirrels, antelopes, grasscutters as well as birds occurs in the confines of the sacred forest. Unlike what Sheridan states about some parts of Africa regarding deforestation due to using forest wood as energy sources, tree-cutting in the Mamfe forest grove as sources of energy, namely firewood and charcoal, has not become the norm; however, people unreservedly gather dead wood from the sacred forest for firewood (Sheridan 2008:75).⁵¹ These may be described as peripheral encroachments, because they do not wholly undermine the existence of the sacred forest. But more importantly, it shows that the sacredness attached to the sacred forest has been considerably eroded by the inexorable effects of social change and contemporary developments. In spite of this, the Mamfe sacred forest falls within the purview of change and continuity in the face of forces of attrition. As J. D. Hughes and M. D. S. Chandran established, ‘sacred groves serve as examples of local ownership and autonomy, and may serve as rallying points for local people when these are threatened’ (Hughes and Chandran 1998:70). Whether the Mamfe sacred forest will exemplify this remains to be seen. But overt violations of the sacred forest may eventually compromise its existence.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt, as Barrow concludes, that sacred trees and groves and their supporting institutions are an important natural and spiritual heritage: ‘Given the importance of sacred trees and sacred forest to all the world religions, a revival (re-emphasis) of their importance should translate into practical action. This requires conserving such trees and groves in the context of spirituality, and calls for greater inter- and intra-faith harmony, as well as reaching out to the environmental movement ...’ (Barrow 2010:47). Although, the exact timing and origin of the Mamfe forest grove are shrouded in obscurity, the reasons for the establishment of the sacred forest are well-grounded in oral history and oral traditions. The sacred forest used to be central to the watershed of social, economic and political worldviews of the people of Mamfe. It was an osmotic site of history, power, memory and ritualised epistemology that supported the solid foundations of religion, ontology

and eschatology. The sacred forest also served as a site where botanical, mammalian and agricultural experiments were conducted. The use of powerful ideologies and sanctions enabled the rulers of the town to preserve the forest grove as a site where the past interacted with the present, forging a harmonious relationship between the people of Mamfe and the world around them. Today, the survivability of the sacred forest is unquestionably in doubt. Apart from the forces of social change and economic transformations, the riddles of memory and history as well as the competing forces of ancient values and the temporality of modernity are a composite potential threat to the very existence of the forest grove. Put together, memory and history are powerful agencies in the preservation of tradition and norms. Hence, as the oral history and oral traditions of the sacred forest and its epistemological uses are pushed to the frontiers of the past by the inescapable pressures of modernity, the sacred forest will eventually become an institution useable in the past, but not tolerable in the present.

Notes

1. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; and interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997.
5. Interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
6. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, May 6, 1997.
7. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
8. Ibid.; and interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
9. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; and interview with Nana Amma Ansa Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.
10. Interview with Mr. Samuel Okyere, Mamfe, 23 March, 2017.
11. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
12. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; and interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
13. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; and interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
14. Ibid.

15. For taboos that protected sacred grooves, see for example, Johan Colding and Carl Folke, 'Social Taboos: Invisible Systems of Local Resource Management and Biological Conservation', *Ecological Applications*, 11, 2 (2001), 584–600.
16. Ibid; and interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.
17. Ibid.
18. Interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.
19. Ibid.; interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; and interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
20. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
21. Ibid.
22. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997; and interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe-Akuapem, 5 January 2004.
23. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997. See also interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
24. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997. See also interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
28. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997. See also interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997; and interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe-Akuapem, 5 January 2004.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid. (Chouin 2009, p. 187), shows that forest groves tend to have 'scattered potsherds and small-size whole pots' and sometimes, in abandoned forest groves, farmers dug up pottery and human bones.
31. Ibid; and interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe-Akuapem, 5 January 2004.
32. For the entire impact of the Basel Missionary activity in Akuapem, see pp. 111–125 in See Kwamena-Poh (1973). The Basel Mission Society founded in 1815 in Basel, Switzerland, laid the foundation in Akuapem under the leadership of Andreas Riss in 1835.
33. For Africa as a whole, see, for example, McCaan (1999).
34. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997; and interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.

35. The history of the church in Mamfe punctuates the literature. See, for example, Smith (1966). For a detailed account of the evolution of Christianity in Mamfe-Akuapem, see a pamphlet written to commemorate the dedication of the Mamfe Emmanuel Presbyterian Chapel by Professor M. A. Kwamena-Poh, entitled, 'The Basel Mission Period 1828–1918: The Planting of the Presbyterian Church in Mamfe Akuapem, 1858–1993', in *Dedication of Emmanuel Presbyterian Chapel* (Accra, Akan Printing Press, n.d.), pp. 11–22; See also M. A. Kwamena-Poh (1973).
36. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997. See also Kwamena-Poh (n.d.), pp. 12–14.
37. Kwamena-Poh n.d., , pp. 12–14). See also McCaskie, 'Nananom Mpow of Mankessim', pp. 145–146, who shows that the British authorities tended to support Christian communities against the indigenous rulers' efforts to stem the tide of Euro-Christian encroachments on indigenous way of life.
38. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
39. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
40. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997. See also interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
41. Ibid.; and interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.
42. Interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.
43. Ibid.
44. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997. The left hand is considered unclean among the Guans and Akans of Ghana. For example, it is considered an insult to greet someone with the left hand or point at a person with the left hand. Overall, the left hand is shelved in public, for instance, gesticulating with the left hand in public is considered disrespectful. The taboo associated with the left hand is derived from its presumed uncleanness because it is the prescribed hand for ablutions etc.
45. Interview with Nana Amma Ansaah Sasraku I (the Queen-Mother of Mamfe) Mamfe, 5 January 2004.
46. Ibid.
47. Interview with Mena Akole, Mamfe, 5 May 1997; and interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
48. Interview with Kwaku Manteaw, Mamfe, 6 January 2004; interview with Akua Asi, Mamfe, 6 January 2004; and interview with Kofi Addo, 6 January 2004.
49. Interview with Oheneba Kwesi Akurang, Mamfe, 6 May 1997.
50. Ibid.; and interview with Abusuapanyin Obuobi, Mamfe, 8 May 1997.
51. Interview with Kwaku Manteaw, Mamfe, 6 January 2004; and interview with Akua Asi, Mamfe, 6 January 2004.

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