What is this thing called Sunsum? A Historiographical and Constructive Theological Investigation into the Nature of the Akan Sunsum, from its Pneumatological Conception to the Contemporary Argument of Quasi-physicalism

OWUSU-GYAMFI, Clifford

Abstract
The present thesis articulates a theological framework that engages Christian thoughts and theological reflections which revolves around an elaborate exposition of the spiritual worldview of the Akan. The spiritual viewpoint is primarily inspired by the concept of sunsum. The ultimate objective is to facilitate a deeper comprehension of the idea of the “spirit.” The expectation is that acquiring an excellent grasp of the concept of the “spirit” will demonstrate how the theology of the Holy Spirit is employed, contextually, in the Akan setting. The proposal is rooted in an entirely different Akan concept, known as honhom. My dissertation contends that honhom exerts significant influence on any reviews, discourses, or scrutiny regarding contextual Akan pneumatology. Previous studies have proven that honhom, as a premise for explaining nonphysical phenomena – such as air and spirit – and meta-empirical aspects, is polysemic and complements the biblical concepts of רוח and πνεῦμα.
What is this thing called Sunsum? A Historiographical and Constructive Theological Investigation into the Nature of the Akan Sunsum, from its Pneumatological Conception to the Contemporary Argument of Quasi-physicalism

Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi

Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Theology

Thesis supervised by Prof. Christophe Chalamet and Dr. Robert Owusu-Agyarko

Spring 2020

Members of the jury:
Prof. Elisabeth Gangloff-Parmentier, Presider (Faculty of Theology, University of Geneva)
Prof. Christophe Chalamet (Faculty of Theology, University of Geneva)
Dr. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi (President of the Ghana Baptist University College (GBUC), Accra)
Dr. Louise Müller (Department of African Languages and Cultures, Centre for the Arts in Society, Leiden University)
Dr. Robert Owusu-Agyarko (Faculty of Theology, Central University, Ghana)
What is this thing called *Sunsum*? A Historiographical and Constructive Theological Investigation into the Nature of the Akan *Sunsum*, from its Pneumatological Conception to the Contemporary Argument of Quasi-physicalism

SUNSUM

(The Akan adinkra symbol signifying personality, energy, power, spirit, and purity)
DECLARATION

I, Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi, do hereby certify that this dissertation entitled “What is this thing called Sunsum? A Historiographical and Constructive Theological Investigation into the Nature of the Akan Sunsum, from its Pneumatological Conception to the Contemporary Argument of Quasi-physicalism,” has been an original independent study of my own under the careful supervision of Professor Christophe Chalamet of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Geneva, and Dr. Robert Owusu Agyarko, coordinator of graduate studies at Central University, Ghana. References and citations from all materials used in this work have been duly credited to their sources in the footnotes as well as in the bibliography.

I also certify that this work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the Internet, via the university’s digital research repository, the library search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the university to restrict access.

_______________________________                      __
SIGNED                                      PLACE AND DATE
Genève, August 19, 2020
BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The present dissertation forms part of the growing concern of using Africa’s socio-religious context as a means for theological reflection. This growing concern has come as a socio-cultural and religious revival of what a majority of Africans consider as authentic self-definition. Already received in Ghana, notable scholars who have integrated religio-cultural ideas in interdisciplinary studies include Joseph Boakye Danquah, Kofi Abrefa Busia, John Pobee, Kofi Sarpong, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Kwame Bediako, Anthony Ephirim-Donkor and Robert Owusu Agyarko, among others. It is these significant contributions by Akan scholars that sparked my interest in contextual Akan studies. I will particularly single out the works of Robert Owusu Agyarko, whose presentation at the International Conference on Pneumatology and Contextual Theology held at the University of Geneva in 2014 became the turning point of my whole theological and academy journey. Agyarko presented a paper titled: “‘Sunsum’ the Spirit of Life: Pneumatology in the (Akan) West Africa Context,” with the aim of constructing a contextual Akan pneumatology based on the Akan concept of sunsum. This impressive contribution by Agyarko raised many questions, leading to the present work and, at the encouragement of Professor Christophe Chalamet, I was challenged to take up further studies into the subject matter. The present dissertation, thus, focuses on the notion of sunsum and its various facets and implications in Akan culture and religion.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to my supervisors Professor Christophe Chalamet and Dr. Robert Owusu Agyarko for their patience and continuous support throughout the research study. I acknowledge their effort, advice, motivation, critique, and the amount of time they invested in reading through the dissertation. Their encouragement has been essential to the completion of this doctoral thesis.

I would like to acknowledge my late parents John Kwadwo Owusu and Esther Ama Owusuaa, two most important persons I regard in high esteem. Their passing left a huge gap in the family, but not in our memory. Their legacy lives on and in us. May their souls rest in everlasting peace.

I also feel compelled to acknowledge my siblings, nieces, and nephews for their support and prayers. I could not have come this far without their unwavering support in my educational pursuit. Words cannot express how important they are to me. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to each one of them.

I will also express my appreciation to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Geneva for its financial support in the course of my research. I thank all the professors and the collaborators at the Faculty for their expertise and their help in shaping my theological thinking. Special thanks to my fellow doctoral students at the Faculty, especially Luc Bulundwe and Elio Jailet, for their interest in my work.

I owe many friends and organizations gratitude in diverse ways: François Tauxe and family, Anne Kowlesseur, Alexandre Vitorovic, Samuel Sarpaning, Faustina Boansi, Albert Muller and family, Dr. Opoku Boateng, Dr. Opoku-Adjei Daniel, Dr. Robert Osei-Bonsu, Dr. Brempong Owusu-Antwi, Pastor David Jennah, Pastor Abankwa Amoakahene, Wiamoase S.D.A Church, Adventist Church in Renens, and above all my church members at Adventist Fellowship Geneva for their prayers and friendship.
DEDICATION

To my dear parents of blessed memory John Kwadwo Owusu and Esther Ama Owusuaa. May they remain in our memory as long as life endures.
ABSTRACT

The question of a contextual expression of the Christian faith and practice in Africa has been an ongoing concern in African theology. How can African religious ideas contribute to theological discussion and learning? This kind of theological question has generally been termed as African theology. Its prime objective is to make the gospel relevant to the people, and also to secure an authentic African identity. The present research forms part of the contextual orientation of Christian theology as it investigates the notion of the spirit among the Akan people of West Africa, in order to propose a new contextual pneumatology for the articulation of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. The study seeks to offer answers to the following key questions: What is the notion of the spirit among the Akan people? How might the Akan spiritual worldview inflect a contextual understanding of the Holy Spirit? How should we articulate pneumatological perspectives in Akan languages?

My proposal takes into consideration the nature and work of the Holy Spirit and its theological expressions among the Akan Christians of West Africa. Because the doctrine of the Spirit involves both the “spiritual” and the history of humanity, the present new proposal articulates a theological framework that engages Christian thoughts and theological reflections. The crux of this proposal revolves around an elaborate exposition of the spiritual perspective of the Akan. The spiritual viewpoint is primarily inspired by the concept of sunsum. The ultimate objective is to facilitate a deeper comprehension of the idea of the “spirit.” The expectation is that acquiring an excellent grasp of the concept of the “spirit” will demonstrate how the theology of the Holy Spirit is employed, contextually, in the Akan setting. The proposal is rooted in an entirely different Akan concept, known as honhom. My dissertation contends that honhom exerts significant influence on any reviews, discourses, or scrutiny regarding a contextual Akan pneumatology. Previous studies have proven that honhom, as a premise for explaining nonphysical phenomena – such as air and spirit – and meta-empirical aspects, is polysemic. Most importantly, the aforementioned nonphysical realities complement the biblical concepts of ρύπα and πνεῦμα and have a firsthand impact on the Akan interpretation of life in its entirety. Honhom also enables a better understanding of the functionality and character of the Holy Spirit, which in turn shapes contextual Akan Christian pneumatology.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration.....................................................................................................................iii
Background of study......................................................................................................iv
Acknowledgement........................................................................................................v
Dedication.......................................................................................................................vi
Abstract..........................................................................................................................vii
Table of content...........................................................................................................viii

PART ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction.............................................................................................................1
1.2. African Concept of Spiritual Phenomena...............................................................4
1.3. Towards a Contextual African Pneumatology.......................................................6
   1.3.1. Placide Tempels and the Notion of Vital Force.................................................6
   1.3.2. Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context....................................................8
   1.3.3. Chinua Achebe’s Notion of chi in Igbo Cosmology.........................................9
   1.3.4. Sunsum: The Spirit of Life by Robert Agyarko..............................................10
1.4. Why the Need for a Contextual Akan Christian Pneumatology?.......................11
   1.4.1. One Spirit but Various Names........................................................................11
   1.4.2. A Response to Akan Spiritual Worldviews....................................................12
   1.4.3. Christian Faith and Practice.........................................................................12
   1.4.4. African Spiritual Churches............................................................................13
   1.4.5. Filmography and Pentecostalism....................................................................13
   1.4.6. Akan Traditional Religion and Practice.......................................................14
   1.4.7. Biblical Authority.........................................................................................16
1.5. Honhom Kronkron (Holy Spirit): A Pneumatological Proposal.......................16
1.6. Structure of Study..................................................................................................19
1.7. Conclusion..............................................................................................................20
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Introduction to the Meaning of Religion

2.2.1. The Relationship Between Religion and Culture

2.3. African Traditional Religions (ATR)

2.3.1. Traditional Akan Religion (TAR)

2.4. Historiographical Approach

2.4.1. Intellectual History and the History of Ideas

2.4.2. Intellectual History and Cultural History

2.5. Honhom Pneumatology: A Biblical Approach

2.6. Delimitation and Limitation of the Research

2.7. Conclusion

CHAPTER 3: INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN THEOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

3.2. The Impact of Christianity in Africa

3.2.1. Challenges to the Growth of Christianity in Africa

3.3. African Theology

3.3.1. What is African Theology?

3.3.2. In Search of a Positive Mode of Expression

3.3.3. Towards an African Contextual Theology

3.4. Liberation Theology

3.4.1. Background to Liberation Theology

3.4.2. An Overview of African Liberation Theology

3.4.3. African Black Liberation Theology (Black Cultural Theology)

3.4.4. Apartheid as a Theological Heresy

3.4.5. Emergence of South Africa’s Black Theology

3.4.6. African Feminist Theology (Womanist Theology)

3.5. Inculturation Theology in Africa

3.5.1. What is Inculturation Theology?

3.5.2. Contextualization of Ecclesial Models

3.5.3. African Anthropology as a Rebirth of Africa’s Cultural Values

3.5.4. The Rise of Africa’s Nationalism
3.5.5. Philosophical Decolonization as a Philosophy of Identity......................54
3.5.6. African Theological Hermeneutics as Inculturation...............................55
3.6. An Appraisal of the Theology of Inculturation...........................................56
   3.6.1. Universalists Criticism of Inculturation.................................................56
   3.6.2. Progressive Criticism of Inculturation....................................................57
      3.6.2a Lack of Methodological Rigor.............................................................58
      3.6.2b Concerning Definitional Issues...........................................................60
      3.6.2c Lack of Disciplinary Solipsism............................................................60
3.7. Conclusion......................................................................................................61

CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCTION TO THE AKAN WORLDVIEW

4.1. Introduction..................................................................................................63
4.2. Akan Cultural Anthropology.................................................................64
   4.2.1. Social Aspect of Akan Cultural Anthropology..........................................64
   4.2.2. The Human Being in Akan Anthropology...............................................66
4.3 What Is This Thing Called Sunsum?..............................................................68
4.4. Sunsum in the Akan Worldview.................................................................71
   4.4.1. The Supreme Deity (Onyankopon)..........................................................73
   4.4.2. The Pantheon Deities (Abosom)...............................................................73
   4.4.3. Ancestors and other Spirits in Akan Cosmology.......................................75
   4.4.4. The World of Natural Objects.................................................................76
4.5 Sunsum in Akan Anthropology.................................................................77
   4.5.1. The Origin of Sunsum.............................................................................77
4.6. Various Categories of Sunsum.....................................................................78
   4.6.1. Sunsum in Sleep Peregrination..............................................................78
   4.6.2. Sunsum in Akan Mediumistic Experience..............................................79
   4.6.3. Sunsum as a Revengeful Force...............................................................80
   4.6.4. Sunsum in Akan Psychology.................................................................80
   4.6.5. The Collective Sunsum: Sika Dwa Kofi (The Golden Stool)....................80
4.7. Conclusion...................................................................................................81

PART TWO: THE GENESIS OF AKAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE SUNSUM HISTORIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 5: THE “BIG BANG” OF AKAN ETHNOGRAPHY

5.1. Introduction..................................................................................................85
5.2. Introduction to Akan Scholarship .......................................................... 86
  5.2.1. Johann Gottlieb Christaller: A Precursor of Akan Scholarship ............ 86
  5.2.2. Christaller’s Definition and Conception of Sunsum ........................... 88
  5.2.3. Robert Sutherland Rattray: A Precursor of Akan Anthropology ......... 90
5.3. Rattray’s Conception and Definition of Sunsum .................................. 95
  5.3.1. The General Definition of Sunsum by Rattray ................................. 96
  5.3.2. Sunsum as “spiritual element” ......................................................... 96
  5.3.3. Sunsum “in a man or woman” ......................................................... 98
  5.3.4. Sunsum as “force” and “power” ..................................................... 98
  5.3.5. Sunsum as “personal magnetism,” “character,” “personality” ............ 100
  5.3.6. Sunsum as the “soul” ..................................................................... 101
  5.3.7. The collective sunsum “soul” of the Asantes ................................. 103
5.4. An Overall Critique .............................................................................. 106
5.5. Conclusion ............................................................................................ 108

CHAPTER 6: LATER SCHOLARS AND THE SUNSUM CONSTRUCTION

6.1. Introduction ......................................................................................... 111
6.2. Theological Encounter with Philosophy in J. B. Danquah ...................... 111
  6.2.1. Danquah’s Conception of Sunsum .................................................... 113
6.3. Sunsum as the Personal Soul in Eva L. R. Meyerowitz ............................ 117
  6.3.1. The Concept of God Among the Akan ............................................. 119
  6.3.2. The Construction of the Sunsum ..................................................... 119
6.4. Sunsum as Paternal Biogenetic in Kofi Abrefa Busia .............................. 123
  6.4.1. Busia’s Anthropology and his Conception of the Sunsum ............... 125
6.5. The Exclusively Spiritual (Ye Sunsum) and the Inspirited (Wo Sunsum) in
     Helaine K. Minkus ................................................................................. 128
  6.5.1. Ontological Definition of Sunsum .................................................... 128
  6.5.2. The Exclusively Spiritual (Ye Sunsum) ............................................ 130
  6.5.3. The Inspirited (Wo Sunsum) .......................................................... 132
6.6. Abosom: The Sunsum of the Human Being – Anthony Ephirim-Donkor .... 136
  6.6.1. The Meaning of Sunsum by Ephirim-Donkor .................................. 136
  6.6.2. The Role of the Abosom in Akan Anthropology .............................. 137
6.7. Summary of the Overall Discussion .................................................... 140
6.8. Conclusion ........................................................................................... 142
### PART THREE: CONTEMPORARY CRITICISMS AND APOLOGETICS OF THE NATURE OF SUNSUM

### CHAPTER 7: TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHICAL DECOLONIZATION AND DECONSTRUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>The Emergence of the Philosophy of Quasi-physicalism</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.1</td>
<td>The Meaning of Quasi-Physicalism?</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.2</td>
<td>Wiredu’s Akan Anthropology</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.3</td>
<td>Quasi-Physicalism as a Matter of Philosophical Decolonization</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.4</td>
<td>Spiritual or Quasi-Physical?</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.5</td>
<td>Critical Assessment of Quasi-Physicalism</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2.6</td>
<td>Definition of Sunsum by Wiredu</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>The Argument Against Quasi-physicalism</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.1</td>
<td>Ṣкра as Soul?</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.2</td>
<td>Against the Philosophy of Quasi-physicalism</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.3</td>
<td>The Pneumatic Conception of Sunsum in Gyekye</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.4</td>
<td>The Meaning of Sunsum According to Gyekye</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3.5</td>
<td>A Critique of the Pneumatic Conception of Sunsum</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>An Evaluation of Quasi-Physicalism and the Pneumatic Conception</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER 8: ANALYSIS OF COMMONLY CONFUSED TERMS WITH SUNSUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>The Relationship Between Sunsum and Ṣкра</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.1</td>
<td>Characteristics of Ṣкра</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.2</td>
<td>Characteristics of Sunsum</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.3</td>
<td>Ṣкра and Other Worldly Realities</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2.4</td>
<td>The Meaning of Săsă (the Revengeful Spirit)</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>The Relationship between Sunsum and Ntorọ</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.1</td>
<td>The Meaning of Ntorọ</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3.2</td>
<td>The Difference between Ntorọ and Sunsum</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>The Relationship between Sunsum and Suman (charm)</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART FOUR: THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ON SUNSUM AND A PROPOSAL TOWARDS A NEW CONTEXTUAL AKAN PNEUMATOLOGY

CHAPTER 9: SUNSUM PNEUMATOLOGY

9.1. Introduction.................................................................195
9.2. Sunsum as Onyame Sunsum.............................................196
9.3. Sunsum in Agyarko’s Anthropology..................................197
   9.3.1. The Meaning of Sunsum in Agyarko’s Anthropology........199
9.4. Agyarko’s Methodology Towards Sunsum Kronkron Pneumatology....200
   9.4.1. Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed on the Holy Spirit..........201
9.5. Sunsum as a Christian Theological Concept........................203
9.6. Critique of Sunsum Pneumatology....................................204
9.7. In Search for a Contextual Akan Christian Pneumatology..........205
   9.7.1. In Search of Linguistic Expression...............................206
9.8. The Bible and the Concept of Spirit..................................207
   9.8.1. The Spirit in the Old Testament.................................207
9.9. Conclusion......................................................................216

CHAPTER 10: HONHOM KRONKRON: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

10.1. Introduction...............................................................219
10.2. The Etymology, Origin, and Meaning of Honhom....................220
   10.2.1. Etymology of Honhom..............................................220
   10.2.2. Origin of Honhom...................................................221
   10.2.3. Fundamental Meaning of Honhom..............................221
10.3. Characteristics of Honhom.............................................223
   10.3.1. Honhom as Breath or a Mild Wind...............................224
   10.3.2. Honhom: The Ultimate Source of Being.......................224
   10.3.3. Honhom as Spirit....................................................225
   10.3.4. Honhom as Pervasive Spirit......................................226
   10.3.5. Honhom as Life Substance........................................226
   10.3.6. Honhom: The Life-force of the Human Being..................227
   10.3.7. Epistemological Dimension of Honhom........................229
10.4. The Differences between Sunsum and Honhom........................229
10.5. Honhom and the Akan Twi Bible Translation........................232
10.6. Theological Justification for Honhom in the Akan Twi Bible ......................... 235
10.6.1. Theo-anthropological Dimension of Honhom .................................. 235
10.6.2. Theological Dimension of the Spirit as Honhom .............................. 238
10.6.3. The Honhom Kronkron (Holy Spirit) .............................................. 240
10.6.4. The Metaphysical-cosmological Honhom of God ............................. 241
10.7. The Implications of Honhom Kronkron Pneumatology to Theology ........ 243
10.8. Conclusion ......................................................................................... 247

GENERAL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION ................................................. 249
Figures ....................................................................................................... 255
Glossary of Twi Terms ............................................................................ 257
Bibliography ............................................................................................ 259
PART ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

SANKOFA

“Go back to take”

*Se wo were fi na wo sankofa a yenkyi*—“It is not a taboo to go back for that which is forgotten” (Akan maxim). The adinkra symbol means it is essential to learn from the past.
CHAPTER 1

General Introduction

1.1. Introduction

This research proposes a new perspective for an African pneumatology that involves a constructive philosophical and theological investigation into the spiritual worldview of the Akan people of West Africa.\(^1\) Akan is an ethnic group comprising several unique tribes whose current settlements are in the tropical areas of Ghana and the southeast of Cote d’Ivoire (Figure 1).\(^2\) In both Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire, the Akan constitute the majority with an average population of more than twenty million citizens.\(^3\) The focus of my research investigates the Akan’s religious notion in which the universe is animated and interpenetrated by an immaterial, volatile, force, power, and “spirit” called \textit{sunsum} (soon-sum) (Rattray 1923; Danquah 1968; Gyekye 1987; among others). \textit{Sunsum} is a multivalent term that has various nuances in the studies of anthropology, philosophy and theology. Several scholars accept the notion of \textit{sunsum} as being responsible for basic essential functionalities in natural objects such as stones, trees, mountains, rivers, but also in human beings. It is generally held as the activating principle and the “spirit” of an object or person.

Scholars studying Akan religion and culture have tried to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the notion of the \textit{sunsum}, particularly its ontological character, whether it is supposed to be a spirit or an emanating force, or both. The results have brought several shades to the term. Despite the various nuances, contemporary scholarship focuses on two main ontological arguments. The first and most popular is the pneumatic character that designates the \textit{sunsum} as a spirit, vital force, and the double of the individual that remains unseen in the astral realms (Rattray 1923; Minkus 1981; Gyekye 1987). The second, which is more recent, and a critique of the former is the quasi-physical

\(^1\) The term “Akan” is both singular and plural. The term expresses any person or group of persons or tribe that belong to one larger ethnic group called Akan.

\(^2\) There are also few Akan found in Togo according to Louise Müller, “Ghanaian Films and Chiefs as Indicators of Religious Change among the Akan in Kumasi and Its Migrants in Southeast Amsterdam,” in Robert W. Hefner, John Hutchinson, Sara Mels, Christiane Timmerman (eds), Religions in Movement: The Local and the Global in Contemporary Faith Traditions. New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 246.

\(^3\) Some prominent Akan figures in modern history include Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), the first prime minister of Ghana and father of African Nationalism, Kofi Annan (1938-2018), the seventh Secretary-General of the United Nations between January 1997 and December 2006, and Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo-Addo (b. 1944), the current president of the Republic of Ghana since 2016.
or material character of sunsum. This is a new wave of philosophy that presents the Akan sunsum as not strictly a “spirit” but also a quasi-physical or quasi-material concept (Danquah 1944; Wiredu 1987).

Scholars from the pneumatic school of thought, which is underpinned by the term “spirit,” designate the sunsum as a distinct immaterial substance or a spiritual entity. This conception stems from both Western and indigenous scholars studying Akan culture and religion (Rattray 1923; Minkus 1981; Gyekye 1987; and others). One of the most influential luminaries in this respect was Kwame Gyekye (1939-2019), an indigenous scholar who favored and defended the pneumatic character of sunsum. Gyekye was a prominent Akan scholar and modern philosopher who has argued in favor of the pneumatic character of sunsum as both traditionally and philosophically accurate, even though he did recognize the multivalent nature of it. Gyekye is notable for his influence in shaping modern African philosophy. His approach to the interpretation of Akan religion and culture involves a critical analysis and comparative studies that provide an argument for a distinct African philosophy and identity. Gyekye, like several African philosophers, pursues a common interpretation that gives value to an African philosophical thought, rather than Western philosophy, as a yardstick for studying and practicing African philosophy. The dogma of an ontological inseparability between personhood and community is a hallmark of Gyekye’s definition of an authentic African personality. To him, the community imposes identity upon the African child. For that reason, personhood is a communal spirituality. His compelling philosophical interpretation of the sunsum as a spirit, divine essence, and experience has heightened preference for the pneumatic character across intellectual frontiers.

Quasi-physicalists, on the other hand, are intellectual questioners who, through analytic critique, question the nature of the sunsum and consider its translation into the English language as “spirit” to be inflected by the West. The scholar who championed this approach is the Akan scholar Kwasi Wiredu (b. 1931). Wiredu remains one of the notable contemporary African philosophers in conceptual analysis. The centrality of his methodology is centered around a critique of some of the African concepts that he perceives as being ostensibly contaminated by Western “definite modes

---

4 Wiredu is a distinguished Ghanaian professor of philosophy at the Department of philosophy in the University of South Florida. He was trained in the studies of philosophy at the University of Ghana and Oxford University and has given lectures in several universities such as the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), UCLA, Richmond, Carleton College, and Duke, and held fellowships at the Wilson Center, Washington, D. C. and The National Humanities Center, North Carolina (Wiredu et al, 2006: xviii).
Wiredu thinks this came about as a result of the influence of foreign conceptual schemes, and the problem of indigenous susceptibility to Western education (Wiredu 1998: 1820; 1996: 136-144). Therefore, Wiredu sees the task of deconstructing the African pedagogy as technically a “philosophical decolonization” and “necessarily a conceptual enterprise” (Wiredu 1998: 18). It is this background that defines his rejectionist stance toward the pneumatic character of Akan spiritual realities to grapple with quasi-physicalism.6

Per Wiredu, the term “spirit” is polysemic in the English world and does not encapsulate the indigenous conception of the sunsum; for this reason, he cautions Akan scholars to avoid translating sunsum into the English language as “spirit” (Wiredu, 1987). According to Wiredu, what many Akan speak of as “spirit” is not merely spirit per se, as understood in the English language, but rather something quasi-physical or quasi-material, meaning it lies between the spiritual and physical world and is often perceived and spoken of with physical properties. The nature of sunsum appears in Wiredu’s conception as quasi-material, i.e. neither immaterial nor physical. The Akan sunsum, thus, seemingly appears to possess physical properties but not (Müller 2008). Eventually, Wiredu rejects the pneumatic conception of sunsum by offering a constructive proposal of quasi-physicalism or quasi-materialism as best describing the Akan worldview of what is supposed to be “spirit” and spiritual.

This present research reveals the importance of the aforementioned two schools of thought in recent contextual studies in African theology. Of a particular interest in my research is the current Akan contextual pneumatology that tends to favor the pneumatic character of the sunsum at the expense of a critical and in-depth dialogue with the quasi-physical critique. Since the philosophy of quasi-physicalism remains the sole pervasive philosophical critique of the sunsum and continues to influence contemporary scholarship, it needs to attract the attention of scholars in Akan pneumatology for proper investigation and dialogue.

5 While Wiredu maintains a sharp focus on the purity of Africa’s traditional conceptual substances, it is however obvious that various political theories such as decolonialism and sankofaism, which are shaded by Kwame Nkrumah’s neo-colonialism theory, have influenced him. The idea of a “go back to take” (Sankofa) to what is African opposes Westernization and its concomitant infiltration of colonialism in the educational system. Its target is to redirect Africa’s educational pedagogy to its traditional values (Kwame Nkrumah 1970; Emmanuel Martey 1993; Kofi Poku and Nana Boaduo 2011; Wiredu 1996).

6 Wiredu is not the first scholar to view the sunsum as not being spirit. In this study, it has been argued that Danquah was the first Akan indigenous scholar who did not characterize the sunsum as pneumatic. The significance of Wiredu’s work is the comparative critique
The current contextual Akan Christian pneumatology is the work of Robert Owusu-Agyarko, an Akan theologian, lecturer and director of graduate programs at Central University in Ghana.\(^7\) Agyarko has proposed that the Akan concept of *sunsum* may form the basis for contextual Akan Eco theology and pneumatology (Agyarko, 2012, 2014). Agyarko’s research interest has centered on contextual pneumatology, ecotheology, Christology, Trinity, and sociocultural reforms in West Africa. His spiritual theology from the Akan perspective has drawn attention to pneumatological discourses in African contextual theology, of which this present research is not an exception.\(^8\) His work is an illustration of theological interest in the *sunsum* debate. It also points out the emergence of rigorous studies in contextual pneumatology among the Akan people.

In this thesis, the significance of the pneumatic and quasi-physical arguments about *sunsum* will inform the research with the view of exploring some vital questions such as the nature of *sunsum* among the Akan people and how its character has a consequential perspective of the nature and character of the Holy Spirit. In this context, the study of *sunsum* is used as the basis for exploring Akan pneumatology. However, the study is not limited by it since other means of expressing contextual pneumatology do exist. In the end, the overriding concern will be to ascertain whether *sunsum* can form the basis for a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology.

### 1.2. African Concept of Spiritual Phenomena

The concept of spirit and spirits is a universal phenomenon. In several parts of the world, spiritual phenomena have been the determining factor for a cosmological and identity construct. As a consequence, it is not strange to see spiritual phenomenology as a multireligious, multilingual, and multicultural reality. This means that irrespective of our global relationality, each religio-cultural context recognizes the “spirit” or spiritual phenomena in their own unique linguistic expression, which eventually defines their worldview and interaction with the rest of the world.

---

\(^7\) Agyarko is a Pentecostal pastor and an extraordinary researcher at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. He currently serves as the coordinator of graduate studies at Central University, Kumasi branch in Ghana. Before assuming this position, he held the position of head of the department of theology at the Christian Service University College in Kumasi from 2013 to 2018. He also served as vice president and acting dean of the school of theology in 2004 at Pan African Christian University College (now Perez University College). Agyarko is currently serving as an ordained minister with the Church of God in Ghana. He is credited with planting seven Church of God communities in West Africa, namely, Burkina-Faso, Mali, Benin, Gambia, Guinea, and Senegal (Bill 2010: 375, 381, 386).

In Africa, the notion of the “spirit” cuts across all cultural lines in the majority of African societies. John Samuel Mbiti (1931-2019), an outstanding Kenyan Anglican theologian and religious philosopher who was emeritus professor at the University of Bern and parish minister in Burgdorf, Switzerland, puts the African notion of the spirit into two categories: spirits of a divine origin created by God directly, and those that became spirits because they were once human beings (Mbiti 1969: 75). Spirits in general may comprise God, lesser deities, ancestors, and evil spirits. God remains the highest spirit-being and Creator who holds absolute will and power over all creation. No one claims to have seen or talked to God. God transcends our worldly confines. God created the lesser deities, known as pantheon gods, who act in loco dei and are thought of as children of God. Ancestors are departed family members who are thought to be living at a special place reserved for them in the spiritual realms and are ceremonially invoked for assistance in the affairs of the living. Evil spirits are said to be malevolent spirits that can orchestrate human destinies and are likewise responsible for some human tragedies. All other spiritual forces are underlings of these two broad categories.

The general understanding has been that spirits and spiritual forces do not exist exclusively outside of the natural. The spiritual and natural are interwoven, making the African cosmology an inspirited universe, i.e. all the natural objects are inspirited to exercise power and certain essential qualities. Consequently, it is accepted that the spiritual is pervasive, and not just the ‘spiritual’ part of the world according to Allan Anderson (b. 1949), an Anglo-Zimbabwean systematic theologian in Mission and Pentecostal studies (1991: 101). This understanding of “spirit” or “spirits” is, according to Anderson, implicit pneumatology, i.e. a pneumatology found in the daily practices rather than in a formal theology of the spirit (1991: 6). Life, in its entirety to most Africans, is wrapped up with the spiritual in view. It is, therefore, crucial to identify the dimensions of African pneumatology as anthropological, philosophical, theological and ecological. To fully grasp such a pneumatological cosmology is not always easy. As Anderson observed, the African notion of the spiritual is essentially suprarational, meaning beyond logical explanation (Anderson 1991: 101).

Because the spiritual pervades the material, it leaves the material agencies with little or no control of their destiny. In this respect, African religious scholars think of the traditional African worldview

---

9 Stories of creatures talking and reasoning with God are common in Akan epistemology, but these only exist in Akan folktales.
as a material-spiritual unity, contrary to the dualistic cosmology of the West (Anderson 1991: 8). Many Africans believe the phenomena of reality are shaped by the spiritual. For example, the Akan proverb *Nsɛm Nyinaa ne ‘Nyame*, meaning “All things are dependent upon God,” expresses the divine absolute activeness in the affairs of human life. Another proverb, *Onyame Nkrabea nni kwatibia*, meaning “There is no bypass to God’s destiny,” suggests that divine predestination is unalterable (Gyekye 1987: 20). The idea of spiritual agencies affecting the material is an established belief that contributes to the rational understanding of the African worldview of cause and effects.

1.3. Towards a Contextual African Pneumatology

The academic commitment to a contextual Christian pneumatology has evolved at a relatively slow pace in African theological discussion when compared to Christological studies. Anderson has argued that pneumatology is a neglected dimension in written African theology, and where it exists, it is regrettably eclipsed by methodological crises that adopt a Western approach to the study of traditional African worldviews (Anderson 1991). It is a paradox that the spiritual worldview of Africans, which is essentially demonstrated by a suprarational disposition and buoyant legacy of Christian enterprise, can lag behind in pneumatological discourses in the academy. The reasons are not so obvious because of the historical negative view of African traditional religion among some mainstream and independent African churches. This stems, perhaps, from a lack of interest in the field. Does a sense of worry prevail? Yes, in my opinion.

Although a small proportion of scholars have scientifically probed the African notion of the spirit and its relation to Christian faith and practice, pneumatological emphasis in the academy is not entirely futile. Things seem to have changed in recent years and there is a huge and significant contribution to this special but neglected area in recent African scholarship. Eminent scholars such as Anderson (Anderson 1991), Chike (Chike 2011), Sakupapa (Sakupapa 2012), and Agyarko (Agyarko 2012, 2014) come to mind. Even though this evolution is praiseworthy, it should be noted that it has made little difference in the area of contextual pneumatology. I will point out few of them to demonstrate how scholars have understood the nature of spiritual phenomena underlining African cosmological traditions.

1.3.1. Placide Tempels and the Notion of Vital Force
Of great significance is the contribution of the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels’ (1906-1977) *Bantu Philosophy* (1956). Tempels’ work is known for its exposition on African cosmology and ontology, especially its contribution to African pneumatology among the Baluba people of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The central idea that Tempels grapples with is the notion of vital force. He argues that Bantu ontology is all about forces: “Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force” (Tempels 1959: 44). Tempels understood vital force or life force as the enabling principle for the life of all beings, except God who is essentially life and the source of vital force.\(^{10}\)


Despite the many criticisms, the very core idea of Tempels’ thesis about life among the Bantus, which is interrelated because of the vital force from God, is still standing. Sakupapa observes that “a conceptual framework of vital force is one which highlights the centrality of life and the interrelatedness of beings (community)” (2012: 426). He further argues that “vital force is the power of God present in all creation and without which life is not possible…[V]ital force is the Spirit of God understood as the principle of life and enabler of communion within creation” (2012: 426). Nalwamba & Buitendag also come to a similar conclusion that “vital force recalls the

\(^{10}\) Tempels’ articulation of vital force is similar to the Akan notion of *sunsum*. But as I have argued in the previous chapter, vital force is dependent on the *ɔkra* instead of *sunsum*. To apply vital force to *sunsum* is a misnomer in my opinion.
biocentric impulse in African ontology and its potential to heighten our sensibilities to the intrinsic value of all of life (creation) in all of its interrelatedness” (2017: 4).

After decades of criticism, the vital force has become an object of heightened interest in recent African contextual Christian pneumatology. Sakupapa has noted that “the notion of vital force provides a conceptual framework for articulating pneumatology that is relevant to the context, faithful to biblical witness and also accountable to the wider Christian community” (2012: 427). Nalwamba & Buitendag conclude with a recommendation to acknowledge the concept of vital force as the basis for “a viable conceptual framework for an eco-pneumatology that is not just relevant to African Christian theology in the African context alone but a gift to Christian theology as well” (2017: 8).

1.3.2. Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context

Allan Anderson’s Moya: The Holy Spirit in an African Context (1991) is an attempt to demonstrate how African pneumatological categories are viable for the development of contextual Christian pneumatology. In this work, Anderson contends that a meaningful reinterpretation of spiritual concepts in light of the Biblical revelation by African Christians can only be understood and evaluated when such reinterpretations are seen in light of the traditional world view of Africans (1991: 69). This work is a masterpiece which expresses Anderson’s thought on traditional religions as a locus for a meaningful theological discussion. Anderson has written on African pneumatology with particular emphasis on African Initiated Churches (Anderson, 1991, 2000, 2001, 2003). Anderson argues that the notion of the “spirit” in African traditional religions is compatible with the Biblical understanding of the Spirit. The analysis he draws from the study of African pneumatology concludes that in most African traditions, “spirit” also denotes wind and the movement of air, among other connotations that are analogous to the biblical meanings (Anderson 1991: 114). From that background, he sees a theological value in moya or umoya, a Sotho-Tswana word for the spirit or breath of life, as a contextual interpretation of the Holy Spirit in South Africa. Moya is a constituent of the human being recognized as the transcendent soul, common with God, and received directly from God (Anderson 1991: 16). Moya is deathless and distinct from the isithunzi, the personality soul, which with the moya becomes the idlozi (ancestor) after death. Anderson says moya traditionally means air and wind and is used to designate the very essence of
human life, which is without any independent existence of its own (1991: 17). Anderson sees moya as the most adequate theological term to describe the Holy Spirit as the basis for contextual pneumatology in South Africa. This perspective allows him to show that the work of the Holy Spirit is more related to the African concept of the creative spirit, which is also the vital force or life force in most African religions.

1.3.3. Chinua Achebe’s Notion of chi in Igbo Cosmology

Chinua Achebe, the celebrated Nigerian writer and scholar, offers a critical interpretation of the African concept of the spirit by examining the notion of chi (pronounced as in the English Chi-ef) in relation to Igbo cosmology. According to Achebe, the Igbo perceive chi as soul, god, spirit-double, personal spirit and guardian angel, among other connotations. The Igbo also view chi as day or daylight and use it to denote the passage between night and day and vice versa; in this sense, chi ofufo represents daylight, chi ojiji refers to nightfall, and mgbachi stands for midday, a time that commands fear among children and respect among roaming spirits.

In the context of this thesis, the first interpretation of chi – as personal spirit, god, spiritual alter ego, soul, and guardian angel – is of great significance because of its influential, yet mysterious manifestation in Igbo psychology. Achebe argues that the Igbo generally consider an individual’s chi to be their double in the spirit world, hence the term spirit-double. Chi is central to understanding Igbo cosmology and worldview. The Igbo believe that the chi of a person coexists with or goes through the sun, the source of daylight, before reaching the world. This perspective is vital because Chi Ukwu or Chukwu (Great Chi), the Supreme Deity in Igbo cosmology, is intrinsically one with the sun.

Chi is also a core component of the concept of duality in Igbo psychology; for instance, something else must always straddle something. The Igbo believe that chi’s relationship to man is complementary rather than domineering, as exemplified by the popular phrase Onye kwe chie ekwe meaning that a man’s chi submits to his wishes. Chi negotiates the talents that a man is accorded before birth, hence the phrase Obu etu nya na chie si kwu, meaning that a man who is plagued by misfortune must have made a calamitous agreement with his chi before he came into the world. A man’s chi, while complementary, can also refuse to comply with his desires; this is the source of the saying chie ekwero, meaning chi has refused. Chi can also be obstinate or ‘bad,’ whereby it undermines a man’s fortune or success. Perhaps the most fundamental title assigned to chi in Igbo
cosmology is that of the creator; in other words, a man is a product of his chi, which is different from every other person’s. According to Achebe, this belief, which confirms the power of individualism among the Igbo, is reflected in the names assigned to children at birth. For instance, Chiekezie means that balance has been restored by chi through the birth of that child. The logical inference, therefore, is that there is a significant relationship between chi, Chukwu the Supreme God, and the sun in Igbo cosmology. In particular, Achebe’s analysis of the manifestation of chi among the Igbo establishes a sound platform for deconstructing and contextualizing African pneumatology.

1.3.4. Sunsum: The Spirit of Life by Robert Agyarko

Agyarko’s contextual pneumatology begins with the Akan notion of sunsum as a spiritual cue for theologization. At an international conference held at the University of Geneva, Agyarko presented a paper that proposes his concept and approach towards the theologization of sunsum as the basis for Akan pneumatology. In his presentation, “Sunsum’ The Spirit of Life: Pneumatology in the Akan West Africa Context,” Agyarko announced that “The Akan notion of sunsum may form the basis for contextual pneumatology” (Agyarko 2014). The methodology Agyarko employed attempted to explore the ecumenical dogmatic affirmation of the councils of Nicea and Chalcedon’s ecumenical creeds, in which the Holy Spirit was seen as both distinct and proceeding from God. Agyarko argues that African Christianity is largely pro-Nicaean/Chalcedonian (Agyarko 2014). This leads him to designate sunsum as an interpenetrating force from God in a panentheistic way; that means sunsum proceeds from God. The Holy Spirit, in Agyarko’s pneumatology, is Onyame Sunsum: the spark of creation and life that proceeds from God, yet distinct of itself. With this proposal, Agyarko becomes the pioneer Akan theologian to work out a contextual Akan pneumatology in contemporary scholarship.

Agyarko’s contextualization paves the way for a contextual spiritual formation that is not only a reflection of traditional spirituality but an integration of “Christian faith with African cultural life and thought forms” (Agyarko 2014). He believes Akan spirituality is, by and large, expressed by the term sunsum. Various Akan thinkers accept sunsum as the principle behind the essential nature of being and a force for an individual’s personality, i.e. the distinctive character disposition of a

11 Translating sunsum as spirit agrees with most scholars studying Akan religion and Agyarko’s pneumatic character is of no exception.
person. Agyarko treats *sunsum* as a contextual framework for a Christian pneumatological discussion. Based on the concept of *sunsum*, he has further explored areas like eco-theology and Christology in dealing with the relationship between faith and the African traditional religions to provide answers to today’s ecological crisis.

Despite Agyarko’s contribution to Akan pneumatology, a few questions need to be asked. Is *sunsum* the alpha and omega of the formulation of an Akan pneumatology? Could there be other ways to interpret pneumatology in Akan religion? With reference to other ways of interpreting Akan pneumatology, my research will answer these questions with a categorical and firm yes. My research is introducing what seems to have been overlooked in the ongoing discussion of Akan spirituality and contextual pneumatology. Akan people have another term often used to describe a ghost or spirit, and that is *honhom* (wind, air, breath, and vital force). In this thesis, I will research whether the notion of the Holy Spirit in African pneumatology is more analogous to the concept of *sunsum* or the notion of *honhom*. In the remaining parts of this thesis, I will, therefore, guide you on a conceptual journey.

1.4. Why the Need for a Contextual Akan Christian Pneumatology?

The concept of the spirit is a reality to the Akan. It is therefore important to engage Akan pneumatology in a meaningful scholarship to correctly appropriate it in dialogue with the Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The reasons why I think a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology is necessary include, but are not limited to the following:

1.4.1. One Spirit but Various Names

The global phenomena of spiritual experiences make the doctrine of the spirit unlimited to Christianity. Although Christianity has enjoyed a monopoly of pneumatological studies in the past, recent studies of spirit-experience around the world is changing the perception of scholars. A number of researches show that the concept of the spirit is a universal reality. For this reason, the Korean theologian Grace Ji-Sun Kim queries whether “there may be a possibility that Christianity does not have the complete answer when it comes to explaining and experiencing the Spirit” (2011: 9). In that case, the universal experience of God, and the spiritual, is emphasized in such a manner that makes pneumatological particularities in cultures point to a single source of divine experience

---

12 See Kärkkäinen & Co. 2013.
of the spirit, but under different shades of names. One may apply the concept of a “spiritual ecumenism” to this kind of description, for instance. The current proposal for Akan Christian pneumatology demonstrates that Akan people have experienced the divine spirit in their own unique way, and this is being validated by the various linguistic expressions for the spirit in their livelihood.

1.4.2. A Response to Akan Spiritual Worldviews

In Table Talks, Karl Barth is quoted to have told to his students that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit would be more understandable in the twenty-first century: “I personally think that a theology of the Spirit might be all right after A.D. 2000, but now we are still too close to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is still too difficult to distinguish between God’s Spirit and man’s spirit” (Barth & Godsey 1963: 28). Barth identified a contemporary problem that continues to challenge today’s theology of the Holy Spirit: the doctrine of the third person of the Trinity has never been an easy task for theologians. It remains one of the ecumenical creeds with numerous conundrums, and one that has maintained the rift between the churches in the East and the West. This problem is, in my view, partly the result of the neglect of rigorous research in pneumatology as compared to Christology. More importantly, however, the Holy Spirit, as an experiential reality, brings divine involvement into practical life as in the case for Christology. The impartation of spiritual gifts by the Spirit makes the doctrine of the Holy Spirit not just a set of theological discourses but an existential reality in the totality of people’s lives. Therefore, a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology is required to respond to the apparent spiritual worldview of Akan people and their Christian experience of the Holy Spirit.

1.4.3. Christian Faith and Practice in Ghana

Christianity remains a major reality in Ghana. Recent census results project that about 71.2 percent of the Ghanaian populace adhere to the Christian faith, making Christianity the dominant religion in the country. The Akan people of Ghana constitute about 47.5 percent of the general population and Christianity remains the dominant religion in this demography. This pattern means the

---

13 Theological work in Christology has centuries of dominance and a track record in church homilies as compared to pneumatological discourses. However, there has been in recent decades a resurgence of pneumatological discussion in different quarters of theological work and ecclesiastical contexts.

lifestyles of the majority of Akan people are now partly shaped by their new identity in Christianity. The Christian life and the Holy Spirit are indispensable since the new life is achieved through fellowship with the Spirit. Thus, we find in the book of Acts a power surge in the early church and its mission as a result of the Spirit (Couch 1998). Since there is very little work being done in the field of contextual Akan Christian pneumatology, a contextual emphasis on pneumatology among Akan Christians is necessary to grasp the importance of Christian experience and the mission of the Church among Akan people.

1.4.4. African Spiritual Churches

The pervasiveness of the spiritual is analogous to pneumatological conceptions in many African churches, especially the African Initiated Churches (AICs), and the New African Indigenous Religious Movement (NAIEM) in the 1940s. These churches, often known as “churches of the spirit” or “spiritual churches,” or known in Ghana as *sunsum nsɔrei* (spiritual churches), emphasize the active and manifest presence of the Spirit (Anderson 2003: 178). Anderson notes that the spiritual churches often go a long way “towards meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, offering a solution to all of life’s problems and a way to cope in a threatening world” (Anderson 2003: 178, 179). The emphasis on faith and power healing, characterized by ecstatic manifestations such as praying in tongues, unconscious falls, and prophetic messages from their leaders, are given a pneumatological interpretation as the movement of the Holy Spirit. These characteristics led Akan people in Ghana to characterize spiritual churches as possessing *sunsum* (*tumi*=power), hence, *sunsum nsɔrei* (spiritual churches). As a consequence, the Holy Spirit came to be associated with *sunsum* as Sunsum Kronkron. The contribution of these grassroot movements is a source for pneumatological discourse in understanding contextual pneumatology in Ghana.

1.4.5. Filmography and Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism has helped shaped African movies, especially in Nigerian and Ghanaian movie industries (Meyer 2015). It is one branch of Christianity that intersects with traditional pneumatology because of the strong emphasis on supernatural experiences of the Spirit. Pentecostalism has held the torch of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit since the beginning of the twentieth century. Pentecostals believe in the experience of salvation through the baptism of the
Holy Spirit and the gifts, especially speaking in tongues.\textsuperscript{15} Pentecostals emphasize divine movement of the Spirit as the liberating agent against all demonic agencies in the world. Recent rise in Africa’s film industry has given an upsurge to a forging of technological images of the uncanny (Meyer 2015: 200). The popular spread of mystical movies about ghosts and evil spirits is a renaissance of Africa’s mystical worldview in modern technologies. Africans’ spiritual worldview over the years existed in memory and artistic visuals other than in film technology. The transition into movie industries is one of a kind and expresses the African \textit{Sitz im Leben} of invincible realities as visual realities. This insurgence has been a forthgoing of blending religion with entertainment.

Although these films can often be sensational, the viewers, from an African point of view, are made to believe the imaginary as ordinary perceptible images. Moviemakers use concrete images to depict imaginable realities. Prior to the twenty-first century, most avengers in African movies were ancestral spirits or ghosts that intervened in adverse situations to redeem their suffering loved ones; this is also evidenced in the folklores. In the same breath, traditional priests played key roles as exorcists for individuals tormented by evil spirits. The influx of Pentecostal film writers and actors revised the traditional conception of ancestral deliverance to a divine agent of the Spirit. Whence, trained pastors joined the film industries to act as spiritual warriors against evil forces. As actors, they seized the occasion to persuade their audience of the dangers of the reality of spirits and to teach the public (Meyer 2015). Thus, pneumatological emphasis in Africa is always shaped by the African worldviews of the supernatural and how their influence can impart human lives. While filmmakers employ traditional conceptions as subject of entertainment, they typically fail to connect spiritual realities with those of the physical world.

\textbf{1.4.6. Akan Traditional Religion and Practice}

The Akan pre-Christian religion is widely recognized in Ghana as \textit{Abosomsom} (the worship of \textit{Abosom}) or the Akan traditional religions in recent scholarship.\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Abosomsom} is best translated as “the worship of \textit{Abosom}/\textit{Abosom} (pl.),” contrary to the pejorative translation by some Christians.

\textsuperscript{15} Pentecostalism emerged in Ghana in the mid-twentieth century although other records show that there existed indigenous Pentecostal churches (classical Pentecostalism) before its formal organization (Wyllie 1974).

\textsuperscript{16} Speaking of Akan religion today may call for many criticisms as majority of Akan have renounced the traditional religion which used to be the sole religious experience before the coming of Christianity and all other forms of religion. Notwithstanding, to speak of an Akan religion is about what is considered indigenous, with its traditions of kingship and influence of its worldview among the Akan today.
as “the worship of stones or rocks.” Bosom is the pantheon agent who acts as an intermediary between the Akan and God. Early Western missionaries branded the religion with vulgarity, using derogatory terms such as paganism, voodooism, idolatry, fetishism, etc. to characterize it. Although few adherents remain faithful to the traditional religion, its powerful impact cuts across the socio-religious and political dimensions of everyday activities in Akan societies. The religion imposes certain values that tend to underlie the basis for moral and ethical expressions. It is in the view of the religious tenets that inculturation theology engages as a theological praxis to deal with the practice of the Christian faith within a given context in Africa.

Further, both Christianity and the Akan traditional religion impact each other. As a result, the church is continuously faced with the issue of double standards or dual allegiance among its adherents. Many Akan Christians struggle with their past devotion to the Abosomsom and their newfound Christian faith. It is a common practice to find Christians consulting traditional priests for solutions to their problems. There are cases of pastors and clergy using the powers of pantheon deities to organize churches. The fear of evil spirits and forces constantly threatens many Akan Christians. In response, several Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, including independent churches, emphasize pneumatological dynamics such as faith healing, the driving out of demons, speaking in tongues, and other spiritual gifts geared towards the destruction of the forces of the kingdom of evil. The Holy Spirit is therefore largely understood as an active force or power (often associated with fire) that fights against evil forces in the same way a person’s sunsum fights the malevolent forces that seek to destroy the individual. As a consequence, the question of the work and nature of the Holy Spirit arises as a crucial theological concern for Akan Christians.

---

17 Stone or rock is called in Akan languages Ebosum or Ebosom. The word is homonymous to Ebosum, leading to a loose description of Akan religion as the worship of stones or rocks. My research seeks to clarify the misconception.
18 Captain Rattray dedicated a whole chapter to expose some of these erroneous assumptions (Rattray 1923: 86-91).
19 Akan traditional religion continues to decline since the past two decades. About 8.5% of the general Ghanaian population adhered to the Akan traditional religion in the 2000 national population census report. The number decreased in the 2010 population census from 8.5% to 5.2%.
20 More details are given in chapter three of this dissertation.
21 In 2008, a video report appeared on the internet concerning a renowned traditional priest who stormed a church at Kato, near Berekum in the Brong Ahafo region, to reclaim a fetish (amulet), supposedly given to the pastor to establish a church. When the pastor failed to honor the periodic conditions, the traditional priest, popularly known as Nana Kwaku Bonsam, stormed the church on Wednesday April 2, 2008 to collect the fetish. The pastor, known as Collins Agyei Yeboah did not resist as he handed the fetish to the priest. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1_IFCutzLo. Last visited on Dec. 17, 2019.
22 These are commonly expressed in many African movies.
1.4.7. Biblical Authority

Many Christian faiths in Ghana regard in high esteem the Bible as the foundation of Christian faith and practice. African Christian theology is practiced by Christians for the church and is mostly based on the Bible. In other words, it “is Christian theology and differs substantively from traditional theology in Africa” (Muzorewa 1985: 78). While African Christian theology seeks to articulate, in particular, the connection between traditional religion and scripture, the Bible remains the supreme source of any Christian theology (Muzorewa 1985: 92). Hence, it will not be a fair treatment for anyone to take an entrenched position on contextual Christian pneumatology that relegates the scriptural conception of the meaning of the Spirit to the background. The role of culture, in this instance, is to give the gospel a communicative function that will make the message of Christ meaningful to the people in reception.

Given all the aforementioned reasons, it is part of my proposal to contribute a pneumatological construction with regards to the nature of the Holy Spirit from a Biblical standpoint – both Old and New Testaments pneumatology – and how that formulation may find expression in the Akan religious languages and experience. Through the inculturation methodology, i.e. the means to secure an authentic Christian self-definition, my research proposes the nearest Akan religious term that will better express the notion of the Spirit according to the Hebrew and Greek terms in the Bible, because the concept of God in the Bible and the Akan religion are inextricably linked, which makes biblical pneumatology complementary to contextual Akan pneumatology.

1.5. Honhom Kronkron (Holy Spirit): A Pneumatological Proposal

*Kronkron* means “holy” in the Akan Twi language. *Hohnhom Kronkron* then means Holy Spirit. What my research is advancing is a pneumatological construction based on the Akan religious notion of *honhom*. The general conception of *honhom* among the Akan refers to all non-perceivable realities and spiritual entities called *ahonhom* (pl.). Traditional Akan thinkers use the term *honhom* to speak of breath, mild wind, spirit and all other entities whose dwellings are in the spiritual realms. Notable Akan scholars who have contributed to discourses on the *honhom* concept include the Akan theological philosopher Joseph Boakye Danquah (1895-1965) and Kwame Gyekye.

Danquah was a Ghanaian statesman and avid scholar trained in both philosophy and law. He is better known as a political activist rather than as a philosopher or barrister. Danquah remains one
of the expositors of the Akan conceptual scheme, and one whose major contribution to Akan studies in his books, *Gold Coast: Akan laws and customs and the Akim Abuakwa constitution* (1928) and *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944), attempts to investigate some of the conceptual discrepancies existing in the Akan conceptual narratives and those created by early European writers studying the Akan religion. This he did but at the risk of his own presuppositions and non-indigenous conceptualization that was partly attributed to his Christian background.

Danquah and Gyekye converge on several fundamental concepts such as morality, monotheism, personhood, etc. Nevertheless, their views on Akan spirituality diverge in so many ways, especially on the concept of *sunsum* and *honhom*. Gyekye’s conception of *honhom* has a monomorphic character, whiles Danquah’s understanding is polymorphic. Gyekye thinks *honhom* is only breath and not identical with Spirit. On the other hand, Danquah’s definition sees *honhom* as an expression of an idea of breath, wind, or Spirit as understood by the multivalent Hebrew ḥôr, and the Greek πνεῦμα (Danquah 1968). Gyekye criticizes the pneumatic origin of *honhom* as well as Christian influences over the Akan religion (Gyekye 1987: 88). His critique seems to me like an opinion rather than a substantive fact. This critique is historically disputed in my research based on the rationale that early Akan philologists and ethnographers saw *honhom* as the indigenous translation for a spirit or ghost (Christaller 1881; Rattray 1916). Again, and importantly, if *sunsum* captured an idea of a spirit, why should Christians substitute it for *honhom*? If suspicion abounds for *sunsum* as a spirit, then a critical investigation will be necessary.

Besides philologists, latter Akan Bible translators have used *honhom* to translate the term “spirit” from the original languages of the Bible. Akan literature began in the nineteenth century as part of the missionary agenda by Europeans to reach out to indigenous Akan people. The first literary work on the Akan language began from 1845 through the establishment of the Basel Mission in then Gold Coast. Johann Gottlieb Christaller, the German missionary, translated the New Testament (NT) books into Akan language from 1857 until 1871; these were published by the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS). By 1881, Christaller had completed a dictionary of

---

23 Johann Gottlieb Christaller (1827-1895) was among the missionaries to Ghana who suffered illness and loss of a wife (Christiane Emilie Ziegler, 37 years), yet, he never gave up on missionary activity. He was a German missionary, philologist and translator, sent to Ghana (then Gold Coast) by the Basel Mission of Switzerland in 1853. It is on the records that Ghana became the first and most successful missionary field in Africa by the Basel Mission after their first operation in the Middle East, specifically in Iran, had failed. Christaller became quite instrumental, especially in his determined use of the local language as the means of missionary work. He died on 6th December 1895 in Stuttgart, Germany. It is reported that his last words were, “My work is coming to an end and my Sabbath is coming. The marked
Asante-Fante with a grammatical introduction, appendices on the geography of the Gold Coast, and other subjects (Christaller 1881). The geographical location of the Basel mission in Akropong, the capital of the Akwapim North District in the Eastern Region of Ghana, influenced the early literature to be written in Akwapim, and partly from the Asante and Fante languages. The earliest publication of the Twi Bible in 1871 used *sunsum* rather than *honhom* as the corresponding term for the “spirit” in the Bible. Today, the two terms are used interchangeably to refer to a spirit, but further comparative analysis will reveal otherwise.

Given the above arguments and analyses, there are several questions that should be addressed such as the difference between *sunsum* and *honhom* and whether there is any relationship between the two. In this study, it is argued that *sunsum* is not outrightly “spirit” in the various meanings it has received in the studies of anthropology, philosophy, and theology; therefore, the Holy Spirit should best be translated as *Honhom Kronkron* other than *Sunsum Kronkron*. The research will argue that in the Akan traditional mindset, what is “spirit” is always expressed as *sunsum* because of the intrinsic power that the object possesses, and not because *sunsum* is an entity as in a spiritual being. This will be a response to the quasi-physicalist who rejects the English translation of *sunsum* as spirit.

Again, pneumatology stems from the Greek understanding of πνεῦμα, meaning “breath,” “wind” or “spirit” and logos which means “word” or “matter.” Pneumatology therefore becomes the systematic study of the Holy Spirit, spirits or spiritual forces. Christian pneumatology focuses on the nature of the Holy Spirit and its activities in the world. Consequently, it is theologically defensible to interpret the activities of πνεῦμα as corresponding to the Akan *honhom* better than the *sunsum*. This does not in any way suggest that Hebrew or Greek pneumatological terms should necessarily have similar expressions among the Akan people. The point is rather that the term *honhom* already exists and its indigenous activities directly reflect those of the classical languages. *Honhom* is a multiform and dynamic reality underlining Akan’s entire metaphysical worldview of spiritual entities and forces. Additionally, *honhom* conveys the idea of a spirit and therefore should be the basis for the formulation of contextual Akan pneumatology.

hands and legs [of Christ] have done all of that for me.” As far as the history of Christianity in Ghana is concerned, Christaller remains one of the most influential missionaries, not only in the spread of the Gospel, but his contribution to Akan literature and scholarship. Read more about Christaller on Chapter Ten.
Finally, in order to sustain *honhom* as the expression for Akan pneumatology, a constructive historiographical methodology, involving a philosophical and theological enquiry is adopted to investigate the nature of *sunsum* which now forms part of the contemporary argument of the pneumatic and quasi-physical character in Akan philosophical studies. My research will investigate both early and contemporary scholarship and will gather data from past and contemporary Akan thinkers to provide a convincing clarification of the meaning and nature of *sunsum* for both present and future academic works. The research will offer a theological justification for the development of a new perspective of Akan contextual pneumatology based on *honhom* and more broadly for academic learning. The proposal should not only be seen as an attempt to make biblical pneumatology meaningful to Akan Christians, but also as a contribution to the overall understanding of pneumatology in African pneumatological studies.

**1.6. Structure of Study**

The study is divided into four main parts. The first part is the general introduction, which defines the statement of problem of the research work. It also introduces the field of study, the scope of the research, and the research methodology. In addition, the general introduction highlights current trends and approaches in African theology, namely, the emergence of African theology and its liberation and inculturation methodologies. This has been done to establish the background to the current theological construction of a contextual Akan pneumatology, which underlies the study and reflects the inculturation methodologies of contextual studies. The general introduction will further offer an introduction to Akan culture and worldviews by introducing and defining key Akan concepts and terminologies in the study.

The second part explores the genesis of Akan scholarship and anthropology beginning with the German missionary Johann Gottlieb Christaller and the Scottish anthropologist Rattray. Christaller is credited as the architect of Akan Twi scholarship, while Rattray’s name is associated with pioneering the study of Akan anthropology. Rattray’s exceptional ethnographical approach on cultural particularities distinguished him from most of the early Western anthropologists who were prejudiced against Africa’s culture and religion. Rattray’s anthropology recast the religious rudiments of the Akan to provide a phenomenal literature for subsequent scholars. This part of the research further introduces the historiography of the Akan *sunsum* beginning with Rattray and its influence in subsequent scholarship.
The third part of the research focuses on contemporary critics and apologetics of the meaning of *sunsum*. Contemporary Akan thinkers, unlike their ethnographic predecessors, have taken a critical approach towards understanding the nature and meaning of *sunsum*. Contemporary scholars first of all face the problem of linguistic expressions, thus, how *sunsum* should be translated into the English language. Second, there is the problem of how to define the nature of *sunsum*. The study tackles these problems from a critical assessment of the emergence of the philosophy of quasi-physicalism, and the various apologetics in defense of the pneumatic character of *sunsum*. My research will illustrate why the argument in favor of the pneumatic character of the *sunsum* fails in comparison to the philosophy of quasi-physicalism, and why quasi-physicalism is inadequate to express Akan spiritual worldviews. The research proceeds to look at some terms that are commonly confused with *sunsum*.

The fourth part focuses on theological formulations of contextual pneumatology that interact with *sunsum* and *honhom*. The research appraises the strength and weakness of *sunsum* pneumatology by looking at its various dimensions of methodology and conception of *sunsum*. After summing up the various problems associated with the *sunsum* pneumatology, the research proposes a new Akan theological construction based on a *Honhom Kronkron* pneumatology.

The general conclusion will provide a synthesis of the research. It will also bring forward key aspects of the entire research to stress the relevance and importance of the research to Akan Christianity, academic learning, and exploration. To ensure a wider scope of contextual Akan pneumatology, this research will offer some new approaches to this field of study.

1.7. Conclusion

Kwame Bediako (1945-2008), the well-known Ghanaian Presbyterian theologian and former rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture, once said, “Wo ntumi ne nipa nkasa a, wo ntumi nka Nyame asem nkyere no,” meaning “If you cannot talk to people, you cannot talk to them about the word of God.” According to Bediako, theology needs human contact, and therefore, is not free from human cultures. Theological interaction with culture should be a methodological tool in Christian missiology. The reception of Christianity among the Akan

---

calls for the processing of its doctrines within the *Sitz im Leben* of the Akan culture. This interaction will ensure a better understanding of the Christian message in the immediate social context. On top of this, it will create room for cultural appreciation and appraisal. For these reasons, the present research intends to help Akan people find a proper expression of the Holy Spirit in the indigenous languages. How do we speak of spirits, the spiritual, and the Holy Spirit among the Akan people of West Africa? This is the question that occupies my research in contextual Akan pneumatology. I use the term Akan pneumatology to mean the concept of spirits and the spiritual in Akan cosmology. My research will entail a critical investigation into the spiritual worldview of the Akan people to understand the notion of the “spirit” and how that understanding affects a contextual application of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for Akan people.
Chapter 2
Research Methodology

2.1. Introduction

This dissertation is a constructive philosophical and theological critique of the Akan concept of *sunsum*, and a proposal for a new perspective for articulating Akan Christian pneumatology based on *honhom* (wind, breath, spirit, soul). In this context, philosophy is understood as the understanding of the rationality and concepts behind the beliefs, thought processes, and behavioral patterns of the Akan. Since religion shapes certain ideas, values and morals upon which people express their individuality and how they understand and relate to other members of their community, philosophy, as a branch of the discipline, gives these aspects a sense of situational meaning and expression. Theology, in this sense, involves a systematic understanding of the totality of the religious system as in belief in God, spirits, rituals and practices, and their implications on the moral life of the people in practice. *Sunsum* and *honhom* are two Akan terms for the “spirit,” and are often expressed in religious and cultural orientations. My research, first of all, takes the task of dealing with the question of the meaning of religion and its relationship with culture within the scope of Akan traditional religions as a necessary undertaking towards the construction of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. The second part will look at the research methodology, which is, to a large extent, a historiographical approach.

2.2. Introduction to the Meaning of Religion

Religion is a complex system of beliefs and practices that can have differing definitions from one cultural setting to another. Nevertheless, common to every religious system is the possession of certain transcendental experiences that impact meaningful beliefs and practices from one generation to the other. Religion may cover a set of illuminations that unify the people in practice in the community to achieve a common purpose. For these reasons, religion needs attention because it shapes certain ideas and behavioral patterns in an individual’s worldview.

Religion remains one of the oldest practices in human civilization. Bolaji Idowu (1913-1993), one of Africa’s influential ethnographers and theologians in the indigenization of Christianity, is convinced that religion has always been with mankind and it affects our innermost beings as well as events in life; minor or major (Idowu 1973). Religion has a universal interest that is
“inevitable as a sphere of human life and activity.” It is rooted deep in the nature of every person, thus, “an inherent urge in man which makes religion a matter of ultimate concern. It makes also for the common ‘interest’ in religion – whether the interest is in embracing it or in fighting a defensive battle against it” (Idowu 1973: 3).\(^1\) This makes religion transcending, affecting all (consciously or unconsciously), and possessing in it a driving force of influence in a person’s worldview. Such characterization of religion raises the question of whether religion is an ontological phenomenon. The answer lies in the next discussion on the definition of religion and its relationship with culture.

2.2.1. The Relationship Between Religion and Culture

Religion and culture often overlap each other, and many people often confuse one with the other. Generally, culture involves the behavior of a group of people who share some commonality and communality. The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition defines culture as “the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization.”\(^2\) This ideology is given a broader interpretation by Mbiti. As a staunch African scholar and one who has had a direct experience of African sociology, Mbiti perceives culture in the following words:\(^3\)

> The word culture covers many things, such as the way people live, behave and act, and their physical as well as their intellectual achievements. Culture shows itself in art and literature, dance, music and drama, in the styles of building houses and of people’s clothing, in social organizations and political systems, in religion, ethics, morals and philosophy, in the customs and institutions of the people, in their values and laws, and in their economic life.\(^4\)

Mbiti’s definition infers culture as having expression within a social movement and covering an integral whole of something that is generally acceptable within a specific social group. Based on these definitions, one’s cultural affiliation becomes a social heritage rather than a biological makeup.

It has also been discussed that religion has inherent dynamic force that influences a person’s way of life; that means the relationship between culture and religion is conditioned by each

---

\(^1\) For example, a person who adheres to atheism is forced to talk about religion in one way or the other to establish a belief.


\(^3\) Professor Mbiti has shown a great appreciation for African cultural studies. He recounts how his intellectual quest for academic excellence was sparked by the story of Ghana’s proud son and pioneer African educationist Dr. Kwegyir Aggrey (1875-1927). For more details check Augustine C. Musopole, Being Human in Africa: Toward an African Christian Anthropology (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 18.

other. Religion has a unifying effect on culture. Christopher Dawson (1889-1970), a historian of religion and culture, in his book *Religion and Culture* maintains the central unifying effect of religion in culture as the guardian of tradition, preserver of moral law, and educator and teacher of wisdom (Dawson 2013: 37). He further maintains that it is religion that holds society in its fixed cultural patterns (Dawson 2013: 37). Religion seeks to give meaning to culture and expresses the depths of cultural lifestyle. In some parts of the world, cultural elements such as naming ceremonies, marriage, kingship, puberty rites, funerals, and farming have religious significance and are maintained by formidable religious sanctions (Dawson 2013: 37).

Culture and religion have a mutual interaction but are not same. The relation between religion and culture is always a two-sided one, says Dawson: “The way of life influences the approach to religion, and the religious attitude influences the way of life” (Dawson 2013: 43). Even in secular societies where the reception of religion may suffer repugnancy, they continue to embrace certain vital rudiments of religion. Various wedding ceremonies, swearing in of state officials and certain customary laws are characteristics of religious illuminations. Religion is a vital force that brings together all that are of vital importance in the life of people, surrounded by religious sanctions, into close relation with religion so that every economic and social way of life has its corresponding form of religion (Dawson 2013: 43).

Whereas one may assume that religion and culture have a model of mutual relationship, we cannot assume a general conception that every culture has a religion. With reference to the Akan, religion is central, all-pervasive and involves a lot of communal ties (Pobee 1979: 44). In fact, it is so closely tied up with the totality of their existence and worldview that it becomes a matter of impossibility to separate religion from communal activities. Marriage, farming, puberty rites, music and arts, naming ceremonies, kingship, funerals, etc., are all absorptive of religion. So, the question about religion among the Akan, like in most world societies, is an ontological phenomenon that pertains to the question of being.5

### 2.3. African Traditional Religions (ATR)

African traditional religions encompass several territorial traditional religions. The term African traditional religions, as used in this research, refers to the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of Africans that distinctively define the spiritual and moral complexities of African people that are handed down from generation to generation. The question as to whether

5 See Mbiti 1989.
there is truly an African traditional religion has been researched and scholars in this field of study have unanimously embraced the large measure of homogenous features in the various traditional religious practices on the continent. Such features include the general belief in the supernatural, ideas about man, society, and nature (Idowu 1973; Asare Opoku 1978; Mbiti 1991). The conviction that the universe is arrayed by varying degrees of spiritual entities and forces that impinge on the natural order of things, including the affairs of humanity, is a general fundamental belief in most African traditional religions (Green 1983). A human being, by definition, is made up of both body and spirit. Community also involves the spirits of the departed family members as ingrained in the invocation of ancestral spirits through the pouring of libation and other sacrifices made to the dead (Asare Opoku 1978: 9).

Another general characteristic of African traditional religions is the explanation of human misfortune and suffering as caused by retributive spirits of some moral offenses or malevolence of spiritual entities. Misfortunes like droughts and famine may be considered as punishment from the gods for an act of sacrilege. In such a situation, after inquiries are satisfied, pacification and sacrificial ceremonies are performed to appease the gods. Human predicaments such as poverty, illness, death, hardships, etc. could be attributed to malicious acts of wicked spiritual entities or by malevolent beings such as witches and sorcerers that use spiritual powers (Green 1983). Though this is not always the case, it is the most popular belief.

African traditional religion is a heritage, with its own historical patterns from the past. Its structure is generally founded on five main pillars according to Mbiti:

1. **The belief system**: This is the most essential part of the religion. Beliefs shape the worldview of adherents. It involves belief in God, spirits and forces, human life, life after death, reincarnation, etc.

2. **Ceremonies and festivals**: These essential group activities express the belief system in practical terms. They sometimes involve recreational activities where people celebrate through singing and dancing. On other occasions, they are moments of mutual sorrow. Examples of ceremonies include funerals, naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, etc.

3. **Religious objects and places**: Religious objects include amulets, charms, talismans, etc. that are meant to serve as instruments of spiritual power. Religious places are sacred places reserved for religious meetings and appointments. They may include natural shrines like mountains, rivers, forests, or man-made shrines.
4. *Values and morals*: These are social ideals that safeguard the harmony of the society. They maintain interpersonal relationships with members in the community and also involve people’s worldview of their environmental surroundings. African folklore, proverbs, and taboos are the most common depositories of values and morals.

5. *Religious functionaries or leaders*: These are experts who have excellent knowledge about religious systems. By their knowledge, they preserve religious traditions and pass it on to their successors. They also preside over ceremonies and rituals. Functionaries “hold offices as priests, rain-makers, ritual elders, diviners, medicine men, and even as kings and rulers” (Mbiti1991: 12).

African traditional religions are practiced by millions today on the continent, making it a contemporary reality (Asare Opoku 1978: 9). Contrary to what early Western anthropologists considered as primitive and savage religion, African traditional religion has become the resource for unearthing Africa’s pre-Christian spiritual heritage (Idowu 1973: 109-112). African traditional religion is studied in upper primary and tertiary institutions alongside the study of many major world religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The length of its appreciation, generated by keen interests in contextual theological studies, philosophy, and the social sciences, even in the world outside the African continent, attests to why it needs constant scholarly engagement.

If someone should ask whether African traditional religions are so significant at all to Africa’s theological studies, the obvious answer is seen in the heightened interest of scholars in pre-Christian religious traditions that is taken seriously as worthy for shaping indigenous Christian lifestyle and learning. This heightened interest in African indigenous religious traditions, once “deemed unworthy of serious theological consideration in missionary times, now [occupies] a central place on the African theological agenda” (Bediako 1991: 2). As a methodological praxis in Africa’s theological studies, African traditional religions seek to find a holistic interaction with Christian doctrines.

2.3.1. *Traditional Akan Religion (TAR)*

Traditional Akan religion is a sub-religion of African traditional religions. It possesses such complex spiritual heritage that defines behavioral patterns and spiritual values for the Akan. The Akan religious experience defines how Akan people express themselves in their belief systems and practices. The concept of *sunsum* is an aspect of the belief system among the Akan that forms the central focus of this present research work.
One historical phenomenon that will be addressed in this research is the convergence of Christianity and the traditional Akan religion. Most Akan profess Christianity today, and many scholars have failed to see the essential distinction between the traditional Akan religion and Christianity; the former is typically cultural while the latter is adequately faith based – at least within the African context. Christianity arrived in Ghana in the 15th century, when it was ushered in by the Catholic Church as part of the global movement of Christianity and colonialism. Missionary work and colonialism were inseparable in the sense that Christianization of Africa was part of the colonial agenda. The initial Papal bull, “Dum Diversas,” issued by Pope Nicholas V on 18 June 1452 to King Alfonso V of Portugal, gave the king the authority to enslave and evangelize the third world. This inception gave way to the theology of salus animarum, or a theology of the conversion of those without faith (Gibellini 1987: 63-64). From 1820, rigorous missionary activity emerged among the Akan people by the advent of the Protestant missionaries. The Basel Mission Society was established in 1828 at Akropong-Akwapim from whence the traditional Akan religion began to gradually decline over time as the dominant religion. The emergence of Christianity in Ghana, therefore, was a historical conquest. In Ghana today, about 5.2 percent of the general population adhere to African traditional religions. This translates into more than one million adherents of the traditional religion among the Akan. Although the figures are quite insignificant, traditional religion continues to serve as the bedrock of many contextual Christian expressions in various theories and practices, and my present study of sunsum and honhom reaffirms this assertion.

2.4. Historiographical Approach

Early Europeans used ethnographic research methods to enhance a better understanding of sunsum. Ethnographic field observation helps scholars to capture or gather observable information from a contextual point of view. In recent scholarship, the approach has shifted to subjective analysis. Instead of objective accounts of field study, scholars use analytical studies to serve as the basis for criticizing and reinterpreting traditional concepts. In recent studies, a broad spectrum of academic disciplines in anthropology, philosophy, history, and political science as well as students of religion have all closely engaged in approaching the sunsum concept using this analytical methodology. The subjective analysis has given weight to a despairingly linguistic conundrum that is progressively occupying the central debate of the

---

6 Christianity is also “typically cultural;” it is not simply “faith based.” With Christianity, the colonizers brought their culture and they often confused their faith with their culture.
contemporary argument of the pneumatic character of sunsum and the philosophy of quasi-
physicalism in recent scholarship. The results have led to alternative ways of perceiving the
nature and meaning of sunsum.

My research employs, to a large extent, a historiographical approach in tracing the various
ideas that have shaped the nature and meaning of sunsum in Akan studies. Collingwood noted
that “the right way of investigating mind is by the methods of history” (Collingwood 1946: 209). To investigate the nature and definition of sunsum from a historiographical approach
brings to view the importance of history to intellectual analysis. Conceptualization of the term
historiography calls for an understanding of the concept of history.

The term history has a Greek root meaning exploration, research, or inquiry of information.
Since ancient times, history has had various contextual and conceptual definitions by different
historians. Greek historians like Herodotus, Polybius and Thucydides all gave accounts of past
events as worthy of remembrance. The definition of history goes beyond events of the past.
Gustaaô Renier defines history as ‘the story of the experiences of men living in societies”
(Renier 1950: 33). English historian Edward Carr defines history as “a continuous process of
interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and
the past” (Carr 1990: 55). The “process of interaction” between the historian and his
environment is dynamic due to the continuous changing of society and its impact on the views
of the historian. The impact of social dynamics on ideas is a reality that makes history so
important to understanding the evolution of concepts.

From the above definitions, it suffices to note that there is no one clear definition of history.
However, the underlying concept is about the actions of people in society in the context of time
and place. The vastness in the nature of history has informed the development of the
historiographical approach, which is the methodological study of history. Merriam-Webster
dictionary defines historiography as “the writing of history based on the critical examination
of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of
particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods.”8 This definition applies
to the study of religions and religious ideas over time. Within the study of Akan pneumatology,
the different times and specific contexts have all contributed to how scholars perceived the
nature and meaning of sunsum. Hence, a historiographical approach will help to gauge the

value of a systematic evolution of how scholars have understood *sunsum* and the various circumstances that formed their understanding.

There are historiographical tools that have aided in the advancement of the study of history including, but not limited to cultural history, history of ideas, and intellectual history.

### 2.4.1. Intellectual History and the History of Ideas

There is no single, globalized definition of intellectual history, cultural history, and the history of ideas (Bavaj 2010; Gordon 2013). This complexity is informed by the multidisciplinary nature of each approach. However, the clear concept of the above approaches is understood in the comparison and contrast of the approaches. Intellectual history constitutes the study of intellectual patterns, ideas, and intellectuals over a specific period (Gordon 2013). The above definition recognizes the nexus between intellectual history and the history of ideas. Even though the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, they differ in the concept of definition. The history of ideas looks at how large-scale historical concepts develop and transform over time (Skinner 2013). As such, historians of ideas pursue one major idea by organizing the historical narrative in the contexts of the time. A classic example of the history of ideas is portrayed by Arthur Lovejoy’s book, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (2009). One merit of the history of ideas is that it permits an individual to acknowledge the commonalities that exist in thoughts despite the contextual differences (Gordon 2013). On the other hand, the history of ideas fosters a Platonist attitude concerning thoughts. The insistence that idea is similar regardless of the contextual variations portrays a Platonist attitude. The history of ideas is quite nuanced as it is marred with internal inconsistencies and tensions (Gordon 2013).

On its part, intellectual history contrasts the history of ideas in various ways: it repels the Platonist narrative. It principally recognizes the existence of the physical world in defining ideas (Bavaj 2010). Intellectual history regards the contextual conditioning of historical ideas. Intellectual historians assert that ideas are understood within some larger contexts, such as the context of intellectual biography, linguistic or cultural dispositions, institutional change, or social struggle (Skinner 2013). Nonetheless, some intellectual historians follow in the path of the history of ideas in the sense that they exclusively adopt the “internalist” approach, and thus advance thoughts in relation to other thoughts, consequently disregarding the external world (Bavaj 2010). The advancement of thoughts in relation to previous thoughts often helps in the appreciation of the connection that may exist between two or more different realms of
intellectual study, which could have been previously ignored (Gordon 2013). This is illustrated by the relationship between political and metaphysical concepts of causality, or scientific and theological ways of elucidation. Any attempt by historians to align themselves to either pure historians of ideas or intellectual historians has become almost impossible. The dominant school of thoughts mirrors the exploration of Platonism. The major focus is on the conceptual contexts, while “contextualism” has been merely given lip-service (Gordon 2013). The take-home message in this discussion is that the study of intellectual history involves multidisciplinary approaches and that the history of ideas and intellectual history cannot be effectively studied in isolation of each other. The methodological approaches involved do not only overlap but are also beneficial for understanding the connection that exists between them.

2.4.2. Intellectual History and Cultural History

There has been a noticeable shift from the study of political and social history to the study of cultural history. It has been observed that there is a very thin line between cultural history and intellectual history (Burke 2008). Cultural history constitutes the study of the vast culture of human society. These include, but are not limited to fine arts, religious beliefs and values, human sexuality, national symbols, and commemorations, or rituals (Gordon 2013). One of the explanations about the origin of cultural history is drawn from the French “Annales” school in the early twentieth century. Exponents of the school sought an understanding of the long-duration patterns of European life (Gordon 2013). They compared the experience of the larger populace alongside the conventional historiographical concern about the schemes of the political elites. Cultural history seemed to have gone into oblivion, but in the 1970s and 1980s it re-emerged (Burke 2008). The central focus of the inquiry was the socio-economic “structuralism” that plagued the society, especially in Europe and North America. The second wave of cultural history was championed by the likes of Carl Schorske, Robert Darnton, Natalie Zemon Davis, and Lynn Hunt (Gordon 2013).

The use of a historiographical approach – cultural history, history of ideas, and intellectual history – is suitable for this research to investigate, analyze, and offer critique of the historical definition of sunsum according to scholars of Akan religion. The approach draws from the early years of colonial ethnography and ethnology, through postcolonial theoretical, analytical, and theological interpretivism of the sunsum concept. In this light, the research will offer a critical examination of both the limitations and potentialities of the methods of the scholars and how relevant these methods are to both current and future scholarship in the study of sunsum.
Scholarly contributions include authoritative sources such as books, articles, monographs, and materials touching on the subject. With these materials, a comparative textual analysis of the pneumatic and quasi-physical schools of thought will be studied to demonstrate that sunsum is not always a “spirit” even though it has over the years enjoyed such pneumatic character. Nevertheless, my conclusions do not dismiss sunsum from pneumatological discourses as my research recognizes sunsum as an emanating force or one that is associated with spiritual beings.

2.5. Honhom Pneumatology: A Biblical Approach

The research proposes a new perspective to articulate a contextual Akan pneumatology or Akan Christian pneumatology that is based on the Akan concept of honhom. As already stated, current Akan contextual pneumatology is based on sunsum. Its proponent, Robert Agyarko, approached the study by looking at the ecumenical Christian traditions of Nicaea and Chalcedon about the Holy Spirit. Through this methodology, Agyarko contests a fervent agreement to the pneumatic character of sunsum as both a dynamic force and an entity (hypostasis). I am not convinced about this conclusion and my research strongly argues that the nature of sunsum is only a dynamic force but not really hypostatic (entititative), and that rather than using sunsum as the basis for an Akan pneumatology, it will be more suitable to use honhom, an Akan term that is closely related to the ecumenical pneumatology of the fourth century. Taking honhom to be the basis of Akan spirituality does not differ widely from early translations of the Bible into the Akan Twi where the Hebrew הﱡחו and Greek πνεῦμα are translated as honhom rather than sunsum in both the Old and New Testament, respectively. For these reasons, my research will employ a biblical approach by looking at the character of the Spirit in its various commodities in the Bible. The study endeavors to investigate patterns of pneumatology in the Bible in dialogue with Akan religion in order to formulate a contextual Christian pneumatology of the Holy Spirit. This will involve, first, a critical observation of the nature of the Spirit in the Bible, and second, a search for proper linguistic expressions of the Holy Spirit among Akan Christians.

2.6. Delimitation and Limitation of the Research

The context of this research is a focus on the Akan ethnic group. However, as an Akan myself, and of the Asante cultural group, I am not altogether safe in talking about the Akan people without my own ethnic biases. In as much as this study is not limited to the Asantes, I deem such presuppositions inevitable but fruitful since I am an Asante and possess a firsthand
experience of the Akan culture. The Asante ethnic group constitutes the majority among the Akan and has impressive ethnographic literature. This came about as a result of the introduction of the study of anthropology in the Asante region in the early twentieth century. My biases in this sense should not be taken as cultural arrogance but a limitation of how much literature the researcher has been exposed to.

Finally, since some Akan people are in the Côte d’Ivoire, Togo, and in the diaspora, it has not been the purpose of this study to explore all these Akan territories. This study focuses only on the Akan people living in Ghana. Where necessary, references will be made to some Akan communities living outside Ghana, but these fields will not occupy a central focus in this research. Ghana, which hosts the largest and most diverse Akan roots, is the field of study as defined in this research work.

2.7. Conclusion

The research methodology has answered the question of the difference between religion and culture as a methodological problem in understanding the context of the research. The overall research methodology offers a historiographical approach to investigate and analyze the meaning and nature of *sunsum* in Akan scholarship. This will involve a constructive philosophical and theological investigation of the Akan *sunsum* and its implications for theological reflections. For my new proposal of contextual Akan pneumatology, I have chosen to approach the task from a biblical perspective. All these methodologies are meant to point out the direction of my research and the conclusions that I will draw as a result.
Chapter 3

Introduction to African Theology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter critically examines the theological systematization of contextual Christian theology in postcolonial Africa, with particular emphasis on liberation and inculturation methodologies – the two main approaches in contemporary African theology. African theology is a process of contextual theologization in Africa. Context here refers to the immediate geographical location where the gospel finds expression. Therefore, contextualization is a process of giving significance to a theological discussion in a given region. The term contextual theology is used by scholars to speak of Christian missions and practices within a specific sociological context with the purpose of achieving a meaningful communication and authentic Christian identity. This task is often exhaustive and has several systematic dimensions. It is because of the universal nature of the Gospel (John 3:16; Matt. 28:18-19), and Jesus Christ as “the Savior of all people” (1 Tim. 4:10), that contextualization becomes a praxis theology to address the people in reception of the good news of Jesus Christ through their own cultural ideas.1 Bediako believes Christianity is always indigenous and culture-bound (1992: 305). This assertion, rendered by Bediako, makes culture an important fabric in theological discourse; however, the gospel of Jesus, rather than culture, is the goal. The gospel has a unique mode of expression that pronounces its own authoritative isms over cultural ideas. Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), the British theologian and missiologist, has noted that “contextualization accords the gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture and speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol, the word which is both No and Yes, both judgment and grace” (Newbigin 1989: 152). Theology, therefore, finds proper expression of the gospel within a given cultural context.

---

1 The term culture in relation to theology does not suggest that culture is the end, but a means to an end. The gospel theologizes the *Sitz im Leben* of the cultural context to speak of Bible truths. The Christological affirmation of the Greek “logos” in John 1:1-3, 14 is an example of contextualization. The author of the Gospel of John employs the multivalent logos concept of the Greeks to affirm Christ’s preexistence and preeminence as the true cosmocreator and pantokrator from God. Again, in Paul's discourse on the “Agnostos Theos” (Unknown God) in Acts 17:16-34, this *unknown God* finally becomes the same Almighty YHWH. The episode presents Paul as a contextual missionary who identifies his acquaintance with the Greek mind and culture while he affirmed the truth of the Gospel.
African theology is a distinctive expression of the Bible and theological interpretation whose core normative stems from African traditional religions and that which sometimes construe a negative reaction against Eurocentric theological hermeneutics. Several African theologians have a feeling that the era of foreign invasion by Western imperialism and missionary activities ostensibly demeaned African traditional religions (Bujo 1992; Opoku 1968; Idowu 1973). It should, therefore, not to be taken lightly to assume quickly that African theology is only a mission-oriented strategy. No! African theology has inherent sociological and anthropological cues relating to the question of identity and social construct. The cultural trajectories in African theology indicate the relevance of African realities, especially traditional religions, in academic and theological discussions.

### 3.2. The Impact of Christianity in Africa

This section explores the historical circumstances that gave rise to an African theology. What ignited African Christians to begin talking of an African theology? There are numerous factors that necessitated an African theology. The greatest to start with is the impact of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa during the second half of the second millennium.

Africa used to be a hub of Christianity in the early centuries. Christianity grew rapidly in Northern parts of Africa in the first five centuries. Prominent theologians who influenced Christianity in Africa throughout these periods included Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Tertullian (160-220), Origen (185-254), and Augustine of Hippo (354-430). It was not until the rapid invasion of Islamic colonialism in the seventh century in North Africa that the growth of Christianity began to gradually decline in the regions, leaving African traditional religions and Islam to become the dominant religions in the sub-Saharan regions of Africa. Nonetheless, Christianity continued to exist in the Ethiopian empire of East Africa. In Christianity in Africa somehow waned until its reawakening in the fifteenth century by European merchants and missionaries. Early settlers were merchants from Portugal, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Italy (Sanneh 1991: 159). By 1652, the Dutch had established the Dutch Reform Church in the southern regions of Africa. The inception of colonialism by

---

3 Rosino Gibellini believes the decline was not as a result of Islamic invasion in North Africa. He asserts that the Islamic invasion only prevented Christianity from reaching the rest of the continent. Gibellini deduces two main causes for the decline of Christianity in North Africa: first is an allusion he makes to internal heresies that plagued the North African churches as a result of Donatism and Arianism, and the second allusion he makes was to the exclusive use of Latin language unlike the Eastern churches who had translations in several languages (Gibellini 1994).
Europeans in the nineteenth century cemented the expansion of Christianity and westernization.

Since the nineteenth century, the spread of Christian missions and learning in Africa have been unprecedented. Most of these expansions have been in the sub-Saharan regions of the continent. As at 2010, the Pew Research Center estimated that Christianity was the dominant religious group in sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 62.9% of believers in the region compared to other major religious factions. Some of the factors that necessitated this growth included: (1) the institutionalization of Christian thoughts and learning in mission schools, health centers, and humanitarian agencies by European missionaries, (2) the translation of liturgical books like the Bible and songs into indigenous languages, (3) the training of indigenous Bible workers to collaborate with Western missionaries in teaching and missionary activities, (4) the Africanization plan to make Africans take leadership responsibilities in administrative management of African churches in the twentieth century, (5) the increase in independent churches and denominations such as Pentecostalism and Charismatic movements, (6) the encounter of Christianity and the African traditional religions in the mid-twentieth century, and (7) kinship and communality. Africa’s strong ties of kinship have contributed largely to the spread of the Christian faith, as Christianity has become a conventional family value in many African homes. Many African households claim Christianity as ancestral tradition just like the African traditional religion. Observably, Christianity has been the most successful and impactful religion in sub-Saharan Africa in the latter part of the second millennium.

4 The Northern regions of Africa record a slower pace in Christianity due to Islamic dominance and strict rules against the practice of Christianity. Islam and Christianity are competitive religious groups in Africa and fears of tension sometimes threaten peaceful co-habitation and relation in some parts of sub-Saharan African states such as Nigeria, Liberia, Chad, Tanzania, and other Islamic dominated areas in Eastern Africa. Islamization ideologies in Sudan and Gambia are current threats to the practice of Christianity in such regions.


6 Mbiti believes African traditional religions have been a major contributing factor to the growth of Christianity in Africa. He thinks God was present in Africa before Christianity and this facilitated the reception and spread of the new faith. We may contest this claim because the spread of Christianity in the early stages was unconscious to the African traditional religions since it was deemed a doomed religion (Bediako 1991). The Europeans preached about their “High God.” It was African traditional religions that shaped Africa’s pre-Christian spirituality and became the bedrock of Christian expressions in Africa. The consciousness to recast African traditional religions for theological discussion is a recent discovery in the last seven decades.

7 If we take Ghana as a case study, per the recent 2012 population census, the Ghana Statistical Board Report shows that about 71.2% out of Ghana’s general population adheres to Christianity, followed by Islam with a percentage of 17.6 %. Others profess to be traditionalist (5.2 %) or without any religion (5.3%). The Northern region of Ghana records the highest percentage of Islam (60 %) of the population in the region. The remaining nine regions adhere to Christianity. Traditional religion is popular in Upper East (27.9%), Northern Region
3.2.1 Challenges to the Growth of Christianity in Africa

Irrespective of the success of Christianity in Africa, there exists a feeling of dread of otherworldly theological disarray as well as common worries about the depths of Christianity, proliferation of faith groups claiming affiliation to Christianity, Christians’ nonparticipation in the social life, and Christians’ silence on crises such as poverty, conflicts, and terrorism on the continent. These challenges have called for a rethink of theological discussions in Africa. How should theology respond to some of these prevailing challenges and the various socio-economic and political dynamisms on the continent? Does the theological content reflect the African reality? These questions are fundamental to understanding what has come to be known as African theology.

3.3. African Theology

3.3.1. What is African Theology?

African theology is Africa’s ecumenical discussion of Christian faith and practices in Africa. There can be several ways to define African theology. In 1969, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) international symposium in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), defined African Theology as “a theology which is based on the biblical faith and speaks to the African ‘soul’ (or is relevant to Africa). It is expressed in categories of thought which arise out of the philosophy of the African people” (Engagement 1969: 114). An exhaustive discussion emerged in 1977 when a group of African theologians met in Accra (Ghana), to rethink emerging pathways in African theology. The conference, known as the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians or Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) brought together Protestant, Orthodox and Catholic theologians to reconsider the practice of the faith of Jesus Christ in Africa. This era marked a significant period of a more diversified but inventive and conservative mode of theological hermeneutic called African theology.8

---

(16.0%) and Volta (14.1). People without religion are found in Brong Ahafo (7.3%) and Western regions (6.7%). In terms of gender stratification, about 73.4% of females profess Christianity compared to 68.8% of males; in contrast 18.3% are males and 17.0% are females practice Islam. Among the non-religious, about 6.7% are males and 3.9% females. The picture of Ghana’s religious affiliation shows that there is at least one or two persons professing a religious faith in a single house.


8 The term African theology was first used in the publication Les prêtres noirs s’interrogent (Paris, 1956) by a group of African and Haitain Catholic priests (Bujo 1992: 5). Bujo also refers to Vincent Mulago, a graduate from the Urban University in Rome in 1955, as the first African theologian. Mulago’s thesis was published in 1956.
Because the resurgence of Christianity in the sixteenth century was engendered by the West, the earliest form of theology in Africa was characterized by Western hermeneutics and lacked serious contextualization in the African *Sitz im Leben* (Gibellini 1987: 61). Bediako, in his *Theology and Identity*, criticizes Western missionaries for their preconceived ideologies against Africans as primitive and uncivilized and their constructive negation of African traditional religions (Bediako 1999). This implies that the West did not understand Africans. African theology, therefore, from its earliest inception, became reactive and apologetic (van Eck 2006: 679). It became a postcolonial reactionary agenda against Western ideological dominance purported to threaten indigenous self-expression and ideological independence. African theology is eventually a process of seeking indigenous Christian self-definition from a “Euro-Christian Africa.”

There is a missiological definition of African theology which views it as Africa’s systematic contextualization of the Christian missiology among the indigenous people of Africa. This approach takes a systematic interpretation of Scripture and how Christian missiology should be applied through the lens of cultural and religious ideas to interpret Christian thoughts and learning to African Christians.

In summary, African theology is a hermeneutical approach that gives serious consideration to the African context to create an authentic African Christianity; more broadly, it seeks the liberation of Africans from the ravages of evil, which are mostly disguised in various socio-economic and political challenges such as poverty, conflicts, domestic violence, illiteracy, poor governance, etc.

3.3.2. In Search of a Positive Mode of Expression

Critics of an African theology take issue with the term “African theology” and question whether there should be one. Several attempts have been made to discourage the nomenclature. Byang Kato (1936-1975), the late evangelical scholar from Nigeria, in his *Theological Pitfalls in Africa* (1975) condemned the emerging theological approach that takes African traditional religions for a theological discussion as a betrayal of sound theology (Kato 1975: 16). Kato was critical of Mbiti’s theological sympathy with African traditional religions and blatantly

---

9 It cannot altogether be ruled out that Europeans did not do any contextualization of the gospel in Africa. As will be seen in the discussion, Bible translations into the indigenous languages were part of the missionaries’ way of internalizing the Gospel in Africa.

condemned the African theology agenda as syncretism. Although Bediako and others saw Kato as negative and unsympathetic (Bediako 1999: 387; Oduyoye 1986: 62; Parrat 1995:63), both Kato and Mbiti converge on their negative view of the various definitions given to African theology. Mbiti refuses to use the term to designate a distinctive form of theological school. To him, African theology is only a “theological reflection and expression by African Christians” (1979: 83). Mbiti did not get enough support for his description of African theology.

An attempt to create a distinction between African theology and African Christian theology has been suggested. Charles Nyameti (b. 1931), a Tanzanian Orthodox Roman Catholic theologian, does not limit African theology only within Christian parameters. Nyameti defines African theology in broader terms as “discourses on God (theo-logos) – and on all that is related to Him – in accordance with the mentality and needs of the people in the black continent” (Nyameti 1994: 63). He further creates a dichotomy in African theology as: 1) African traditional religions (non-Christian) theology; and in a narrower sense 2) African Christian theology, thus, “the understanding and expression of the Christian faith in accordance with African needs and mentality” or the “systematic and scientific presentation or elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs and mentality of the African peoples” (Nyameti 1994: 63). Other scholars who share in this include Agbeti (Agbeti 1975), Tienou (Tienou 1982), Muzorewa (Muzorewa 1985) and Chitando (Chitando 2006). These scholars label African theology as the beliefs and practices of African traditional religions, whereas African Christian theology is narrowed to mean the interpretation of the Christian faith and practices in Africa.

Although these scholars seem to solve part of the problem, the effort to seek a positive mode of terminological expression continues to fall apart. The Catholic theologian Bénézet Bujo from the Republic of Congo has suggested a more radical proposal. Bujo proposes this: “Anyone who wants to construct an African theology must take the basic elements of the African tradition and interpret them in the light of the Bible and the Fathers” (1992: 68). Even though Bujo speaks as a Catholic, such characterization has been the ongoing understanding of an African theology.

approaches have occupied African theologies. However, the growing commitment in contextual studies among African Islamic scholars proposes a reconsideration of the definition of African theology. Should African theology remain exclusive to African traditional religions and Christianity?

3.3.3. Towards an African Contextual Theology

Islam is the second largest religion in sub-Saharan Africa after Christianity. In analyzing the history of religions in Africa, Bediako accepts both Christianity and Islam as traditional in the sense that “they too flow into the overall history of African religion” (Bediako 1989: 60). Bediako further cites Mbiti for expressing similar ideas that “both Christianity and Islam are ‘traditional’ and ‘African’ in a historical sense, and it is a pity that they tend to be regarded as ‘foreign’ or ‘European’ and ‘Arab’” (Mbiti 1969: xii). Emmanuel Martey, a Presbyterian systematic theologian from Ghana, has also contended that “Islam must no longer be excluded in theological discourse, for its continued exclusion is an impoverishment of the African theological reality” (Martey 1992: 40).

The growing tendencies of a broader inclusion in the African theology discourse should alter the orthodox definition given to an African theology. My research, hereby, proposes that if African theology is to be taken seriously as a school of theological reflection – as it supposedly now is – then African theologians should consider speaking broadly of African Contextual Theologies (ACT) to define the mediation between culture and theology within the African context where theological discourses find expression. Consequently, they will be capable of “theologizing in a more genuinely African way and dealing with topics important to Africans” (Bujo 1992: 5). African Contextual Theologies will seek to find the right passage to penetrate the hearts of Africans through meaningful methodologies and dialogue. My research further proposes that Christian theologians in the field of African Contextual Theologies should start speaking of African Contextual Christian Theologies (ACCT) in a narrower sense to suggest a

12 Emphases are mine
13 There is no explicit or implicit intention by Mbiti to use the term ‘traditional’ to denote cultural traditions. The term, if correctly understood here, is used to express how the two religions have become customary practices in African societies. What is traditional in the cultural sense relates to the unique and indigenous circumstances of a people. Here, African Traditional Religion is defined as ‘traditional’ because it is “a heritage from the past; however, it is treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity” (Awolulu 1976). Christianity, Islam and all other religions are to be treated independently from cultural traditions to avoid the notion of religious radicalism. The fact that African Theology should recognize the major triad religions (African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam) as helping to shape contemporary Africa should not be confounded with traditional African beliefs.
Christian theology that arises from a particular African cultural context. It is time to reevaluate the ambiguous and controversial term “African theology,” unless it is used generically to express, as Mbiti proposes, the theological reflection and expression by African religious thinkers – not necessarily restricted to Christians. Hence, this research will now use African Contextual Theologies (ACT) and African Contextual Christian Theologies (ACCT) in place of African Theology.

In the next section, my research explores current approaches and trends in African Contextual Theologies. Two prevalent approaches today include inculturation and liberation theologies, each of which leans towards addressing a particular historical need of Africans. What do scholars mean by liberation and inculturation theologies? What are some of the historical contexts that flourished these theologies in Africa? The section will further discuss current trends, prospects, and challenges in these theological approaches.

3.4. Liberation Theology

3.4.1. Background to Liberation Theology

Liberation theology finds expression in Christian missiology where the Church believes the gospel of Jesus Christ is a liberating message to the poor from all dehumanizing agencies. Thus, the Church identifies Christ with the suffering and asks, “What would Christ do?”

The historical root of liberation theology began during the colonial years in Latin America. A group of theologians saw the need to express social and ecclesial concerns for people struggling for liberation from colonialism. The Peruvian Catholic priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez (b. 1928 in Lima) is considered one of the principal proponents of liberation theology. His book, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (*Teología de la liberación: perspectivas*, 1971), expounds largely on liberation theology. In this book, Gutiérrez defined liberation according to three interpenetrating meanings that involve, first, the expression of the aspirations of the oppressed for political, economic, and social justice – in other words, an active consciousness of the oppressed to reject repressive schemes and institutions. Second is the human being as a historical figure that “assumes conscious responsibility for its own destiny” through self and social renewals (Gutiérrez 1971: 36). Thirdly, Gutiérrez perceives the revelation of Jesus Christ as a liberator who saves humanity from sin, “which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustices and oppression” (Gutiérrez 1971: 37). Although salvation is not the same as socio-economic and political liberation in the strictest sense, it is where human beings, per liberation theologians, finally gain freedom from the
oppressive consequences of evil to live in communion with God. This newness of life is historical and the basis of all social reforms.

Between 1968 and 1975, two important conferences, namely, the Medellin Conference held in Columbia (1968), and Theology in the Americas (TIA) conference in Detroit (1975), gave prominence to the emerging theology. These periods marked the formative phase of the liberation theology (Gebellini 1987).

In 1976, the creation of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in Dar es Salaam began to reflect on methods and systematization of various themes of liberation theology (Gibellini 1987). Liberation theology received greater attention due to its intrinsic Christian virtues of addressing poverty and oppression. By 1977, liberation theology had swept across the Third World countries, leading to a heightened assimilation as a hermeneutical approach in Africa’s Christian contextual theology. The EATWOT conference held in Accra in 1977 took liberation theology seriously by identifying the fight against oppression as a theological task. Since then, liberation theology has come to be understood as a theological framework in African Contextual Theology.

3.4.2. An Overview of African Liberation Theology

African liberation theology is a theology of struggle for an authentic theological self-definition. Africa’s theology of liberation, in its African context, is a struggle for an authentic African dignity and identity that is free from any form of colonization and apartheid on the continent even though “theology has always been […] a struggle against all enslaving and dehumanizing forces” (Martey 1993: 7). The understanding has been “based on the historical experience of Black people under white supremacist domination” (Martey 1993: 95). Nevertheless, this description is too narrow to grasp the meaning of liberation theology today because of its connotation of political affairs. It is therefore important to outline a wider scope of liberation

14 The statement on oppression from the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in Accra (1977) reads: “There is also oppression in the exploitation of the people through national and multinational institutions. In all these instances of captivity we need to be liberated. We recognize that there are many forms of oppression. There is the oppression of Africans by white colonialism, but there is also the oppression of Blacks by Blacks. We stand against oppression in any form because the gospel of Jesus Christ demands our participation in the struggle to free people from all forms of dehumanization. Therefore, African theology concerns itself with bringing about the solidarity of Africans with Black Americans, Asians and Latin Americans who are also struggling for the realization of human communities in which the men and women of our time become the architects of their own destiny” (Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, 17-23 December 1977, Accra, Ghana).
theology in Africa as the lute against every unjust structure against Africans – whether the perpetrator is white or Black.

Characteristically, liberation theology is a theology of public or social interest other than the traditional understanding of individualistic salvation: “work out your own salvation” (Phil. 2:12). This shift constitutes a demonstration of theological concern for a collective social wellbeing. If one would like to characterize it more appropriately, then liberation theology is a commitment to socialism.\textsuperscript{15} The general scope of interest for liberationists involve socio-economic and political challenges such as poverty, clitorectomy, child labor, human trafficking, HIV/AIDS, girl-child education, child marriage, domestic violence, etc. These prevailing social challenges in Africa permit liberation theology to thrive as a theological framework. Where liberation theology is applicable, it eyes the unjust ideological framework upon which unjust structures are built upon, and by the application of Christian virtues, aims at collapsing these structures to raise civil equity towards a free and virtuous society.

In order to fully understand the various pathways in liberation theology, the next section will focus on the two most prevalent liberation theologies in Africa: African Black liberation theology and feminist theology.

3.4.3. \textit{African Black Liberation Theology (Black Cultural Theology)}

Black theology is an African-American socio-political theology that seeks to find significance of being Black through the teachings of Jesus Christ in the lives of suffering Black people. The grassroots of Black theology stems from the long years of United States’ racial segregation in the 1960s. These periods were years of circumscribed civil rights for African Americans, during which Black people were victimized by racial policies with psychological effects. It is such dehumanizing circumstances that stirred the conscience of Black people with regards to racism and their own responsibility as dissenters of racial structures. This awakening is often known as Black Consciousness, which is also central to understanding contextual theologies in Africa.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Marxist praxis theory has been the underlining hermeneutics of liberation theology. See (Miranda 2004) and (Bonino 1976).

\textsuperscript{16} The idea of Black Consciousness is a mind renaissance, i.e. an awakening of Black Consciousness to the question of being in a world that has denigrated them into inferiority and servitude. It is the period when Blacks began to see their humanity beyond the color line. This awakening started as egalitarian campaign that seeks to bridge up the color line. The initial phase rested on two major emancipation agenda (though several others may apply), namely: (1) political emancipation movements such as the civil rights and Black Power movements that pressurized the government and civil authorities to reconsider the social status of Blacks in the United States of America, and (2) Black religion which brought about several racial churches of a people struggling for self-
African Black liberation theology is South Africa’s Black theology. It finds its expression in the wider context of the global struggle of Black people for self-dignity and identity and emerged as a reaction to the structures of white supremacy in South Africa. From 1948 to 1994, South Africans lived under a constitutionalized system called apartheid. The word apartheid is an Afrikaans word that means separateness. It stems from the compound of two Dutch words, *apart* meaning “separate” and *heid* meaning “hood.” The Encyclopedia Britannica defines apartheid as a governmental “policy that governed relations between South Africa’s white minority and non-white majority and sanctioned racial segregation and political and economic discrimination against non-whites.” On June 21, 1990, Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid hero and first Black president of South Africa, in a speech to a crowd of about 100,000 assembled at 125th Street and Adam Clayton Powell Boulevard in New York City, described the conditions of apartheid as “the color line that all too often determines who is rich and who is poor; that all too often decides who lives in luxury and lives in squalor; that all too often determines who shall get food, clothing, and health care; and that all too often decides who will live and who will die.” The apartheid government was an instituted segregation that divided the populace into a social caste system with privileged whites at the top of society and all other races at the bottom without equal privileges enjoyed by the white minority.

There are three main phases to the origin of apartheid as racial domination in South Africa. First was the political-economic invasion of South Africa by the Dutch (Afrikaners) and British in the seventeenth century. From 1652, both the Afrikaners and English colonized South Africa. The struggle for economic and political dominance in the region led to the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) in which the British emerged victorious. The vast majority of the colonies in South Africa came under British rule. Through the South Africa Act 1909, a unification process took place to bring together all the British colonies of the Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal, and Orange River; this led to the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. A common flag and a political compromise were adopted between the British and Afrikaners (Connolly 2003). The unification process excluded inputs from indigenous Black Africans and

---

19 The Dutch were the first permanent settlers in South Africa who later came to be known as Afrikaners. Afrikaner derived its name from a Dutch-root dialect comprising of various group languages known as Afrikaans.
non-European races in South Africa, thereby marking the rise of white supremacism in South Africa.

The second phase entailed constitutional restrictions against non-whites’ integration into the new Union of South Africa. There were several segregation laws that prepared the grounds for the institution of apartheid. Some of these laws restricted non-whites from having equal rights and freedom as their white counterparts. Many whites occupied the most prestigious and high paying jobs while the Mines and Works Act in 1911 put Blacks in cheap labor. The Native Affairs Act of 1920 created tribal, government-appointed district councils that traversed the whole country. The Natives (Urban Areas) Act No 21 of 1923 controlled the movement of Blacks to urban cities and towns in South Africa. On the other hand, the Industrial Conciliation Act No 11 of 1924 restricted Blacks from trade unions, such that Blacks were excluded from membership in registered trade unions and registration of Black trade unions was prohibited (Meisel 1994: 23).

The final phase of apartheid was its constitutional institution in 1948 by the National Party. After World War I and World War II, the political influence of the British began to decline as Afrikaners became more powerful in political affairs. The National Party had become predominantly Afrikaners with much significant political influence in parliamentary affairs. By 1948, the party had won the confidence of the white populace through the election of D. F. Malan, its flagbearer, as prime minister of South Africa. Malan’s racial policies restricted British immigration to South Africa. At the same time, the National Party government under Malan used nepotism to establish Afrikaner supremacy until they finally gained dominance in South Africa’s politics (Lapping 1987: 87). After easing out British imperialism, Black Africans remained as the only opposition, and the “weapon the Afrikaner chose for meeting this Black challenge was apartheid” (Martey 1993: 19).

The apartheid government legislated that whites and non-whites were inherently unequal and therefore could not have equal privileges in education, health care, transportation and jobs. Socio-economic inequality during apartheid was not a denial of certain civil privileges; rather, the problem was the social stratification of privileged and non-privileged persons based on the color of the skin. For example, non-whites were not denied the use of public transport services, but transport was segregated into white and non-white compartments, especially in trains.

---

Education and employment were also subjected to the same policy. Disenfranchisement was institutionalized and non-white races barely had a public opinion in national affairs. Apartheid created a barricade of color perception and severe separatism that victimized the Black race of South Africa as people without human rights and dignity. The apartheid government controlled all social, political, and economic structures. The philosophy was to use white skin as a policy for entrenching white supremacy against the freedom of other races in South Africa (Martey 1993: 19). Our interest may now focus on the ideologies behind the institution of apartheid.

3.4.4. Apartheid As a Theological Heresy

It is a mistake for anyone to perceive apartheid as being only a political system. Apartheid was a religio-political system that supported white monopoly. Its underlining ideology was theological with support and justification from the white Dutch Reformed Church (Boesak 1979: 204; Maimela 1994: 186; Martey 1993: 18). The theology behind apartheid was deeply rooted in divine predestination, (dominionism) here interpreted by the British and white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa as God’s elect to dominate and subdue all other nations to a life of servitude (theonomy) (Martey 1993: 19). The British sustained colonial adventures with the theology of the elect, thus shaping human history based on their political and messianic expression (Maimela 1994: 185). In the words of Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902), then a businessman, founder of the modern diamond industry, and once a Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890 to 1896, the British were the finest in the world: “I contend that we are the finest race in the world and that the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race.” Rhodes has been identified as a representative of this theological agenda of British supremacy as he once declared that the British are “destined to help on God’s work and fulfill His purpose in the world.” The British understood their role in human history like ancient Israel: called to subdue heathen nations by divine mandate (Maimela 1994: 185, 186). There is no doubt that this was a purported colonial ideology.

The British theological agenda of white supremacy was taken over by the Dutch Reformed Church that provided spiritual nourishment for the rising Afrikaners (Maimela 1994). The church gave Afrikaners a theological motive to preserve white survival and supremacy on the

21 The whole of the colonial adventure was justified by theological ramifications of the Papal Bull “Dum Diversas” in June 18, 1452 to enslave and evangelize third worlds.
African continent; as such, the theology of apartheid became embellished in the Afrikaners National Party’s manifesto in 1947.\textsuperscript{24} The welding of religious ideologies with politics was nothing but a deification of Afrikaners’ nationalistic agenda that achieved its modus operandi in the structural features of apartheid policy.\textsuperscript{25} The epic subtlety of apartheid, supported by astute theological dogmas, gave enormous benefit of supremacy to the white minority against the disadvantaged non-white populace.

In summary, the backdrop of apartheid, well understood, was to maintain white supremacy over non-white races. The theology of election was used by the white minority to legitimize segregation, and finally to establish the law of apartheid. Afrikaners’ God was a “white God” who is on the side of white people and a God who is unconcerned about the suffering majority under the apartheid constitution. This racial hermeneutic achieved both political and religious triumphalism in South Africa but with serious ugly scars of: (1) westernization as a domineering movement, (2) the relevance of theological virtues, (3) the essence of church and state dialogue, (4) Christian ethics in relation to human dignity and identity, and finally (5) Europeans. These problems mattered less to the beneficiaries of apartheid; to Black South Africans, however, it was the boiling point of the politics of conscience and the emergence of Black theology.

3.4.5. Emergence of South Africa’s Black Theology

The fall of apartheid was largely indebted to the politics of conscience known as Black Consciousness, which was a new outlook of theological anthropology. Around the mid-1960s, anti-apartheid movements emerged to challenge the apartheid government through Black cultural renaissance and new contextual hermeneutics of the Bible; known today as South Africa’s Black theology. The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) led by Steve Biko, also known as the father of Black Consciousness, redefined blackness beyond color perception. The movement “interpreted the South African situation using the Hegelian theory of dialectic materialism,” that is, Black solidarity (antithesis) and white racism (thesis) resulting in defining

\textsuperscript{24} Certain portions of the manifesto read: “the policy of apartheid, a concept historically derived from the experience of the established white population of the country, and in harmony with such Christian principles as justice and equity” (Krüger 1960). The manifesto further justified the theology of apartheid as in line with Christian values: “the party rejects any policy of oppression or exploitation of the non-whites by the whites as incompatible with the Christian character of our people and therefore unacceptable” (Krüger 1960).

\textsuperscript{25} After the party seized power in 1948, Malan is reported to have said: Our history is the greatest masterpiece of the centuries. We hold this nationhood as our due for it was given us by the Architect of the Universe [sic!]. [God’s] aim was the formation of a new nation among the nations of the world […] Indeed, the history of the Afrikaner reveals a will and determination which makes one feel that Afrikanerdom is not the work of men but the creation of God. (Cited in Martey 1993: 19).
true humanity beyond color or race (synthesis) (Martey 1993: 24). This was the epistemological rationality behind the movement to empower Black people psychologically concerning their authentic humanity.

The movement emphasized authentic liberation as the liberation of the mind. Liberating psychological faculties was fundamental to understanding the evils of apartheid and the being of Black. Black people were to see their humanity as complete and their blackness as constituting an authentic humanity contrary to the divisive definition of being human as espoused by the apartheid policy that reduced the degree of their humanity and blackness to nothing but a syndrome of blasphemy (Martey 1993: 24; Tutu 1979: 194). BMC affiliated groups were banned in 1977 but subsequent resistance groups emerged, such as the Black Theology Task Force (BTF). The new theology aimed at liberating victims of racist policies by reversing the apartheid hermeneutics of racist demarcation, and to understand God as the Father of all through Jesus Christ in human history (Tutu 1979: 195, 196). The movement was conscious of redefining Black identity by reacting to apartheid as heretical (Martey 1993: 23, 24). These periods marked an ethical, philosophical, epistemological, social, political, and theological emphasis of Black humanity. Prior to this time, Black Nationalist groups such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) had been banned in 1960 following the major massacre of Blacks by whites in a nonviolent protest against the apartheid government that turned bloody (Martey 1993: 22).

Black theology was not only a struggle against apartheid but also a struggle towards a united humanity. Following a three-year negotiation that ended apartheid in 1991 at Kempton Park in Johannesburg, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was formed in 1995 to further the transition to a fully democratic South African state. Part of its mandate was to build a new society that would bury the immoral consequences of apartheid and seek acceptable moral norms for progressive reconciliation and prevention of future human rights abuse in South Africa. The role of Black theology was the promotion of authentic humanity in a communal solidarity. The Zulu word Ubuntu, which defines humanity as a community working together towards the interest of each other, became a utilitarian moral philosophy for reconciliation. Ubuntu takes up the socio-political dimensions of South Africans to promote peaceful cohabitation and equal human rights.

Though Ubuntu has been praised for its effectiveness in reuniting South Africa, critics perceive the concept as a means for cultural nationalism; as a consequence, whites, Indians, etc. are
obliged to claim an African identity as long as they seek utilitarian good for the masses (Christoph 2002: 53). Others like Allan Boesak, the avid anti-apartheid activist, have criticized both *Ubuntu* and TRC as ill-equipped to address the social injustices and post-apartheid ideologies that are entrenched in the social structures of South Africa. While speaking to students at Yale Divinity School, Boesak remarked that *Ubuntu* does not enable the doing of systemic justice or the undoing of systemic injustice (Boesak 2017: 141). The reason, given by Boesak, is that no demands for remorse and repentance are made from the perpetrators of apartheid.

3.4.6. African Feminist Theology (Womanist Theology)

Women’s involvement in the African religious experience is vital to understanding the role they play in recent theological discourses. As observed by Mb
ti, there are more female priests (priestess) in African Traditional Religion than male priests. This background has been quite significant in shaping the integration of African women into Christian liturgy.

The need for feminine integration into theological dialogue came about during the postcolonial era. The 1977 Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians in Accra raised the necessity of equal integration of women into the theological task. The emphasis on equality expressed recognition of the qualification and qualitative significance of African women’s spirituality as equal to that of their male counterparts in applicable theological expressions and reflections. Per such egalitarian recognition, women were now given more preeminence in academic discussion as well as in shaping public opinions.

After the Accra meeting, a group of women experts in religion and cultural studies met at the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva in 1989 to discuss key aspects of theology that women can play within the African context. The meeting gave birth to the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) led by Mercy Amba Oduoye, a Ghanaian theologian and a director of a task force in promoting women theologies in Africa at the WCC. Oduoye


28 Part of the statement read: “Throughout this document, we have referred to the need to struggle against sexism. If that struggle is to be taken seriously by the church, then our seriousness will be reflected in the way we do theology. We recognize that African women have taken an active role in the church and in the shaping of our history. They have shown themselves to be a coherent part of the liberation struggle. But we cannot ignore their exclusion from our past theological endeavors. Therefore, the future of African theology must take seriously the role of women in the church as equals in the doing of theology.” (Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17-23, 1977, Accra, Ghana).
is also recognized as the mother of African feminist theology. The Circle, as it is popularly called, has championed Africa’s feminist theology through a conscious articulation of women’s role in the church and society as well as academic influence in the development of Africa’s feminist hermeneutics. In the past three decades, feminist theology has turned out to be one of the transformative approaches in shaping Christianity in Africa. The fight against HIV/AIDS, child marriage, slavery, clitoridectomy, domestic violence, and education for the female child are some of the areas that feminist theology seeks to address.

Like all other theological approaches, African feminist theology is not immune to criticism. It poses a reactive paradox in its contextual integrity. Whereas the whole of the African theological agenda has been a reaction to foreign oppression and redemption of African culture from Eurocentric ideologies, African feminist theology has been a reaction to and liberation of women from injustice and inequality suffered by African women in Africa’s domineering patriarchal societies (Abbey 2001; Chitando 2009; Oduyoye 2001). That means African cultural structures support the oppression of women. Again, African feminist theologians accuse cultural norms of protecting men to enjoy the dividends of these structures. Critics of Feminist theology believe its adherents are articulating Africa’s normative thought forms through the perception of Western feminists (Nadar 2012: 273, 276).

Feminist theologians also face the problem of ecumenical systematization of theology, especially in most conservative African churches that are basically characterized by “globalized hermeneutics” as in the case of ordination of women in the Catholic and some evangelical Protestant churches. In such instances, contextualization loses its significance and penetrating effects. On the contrary, are these not, most often, the rallying cries through which African feminist theology seeks to address?

In a nutshell, liberation theology seeks to confront unjust systems that tend to bring suffering or subject humanity to harsh conditions. Liberationists believe that social life and the Church’s public actions are intertwined. Therefore, the gospel message of salvation and freedom should have a socio-political impact to create a free and a virtuous society for all.

3.5. Inculturation Theology in Africa

In this section, we are looking at inculturation as an approach in African Contextual Theologies. There is a growing feeling among many Africans that Christianity is a machination to further Western imperialism in Africa. Often cited is the Papal Bull Dum Diversa which was issued to evangelize and colonize third world countries, and which had led many Africans to
question the intents of Christianity in Africa. How do we respond to this growing concern? How long will Christianity remain as a foreign institution in the minds of Africans? One way to respond to this problem is to demonstrate that Christianity is compatible with African realities and that domestication of Christianity is possible through an inculturation theology.

There is also the question of the depths of the gospel among Africans. Have African Christians broken away from the traditional religions? Do they continue to consult the traditional priest? Are there issues of fear of witches, demons, and spirits? Augustine Musopole, a Presbyterian theologian from Malawi and professor in philosophy of religions has questioned the depths of Christianity in Africa and calls for a second stage of evangelism and theological indigenization. Speaking to a group of church leaders at the eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, Musopole stressed: “While Christianity in Africa is growing in numbers and in its geographical spread, its depth is questionable. This might be the reason it is easily overcome by forces of ethnicity, patriarchy, corruption, hatred, political manipulation, racism, classism, regionalism and traditionalism.” He further asserted that “[t]he Church in Africa, especially the mainline churches, are being called to embark on a second stage of evangelism and theological indigenization.”

3.5.1. What is Inculturation Theology?

The term inculturation became popular in the 1990s even though the Gospel and culture have always enjoyed intimate interaction. Inculturation lends itself to the acquisition of cultural norms to co-opt the Gospel into its immediate context. It is a contextual discipline that uses persuasive models to critically engage culture and the message of Christ for an effective missionary activity. The theology of inculturation is also an academic expedition into cultural anthropology herein defined as the studies of human societies and cultures with respect to their spiritual needs. Inculturation provides a solid foundation for both theologians and missionaries to understand the process of the Gospel in its sophisticated anthropological context.

Inculturation emphasizes Africa’s religio-cultural experiences as the starting point of theological discussion (Martey 1993: 69). Several African Christian contextual theologians

---

have accepted inculturation as a praxis technique to create authentic African Christian identity. The security of integrated identity, thus the ecumenical identity as a Christian and one’s unique cultural identity (e.g. Ghanaian Christian), in African Christianity – both mainstream and independent churches – has been a matter of deliberate concern and growing consensus. There is a growing production of literature articulating themes of inculturation theology. Again, more and more African churches have embraced cultural integration, especially in the liturgy, as a mode of Christian expression. With such reality in view, the concept of inculturation should be spared, if possible, of further criticism that it is a theological falsification, if not heresy. Instead, African theologians should look forward to stimulating an in-depth understanding of Christianity and the formulation of applicable methods of evangelism in order to inculcate in Africans the relevance of Christ’s message to their actual lives and its effect on the socio-economic and political sectors in society.

In the following sub-sections, we shall look at the events that led to the development of Africa’s inculturation theology.

3.5.2. Contextualization of Ecclesial Models

The attempt to contextualize the gospel was liturgical in the early years of missionary activities. The resurgence of Christianity in Africa in the fifteenth century saw European expansion of the faith in Africa. Already established, both Catholics and Protestants carried out missionary endeavors in Africa. Early missionaries focused on indigenizing the liturgy to facilitate the reception of Christianity (Sanneh 1991: 160). Western philologists enhanced the transition of African indigenous languages from oral communication to literature. The effort to translate the Bible into indigenous languages became a prime agenda of the missionaries. By the end of the nineteenth century, many Africans could read the Bible in their own indigenous languages and could also defend their faith by the same means. The training of indigenous missionaries and later translation of liturgical hymns into indigenous languages prepared the ground for the renewal of cultural ideas in the growth of the church in Africa.31

30 The Ugandan Luganda Bible was completed in 1894; the Malagasy of Madagascar Bible in 1830. The Oromo of Ethiopia New and Old Testaments Bible was completed between 1893 and 1899. The Bible was translated into Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu South African languages between 1837 and 1883. The Yoruba Bible was first published in 1884 followed by later republication by the BFBS in 1900. The Akan Twi New Testament books were translated by Johann Gottlieb Christaller from 1857 to 1878 and published by the BFBS. Others such as Bemba (Zambia), Chinyanja (Malawi), Igbo (Nigeria), etc. were completed in the early twentieth century.

31 The assimilation of indigenous languages into missions became one of the most successful channels to legitimate Christianity in Africa. Further reading on Christianity’s encounter with African indigenous languages.
3.5.3. **African Anthropology as a Rebirth of Africa’s Cultural Values**

Missionaries and colonial officials have made valuable contributions to African anthropology. Africans esteem their cultures, but they were never studied until the twentieth century when a heightened interest in Africa’s social structures and cultural values emerged as worthy for documentation. The works of European historians and anthropologists on Africa laid the foundation for later indigenous anthropologists and also provided a roadmap for constructive cultural patterns and appreciation. African inculturation theology leans heavily on early Western anthropologists as their works provide a source for critical observation and “a theoretical basis for transforming traditional religion or, at least, for using some of its elements in the process of adapting Christianity” (Ilesanmi 1995: 58). Their descriptive studies of African culture and religion, besides the criticism and biases, have helped shaped contemporary contextual studies.

3.5.4. **The Rise of Africa’s Nationalism**

The struggle for liberation from colonization and neo-colonization paved the way for what has come to be known as the theology of cultural liberation or inculturation theology as it is technically known. Martey has identified politics, culture and religion as significant stimulants for the emergence of African Contextual Theology, although other factors may apply (1993: 9). The struggle for independence from colonialism created socio-political and economic concerns that led to the rise of pan-Africanism and African nationalism. Pan-Africanism is an intellectual vigilant movement that aims at frustrating Western imperial influence in Africa. It has several modes of expression such as in Negritude by Léopold Sédar Senghor, a Senegalese poet, writer, and statesman. Negritude was an African solidarity movement against French imperialism. Ghana’s philosophy of *sankofaism* is another example of pan-Africanism that seeks to return to Africa’s past traditions to critically retrieve relevant traditions for the future. Several anti-apartheid movements in South Africa were sub-movements of pan-Africanism, such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Pan-Africanism, with its ideology of redeeming an authentic African identity and cultural experiences, has been a contributing factor to Africa’s cultural renaissance.

3.5.5. **Philosophical Decolonization as a Philosophy of Identity**

[and cultural values can found in Lamin Sanneh’s book *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 157-208.]
A major influence of Africa’s inculturation theology was the rise of theological philosophies and philosophies that began to question and to unearth Africa’s cultural values through critical reflection. Ghanaian J. B. Danquah’s classic work, *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944), explores Akan anthropology, philosophy, and theology. African literary and artistic philosophers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (Kenya), Wole Soyinka (Nigeria), Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), Okot p’Bitek (Uganda), and Taban Lo Liyong (Uganda), contributed significantly to the definition of an African personality. African philosophers like Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, and others have all called for a philosophical decolonization of African epistemologies which they think are more or less contaminated by Western ideas. Although these philosophers do not reject anything Western, the call for authentic African epistemologies is a reconciliation of the spirituality of Africans with their cultural values. The quest to rediscover authentic African epistemologies indirectly questions what or who is responsible to shape the worldviews of Africans.

3.5.6. African Theological Hermeneutics as Inculturation

The rise of African theology and its hermeneutics of Africa’s pre-Christian religion and culture as a source for theological discussion reached its zenith with the publication of *Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent* in 1956. The book is a collection of reflections on the African church by some African priests studying in Europe. This is so far the accepted starting point of modern African Contextual Theology (Martey 1993: 16; Bujo 1992: 5). The greatest feat came from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians in 1977 in Accra, during which African cultural realities and African traditional religions were considered sources of theology as already seen in pioneering works of Charles Nyameti (Tanzania), Stephen Mulago (Congo), John Mbiti (Kenya), Kwesi Dickson (Ghana), Bolaji Ndowu (Nigeria), etc. By the turn of the early 1980s, the term inculturation had become widespread. The earliest usage of the term was in 1962 by Professor Joseph Masson of the Gregorian University in Rome. However, it became popular after its definition by Father Arrupe, Superior General of the Jesuits in 1978. Whence, the term became a theological phrase in contemporary theology (Martey 1993: 67, 68).

In summary, African Christian contextual theologians have embraced the inculturation approach to better define an African Christian identity. The nature of this identity transcends

---

32 Inculturation was defined by Father Pedro Arrupe as, “[T]he incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’.” Pedro Arrupe, “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation,” AR 17 (1978), 230. Cited in Martey 1993: 88.
beyond religion and culture to incorporate political, educational, and literary ideologies of Africans. Consequently, the inculturation agenda provides a lens upon which theologians carry out Christian missions in Africa.

3.6. An Appraisal of the Theology of Inculturation

Inculturation theology is subject to criticism. Several criticisms exist from both past and contemporary theologians. For clarity, we shall divide the critics into two main groups: universalists and progressivists. The former group involves those who possess “a static and unitary view of Christianity… instead of as a horizon towards which Christians of all places and ages are moving and growing” (Ilesanmi 1995: 59, 60). Universalists utterly reject the inculturation theology and insist that it is a misguided effort (Ilesanmi 1995: 58, 59). They are unsympathetic to the discipline of inculturation and do not see it as compatible with the Gospel. The latter group comprises those who criticize the methodologies as well as content of inculturation. These theologians do so, not to reject inculturation methodology in its entirety, but to consider what is called inculturation theology for now and then. It is important to discuss these criticisms in their respect context.

3.6.1. Universalists Criticism of Inculturation

The intellectual attempt to excavate Africa’s past religion to theologize Christianity’s adaptation in Africa was misconstrued as a return to African traditional religions (Ilesanmi 1995: 59). Among such critics included the Qua Iboe Church of Eastern Nigeria, Pentecostal, and Charismatic movements. Others deemed the inculturation agenda as the gospel of heathenism, satanic doctrine, and an overt nationalism (Ilesanmi 1995: 59).

A significant critic of the inculturation theology was Byang Kato (already mentioned). When it comes to inculturation theology, Kato did not hide his feelings. Bediako, in his *Theology and Identity*, refers to Kato as a dissenting voice in modern African theology (Bediako, 1999: 391). So far, Kato is one of the overt critics so far of inculturation theology. Kato stresses Scripture as the absolute word of God and posits: “Must one betray Scriptural principles of God and His dealing with man at the altar of any regional theology?” (Kato 1975: 16). Prior to his conversion into Christianity, Kato was raised in a traditional religious (Jaba religion) home where he was being trained to become a traditional priest. This background shapes Kato’s avid hostility towards the traditional religions of which he sees no “redemption nor evidence of direct divine revelation” (Kato 1975: 44). It becomes easier to understand Kato from this background because his past involvement with the Jaba religion provided an experience that supported his
sympathy for a universalistic model of theology and constructive theological development against what he called syncretistic universalism (Kato 1975).

In spite of this, it does not seem clear that Kato is altogether against African realities (Kato 1975: 25). He only failed to see any relationship between the traditional religion and the gospel. Kato thought such an attempt leads to syncretism and makes the unique salvation of Christ of no effect (Kato 1975: 175). Several African theologians from the inculturation school have seen Kato as an attacker and rejectionist (Bediako 1999; Oduyoye 1986; Parrat 1995). Bediako, in his review of Kato’s response to African Theology, thought Kato failed “to deal with the identity problem of the modern African Christian” and “was unable to provide the kind of theological interpretation and insight into the religion and spirituality of the Jaba people” (Bediako 1999: 386, 387). Irrespective of these criticisms, Kato did recognize the heightened interest in African theology which without any doubt has been a success (Kato 1975: 16).

Besides Kato, other early African authors like the Ugandan Okot p’Bitek, and Ali Mazrui who wrote the epilogue of p’Bitek’s book in 1970, have nicknamed both Mbiti and Idowu as “intellectual smugglers” who treat African traditional religions as subjective to contain Christian revelations without recognizing its unique spiritual experiences (p’Bitek, 1970: 88). P’Bitek did not only see inculturation theology as a threat to the uniqueness of the African traditional religions, but inappropriate to Christianity itself. Hence, Mazrui posits: “Why should African students of religion be so keen to demonstrate that the Christian God had already been understood and apprehended by Africans before the missionaries came?” (p’Bitek 1970: 127). Bediako considers p’Bitek as by far the most incisive critic of the Christian interpretation of the African traditional religions (Bediako 1999: 9). However, Bediako also believes p’Bitek and others demonstrate the success of the essential thrust of the African theological enterprise (Bediako 1999: 9).

3.6.2. Progressive Criticism of Inculturation

---

33 Cited in Bediako 1999: 9. p’Bitek’s intellectual smuggling could have best been descriptive if his argument was geared towards an acculturation agenda, which does not seem to be the case here. The expression of one’s own contextual realities in the Christian faith cannot be smuggling unless one perceives Christianity as another culture; such characterization has been the struggle for African Contextual Christian Theology, which is already the subject of a detailed discussion in Bediako’s book *Theology and Identity* (1999).

34 Cited in Bediako, 1999: 9

35 Okot p’Bitek had feared the death of African traditional religions from the rushing floods of Eurocentric philosophies and ideologies that pose a threat to both Christianity and the traditional religions. He wrote: “Will the African deities survive the revolutions in science and philosophy which have killed the Christian God? I doubt it” (p’Bitek 1970: 112).
Besides the critical “objectors” (if the term “attackers” is too strong), progressive critics identify three main shortcomings of the theology of inculturation: 1) lack of methodological rigor, 2) naivety concerning definitional issues, and 3) disciplinary solipsism.36

3.6.2a Lack of Methodological Rigor

Although African theology has its own mode of expression and primary theological purpose, the quest to recast African traditional religions is often faced with a methodological crisis (Bediako 1996: 4). Jesse Mugambi, a Kenyan scholar of African Christianity and phenomenology of religions, has noted that African theology “is in a methodological crisis, owing to the lack of methodological consciousness” (Mugambi 2000: 69).37 One such methodological problem is the conceptual confusion between religious phenomenology and reductionism. Religious phenomenology is indispensable from inculturation theology since one need adequate knowledge about African traditional religions before proper inculturation can be achieved. However, phenomenology is descriptive and lacks theoretical criticism; it is religious studies by direct experience. Inculturation on the other hand uses a theological approach. It also employs reductionist approach to construct a theological thought for Christian missions.

Correctly understood, inculturation is not just another form of religious studies. Neither is it without religion. Inculturation is a theology seeking ‘landing’ within a given context. Hence, rigorous interpretation, reinterpretation, and criticism of the culture are embarked through the lens of Scripture to produce an inculturation theology. In this case, one would have to appreciate Kato’s contribution to African theology that Scripture should take primacy as it communicates its mode of expression and authority over culture in order not for Scripture to become “one of many revelations rather than special revelation” (Kato 1975: 173).38 Mbiti likewise affirms categorically that “nothing can substitute for the Bible” (1986: 59).39

36 Ezra Chitando in discussing African traditional religions in African Contextual Christian Theology brought out these three main issues in the theology of inculturation (2006: 105).


38 God’s revelation as explained by Kato is not only through Scripture. Like all evangelicals, Scripture is the special revelation of God. Kato maintains that there are revelations in nature which he terms as natural revelation.

39 Lesslie Newbigin (1909-1998), the British theologian and missiologist, had warned against starting contextual theology with culture. Newbigin has been a staunch European contextual theologian in the twentieth century, whose endearing legacy of ‘missionary encounter with Western culture’ to the Western church provides in-depth understanding of culture and contextualization. To Newbigin, biblical stories provide a useful context for dealing with culture. There is nothing more important than the primacy of Scripture in the contextualization of the Gospel. He emphasizes that scriptural truths are absolute and, therefore, superior to cultural ideas. This understanding is
Another methodological problem is critical engagement with African cultures. In one hand, inculturation is used as a means of criticizing Eurocentric hermeneutics that for so long has been the basis for theologizing in Africa. On the other hand, inculturation shows that the fabrics of African cultures are worthy and compatible with the Christian message (Ilesanmi 1995: 52). These two are crucial to the discipline of inculturation. However, these are not enough especially if inculturation is to be taken as a means for criticism. Is everything in African cultures worthy of theologization? African Contextual Theologies should dare to criticize African cultures as to which aspect of it is relevant for theologization and that which is detrimental to modern social formations. African feminist theologists, in their decades of practice, have critically engaged in uprooting such negative predispositions such as patriarchy even though their efforts are often met with heavy opposition from men.

Further, inculturation hermeneutics face the problem of homogeneous synthesis of African cultures. Is there a thing called an “African culture?” Or we should start talking of plurality of cultures? Chitando draws attention to the fact that a homogenizing approach to African culture persists irrespective of alert-calls from feminists and other interest groups (2006: 106). Africa is a huge continent comprising of about 54 internationally recognized states with each state diversified with complex socio-cultural experiences. Homogenization discourses ignore this complex diversity that also carries in itself implicit unique merits. It is true that a lot has changed over the last few decades. Several African theologies have focused on regional hermeneutics rather than continental homogeneity. Constructive inculturation approaches free from homogeneity are engaged in recent African theological works (Burton 2000; Aye-Addo 2013).

Lastly, African theologians face the problem of the dynamic social matrix of today. The frequent reference to Africa’s “past” has generated a static view of culture. Culture is dynamic and each generation is confronted with its own socio-cultural questions. For example, African contrary to the Platonic understanding of truth as related to ideas. For Newbigin, the authority of Scripture must be surpassing all forms of societal ideas. This knowledge penetrates through the church that carries the Gospel to world societies. It is the church that is endowed with the judgment of both “No” and “Yes.” He says: “True contextualization accords the Gospel its rightful primacy, its power to penetrate every culture and speak within each culture, in its own speech and symbol, the word which is both No and Yes, both judgment and grace.” It is therefore not some cultural element that legitimates the contextualization of the Gospel. The Gospel has its mode of expression that pronounces its authority over cultural ideas. (See Newbigin 1989: 151-152).

40 Bediako discusses this in “Christianity as “Civilisation”: The legacy of “The Third Opportunity” and Making of a Modern Identity Problem” in his Theology and Identity (Bediako 1999: 227-266).

theologians are constantly faced with questions relating to postmodernism, sexuality (LGTBQI), ordination of women, scientism, etc. These inevitable trends in the global sphere should influence the methodological consciousness of African theologians to adapt their methods to meet contemporary trends.

3.6.2b Concerning Definitional Issues

The question asked here is whether African theologians have a definite mode of semantic expression. Chitando thinks African theologians are wobbling in a definition crisis and further remarks that there is lack of clarity concerning the meaning, nature, and task of African theology (Chitando 2006: 106). Several arguments exist in the usage of the various terms employed. Over the decades, African theologians had to struggle with terminologies such as adaptation, enculturation, indigenization, and acculturation, until inculturation became preponderant as a missiological approach (Byrne 1990). Again, several names have been proposed in place of the term “African theology;” this research has not taken this problem for granted. African theology, herein referred to as African Contextual Theology (ACT), has been proposed to define the reinterpretation of the Gospel in terms proper to a specific cultural context. Chitando had proposed “African Christian theology,” but this trademark is too vague and broad to define what is understood as an African theology. Up to this time, the term “African theology” is not awkward to use – although insufficient to define what is referred to in this research as African Contextual Theology. The present terminological variances or contradictions point towards the fact that a rigorous preoccupation of the discipline is a work in progress other than “a discipline that is unsure of itself” (Chitando 2006: 107).

3.6.2c Lack of Disciplinary Solipsism

Critics accuse African theologians of lack of disciplinary solipsism as a result of too much focus on African traditional religions. Chitando, for instance, argues that African theologians should gear towards multidisciplinary approaches that will help to reposition Christian theology in the academy and to help it to attain relevant significance. One relevant problem Chitando raises is the threat of “thoroughgoing criticism of Christianity in Africa by African intellectuals and creative writers” (Chitando 2006: 107). Given this observation, African churches stand accused of lack of Christian apologetics. Again, African theology has been mainly a discipline of systematic theology and ethics. Other areas of theological concentration such as History of Christianity and Old and New Testaments studies have received little attention. Where attention is given, it is characterized by denominational biases. African Bible
scholars like John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu have taken contextual interpretation that leaves the historical and critical analysis of biblical text to suffer. African theologians should take serious consideration to Western scholarship as a source of theological engagement in the wider ecumenical spheres of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary theological scholarship to avoid being accused of “sequestrating and ghettoizing African Christian theology” (Chitando 2006: 107).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the phenomenal growth of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa that has given way to a neo-scholastic engagement between theology and culture. What has come to be known as African Theology, herein referred to as African Contextual Theology or African Contextual Christian Theology, is Africa’s theological contextualization of religious faith and practices in Africa. The primary purpose of African contextual Christian theology is to express the Gospel in the various African worldviews as it relates to the practice of Christian faith and ecumenical dialogue of Christianity. The academic driving force behind this has been keen in current African theological discourses. Several African theologians accept that the Gospel should be communicated in ways that become relevant to Africans. Proponents such as Mbiti, Idowu, Nyameti, Dickson, and Bediako, after examining African traditional religions, have pointed out that African religions are resourceful for the practice of Christian faith. Their overall theological works show that African cultures and religions are worthy and compatible with the Christian message, and therefore should be a medium for Christian missiology in Africa.

It has been identified that there are two main theological approaches in the African theological enterprise. First is liberation theology that is predominantly practiced as a response to apartheid in South Africa. Liberation theology, including feminist theology, addresses socio-economic and political injustices in Africa. Theologians in the theology of liberation seek to address unjust concerns by using the Christian faith as the starting point to speak of Jesus Christ as the liberator of the oppressed. Liberationists are mostly reactive to Eurocentric and patristic ideologies in African societies. The second, which is the oldest, is inculturation theology. Contextual African theologians widely accept inculturation as an incarnation of the Gospel within a given cultural context. Critics beg to differ as majority of them see it as syncretistic universalism, thus, an attempt to invent a common world faith through the lenses of different religions. While this research does not see any attempt of syncretism in inculturation
methodology, the chapter has identified some tendencies in some inculturation circles. If the incarnation of Christ is taken seriously to define the substance of inculturation, then African contextual theologians should consider Christ in all aspects of His earthly experiences as a human being, yet perceived as the Son of God (Phil. 2:6-8). In the same way, the Gospel should be expressed in the contextual worldviews of the people in reception without losing its salvific force and missiological intents. With such methodological consciousness, Christianity will continue to assume its rightful place in Africa.


Chapter 4

Introduction to the Akan Worldview

4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the worldview and cultural anthropology of the Akan people. In common with many sub-Saharan African societies, the Akan culture is a framework of social, economic, political, and religious systems diversified in artistic expressions for everyday life. The definition given in my research as Akan culture involves cultural particularities exclusive to the Akan. Despite the strong influence of westernization in Ghana, Akan communities continue to glory in their cultural heritage. Akan culture sheds light on day-to-day activities in present-day Ghana – including national affairs. It is therefore of great necessity to set the basic framework to understand Akan religious-cultural traditions and to bring forward some of the implicit rationalities behind all that unfolds in the relationship between the spiritual and physical world.

To do this will require a systematic definition of the contextual premise of Akan worldview in understanding the formulation of any Akan contextual pneumatology. The basic idea of worldview may cover the “concept of the supernatural, of nature, of man, and society, and of the way in which these concepts form a system that gives meaning to men’s lives and action” (Busia 1955: 19). The worldview shapes the thoughts for day-to-day fulfillment of life. It involves reality and the interpretation of cause and effects in life and beyond. The Akan worldview is not independent of the total experience of a person’s existence. The demands of a community, driven by holistic expressions in the languages, customs, and arts, form the basis of the Akan worldview, and the continuity of these expressions predisposes their collective destiny. In this chapter, we will look closely into the Akan worldview to determine its various dimensions, lay the basic answers to the fundamental questions of the meaning and nature of sunsum and its implications to develop a new perspective for a contextual Akan pneumatology. In the end, we should be able to raise the necessary questions that will determine the basis for

---

1 One of such areas is the Akan language called Twi. The Twi language remains the most widely spoken language in Ghana. About half of the Ghanaian population comprises native Twi speakers, and about seventy-five percent of the general population speaks the Twi language. The Akan Twi has become the medium for many activities in marketing, media, and cultural exchange in Ghana. Travelers who enter Ghana through the Kotoka International Airport in Accra, the capital city, receive a warm welcome in bold Akan inscription that reads, “Akwaaba,” meaning, “Welcome.”
a historiographical, philosophical, and theological investigation of sunsum in this present study of Akan pneumatology.

### 4.2. Akan Cultural Anthropology

Knowing more about Akan anthropology begins with its cluster of unique cultural groups. Every Akan belongs to a tribe. Major tribal groups comprise Adansi, Akyem, Akwapin, Anyi, Aowin, Asante, Assin, Baule, Bron, Fanti, Gomoa, Kwahu, Nzima, Sefwi, Twifo, Wassa, and the East Atlantic communities in Côte d'Ivoire (Pescheux 2003: 29–30; Ephirim-Donkor 2008: 56–57). The Ghana Statistical Service estimates the Akan population to about 47.5 percent of the general Ghanaian population. The Asantes of the Akan ethnicity make up the highest percentage of the general Ghanaian population; this makes the Asante region the most populous province in the country. The Akan people of Côte d'Ivoire have their settlements in the south-east and central parts of the country with three major divisions: Central Akan, occupied by the Baoulé who make up the largest community with about 23 percent of the general population in Côte d'Ivoire. The Akan at the border comprise the Agni or Anyi, Abron, etc., and the Akan in the Ebrié lagoons are Ebrié, Abouré, Adioukrou, Appolloniens, etc. (Allou 2012; Kouadi 2016). There is a sizeable Akan population in the diaspora, including the Americas.

#### 4.2.1. Social Aspect of Akan Cultural Anthropology

Characteristically, the Akan share common trace of progeny and linguistics. Akan ancestry descends from an ancestress called abrewa, or “old woman.” Traditional folklore regards her as the first ancestress and ancestral mother in the ancestral spiritual world (Ephirim-Donkor 2008). Based on this ideology, every Akan child bears a physio-material of the abrewa called mogya (blood), which eventually becomes the ideology behind Akan matrilineage of the eight consanguineal groups called abusua (Ephirim-Donkor 2010: 12, 30-32).

---

2 The Akan people of Côte d'Ivoire originate from the Asantes of Ghana. The Asante Kingdom was founded in the seventeenth century under the leadership of its famous king Osei Tutu I. His administration saw a drastic expansion of Asante territory in modern Ghana until his death in 1731. When his nephew and successor died after a short reign, a divisive war over succession to the throne broke out in Kumasi, the capital of the Asante Kingdom, between two royal families; this led to the death of the brother of the contesting queen mother, Awura Poku. To avoid further deaths, she led her people westward to their current settlement in Côte d'Ivoire.


4 Historians give accounts of Akan migrants in the Americas because of the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. About 10 percent of the slaves shipped from Ghana to the Americas were Akan (Konadu 2010).

5 Mmusua kuo (clans) is the plural form of abusua (clan). Members of the abusua are called abusuafuo in the Akan languages. Each abusua has unique characteristics and taboos.
An *abusua* is a social unit in which members of a specific lineage trace their existence to a common ancestress and share strong ties of kinship. That means the *abusua* identifies an Akan citizen to belong to a particular maternal ancestor. The *abusua* also underscores the ancestral cult where the living and dead connect. The eight consanguineal *abusua* with their totemic symbols and qualities are:

**Table 1: The Eight Akan Clans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abusua (Clan)</th>
<th>Totemic symbol</th>
<th>Symbolic quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aduana</td>
<td>Dog (with flames in the mouth)</td>
<td>Honesty and industriousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agona</td>
<td>Parrot</td>
<td>Eloquence and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asakyiri</td>
<td>Vulture</td>
<td>Calmness and patience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aseneɛ</td>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>Diplomacy and faithfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asona</td>
<td>Crow</td>
<td>Statesmanship and patriotism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biretuɔ</td>
<td>Leopard</td>
<td>Bravery and Aggressiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ɛkoɔna</td>
<td>Buffalo</td>
<td>Honesty and uprightness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ɔyokɔo</td>
<td>Hawk</td>
<td>Statesmanship, bravery and patience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Akan citizenship is by birth or affiliation into one of these matriclans. The group ideology has a consequent expression of unity in diversity. Other commonalities among the Akan may

---

7 The present researcher belongs to the Aduana clan of Wiamoase in the Ashanti region.
8 The grouping is expressed by the Akan proverb, *Abusua te se nhwiren, egogu akua-kuo*, meaning “The clan is like flowers, they blossom in clusters.” Translated by Rattray in Robert S. Rattray, *Ashanti Proverbs: (the primitive ethics of a savage people)* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1916), 125. A person cannot renounce citizenship of an *abusua* as the proverb says, *Abusua nte se asafo na yeako agye:* “Clan membership is unlike club membership where one can withdraw membership.” In some rare cases, an immigrant can attain Akan citizenship. An immigrant is known in the Akan language as *ɔhozo* in the narrow sense; the term denotes a stranger because of the mere fact that the person is without Akan citizenship. Any person without Akan citizenship residing in Akan land is *ɔhozo*. In its broader usage, any person (irrespective of a cultural group) can be a stranger in Akan land especially if one is not a citizen of the town. At some point, if a migrant desire a permanent residence within Akan community of residency, then affiliation to an Akan clan would be necessary for protection and integration purposes. Since the Akan tradition has no allowance for proselytism, such affiliations are duly recognized. If the migrant is a woman, her children become part of the clan she is affiliated to and the children have the right of inheritance from the mother’s bloodline. If a migrant man espouses an Akan woman, the children
include language, bilineal and matrilineal inheritance, unique naming ceremonies, traditional religion, festivals, and a monarchical succession of kingship and queenship (Pobee 1979: 44; De Graft-Johnson 1986: 83-84).9

4.2.2. The Human Being in Akan Anthropology

The Akan conception of the human being, personhood, and community is a social ontology. The social structure begins with the concept of the human being, known in Akan terminology as onipa (nipa is singular, and nnipa is plural). Onipa is the generic Akan term for the human being. Gyekye and Wiredu have identified the word as ambiguous because it expresses both the concept of the human as a “being” and the idea of a person as a degree of quality (Wiredu & Gyekye 1992). We can express these in two categories, i.e., descriptive and normative judgments. By descriptive judgment, onipa refers to the distinct features of a personal being called “human being” as opposed to an animal or a thing (Gyekye 2011). Phrases in the Akan language like ɔyɛ nipa, meaning “she is a human being,” and ɔnnye nipa, meaning “she is not a human being,” distinguish the human being from what is not human.

The second category presents the human being as a person, the criterion for moral judgment. Normative judgments like ɔyɛ nipa – “she is a person” – suggest the individual represents commendable social norms and standards such as kindness, generosity, sympathy, etc. (Gyekye 2011). The opposite, ɔnnye nipa – “she is inhuman” – indicates that the individual falls short of socially commendable norms and standards. It may suggest the person is unkind, corrupt, unloving, unfaithful, etc. These expressions of the human being provide the basic framework to construe Akan socio-religious and political structures.

Broadly, the Akan do not define a human being using physical components such as flesh and blood. The Akan indigenes perceive a human being as possessing immaterial, material, and social elements.10 These are ɔkra (aw-krah’), denoting “life-force,” mogya (mo-ja) meaning “blood,” ntorɔ (n-to-ro) representing “fatherhood,” nipadua (ni-pa-du-a) for “body,” and sunsum which communicates “spirit.” ‘kra and sunsum are immaterial by nature. The ‘kra is a life component responsible for life in the body.11 It is “the innermost self, the essence of the individual person,” and “the embodiment and transmitter of the individual’s destiny (fate:

---

9 John Pobee, an emeritus professor at the University of Ghana, explains that the Akwapim of Larteh and Mampong are exceptionally patrilineal (Pobee 1979: 44).
10 The term immaterial is used in this sense to denote non-physical and non-perceivable objects.
11 It is often shortened as ‘kra.
nkrabea). ‘Kra is the “spark of the Supreme Being,” “the divine essence” and the state of “having an antemundane existence” with God (Gyekye 1987: 85). This definition of the ‘kra gives it a spiritual nature, although arguments surround its pneumatic nature. In Akan religion, the ‘kra is deathless and its separation from the body is death. It is the reason why Akan people esteem the human being with a significant degree of sacredness, beginning from the time of conception until the post-mundane life of the individual as an ancestor. The ‘kra is the reason why Akan people say, “Nipa nyinaa ye Nyamemma, obi ara nnye asaa ba,” meaning “All human beings are the children of God and none is a child of the earth.” Thus, God is the origin of every human being.

Following the spiritual essence are the social biogenetics responsible for the social experience. These are ntorɔ, which means “semen” and symbolizes fatherhood or character resemblance, and mogya, meaning “blood” and intimates abusua or from the mother. These are biogenetics that give social affiliation to the Akan child. Ntorɔ is a genetic component emitted during sexual intercourse between a man and woman. Only males transmit ntorɔ (Rattray 1927: 319; 1929: 8). Its role accounts for the physiological mysteries of conception (Rattray 1923: 46). There is a general belief that ntorɔ is a tutelary spirit from a river god (Denteh 1967: 91, 92). There are twelve river gods recognized as being responsible for the donation of the ntorɔ. The river gods are behind the proto-psychological character from the father or members of the patrilineage (Denteh 1967: 96). Ntorɔ is not responsible for the physical resemblance of the child (Gyekye 1987: 226). Its operation is a spiritual input responsible for the individual’s degree of charisma and the degree of “personal presence that each develops at the appropriate stage” (Wiredu 1992: 196, 197). At death, the ntorɔ returns to the father’s family (Rattray 1957: 319). The mogya “represents a physiological bond to one’s mother and an independent membership into her clan (abusua), or maternal lineage” (Neville & Co. 2009: 51). The Akan matrilineal system, already mentioned, is based upon the mogya ideology to legitimate a person’s citizenship in Akan society and acquisition of ancestral status in the family.

The nipadua is only a physical material and the subject of perceptible experience of the whole human being. We can say it is that part of the human being we can feel by physical touch. The word nipadua is a compound from nipa (human being) and dua (tree). The Akan perceive the

---

12 The twelve river gods or ntorɔ groups are: Bosompra (Tough/Strong/Firm), Bosomtwe (Human/Kind/Empathetic), Bosombo/Bosomkôteaa (Proud/Audacious), Bosomafram (Liberal/Kind/Empathetic), Bosommuru (Respectable/ Distinguished), Bosomkonsi (The Virtuous), Bosomdweróbe (Eccentric/Jittery), Bosomayensu (Truculent), Bosomksika (Fastidious), Bosomkrete (Chivalrous), Bosomakim (Fanatic), Bosomafi (Chaste) (Rattray 1923: 47, 48; Denteh 1967: 96; Opoku 1978: 98).
figure of a human being like the shape of a tree with branches like hands and fingers, the leaves like the human head, the trunk standing like the body to the feet, and roots like the toes (Gyekye & Wiredu 1992). The *nipadua* has many biological components such as cells, tissues, muscles, and organs. Its formation begins from the womb after the immaterial and the biogenetics combine to form a fetus. The *nipadua* is temporal, suffers death and corruption, and there is no existence of it after death.

The next important aspect of the human being in Akan anthropology is the distinctive *sunsum*, an immaterial substance that defines personality and interacts and operates on various aspects of a person’s whole life, including the social, emotional, mental, and spiritual faculties. Scholars consider *sunsum* as the basis of the Akan concept of personhood since it expresses the qualities peculiar to one’s individuality – in both moral and ethical attributes (Opoku 1978: 96). *Sunsum* has a variety of contextual interpretations because it is not exclusive to the human being. In a broader sense, the term integrates ontological and epistemological realities to define Akan cosmology.

Now, it is proposed to offer a general panoramic look at the various meanings and interpretations given to *sunsum* in Akan worldviews. Further studies in the second part of the research will reveal more critical analyses and different dimensions relating to the historiography of *sunsum*. Our interest in the next section focuses on *sunsum* and the Akan worldview.

**4.3. What Is This Thing Called *Sunsum***

Our first question is an inquiry into the spiritual worldview of the Akan people. *Sunsum* is pronounced like the English “soon” and the Latin “sum” together. The term is enigmatic and ambiguous, and its meaning has puzzled many scholars studying Akan religion. Gyekye says it is the greatest difficulty in Akan metaphysics and a source of confusion (1987: 89). Ephirim-Donkor is an Akan scholar in religious studies and traditional chief of Gooma Mprumem in Ghana. He has written a lot on the subject and admitted that *sunsum* is a paradox and even an enigma (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 49). Part of the puzzle stems from different attempts to unravel its nature or to appropriate its essential conception in English translations. Few scholars have ventured, as far as possible, to investigate the meaning of the term. There is a unanimous conception that *sunsum* is a spirit, except for recent studies in quasi-physicalism that challenge

---

13 In some books, it is spelled *sumsum*. I can only think of this as a linguistic inflection of the term *sunsum* and not indigenous per se.
the pneumatic character to be incorrect and a conceptual blunder. This section will focus on introducing the various definitions given to sunsum, with a particular emphasis on a summary of the literature review of the meaning and nature of sunsum in academic circles.

Generally, the Akan believe sunsum is a spiritual, volatile, and dynamic substance that is present in natural objects, including human beings. It serves as the principle of personality and power for protection against attacks (Rattray 1955: 153). The idea of protection suggests that the sunsum is an astral vitality although it is considered to be the essence of the object in which it resides. Several Akan people accept sunsum as an activating principle of life in human beings and natural objects (Gyekye 1987: 75, 88, 98). It is an essence emanating directly or indirectly from God (Jawanza 2012: 79-80; Gyekye 1987: 73). According to some scholars, sunsum is the operational force for morality and that which is responsible for character, genius, temper, and quality (Molefi 1996: 453). Sunsum is the subject of experience, and it determines the spirituality of an individual or object. It is responsible for the formation and transformation of personality (ego) and the character in dreams (Ephirim-Donkor 2010: 90; Gyekye 1987: 89, 90, 102; Molefi 1996: 453; Wiredu 1987: 161).

There are different etymologies of the word sunsum. Danquah suggests that sunsum is an evolution of esu (nature/character). Esu means character or nature in Akan language. In Akan epistemology, esu expresses distinct features of an individual’s personality or the nature of a thing. Akan words like suban (character) and suman (amulet or charm) have their root in esu. Danquah describes esu as a form of “prime genetic basis for the origin of the social subject, i.e., man” (1968: 111). Esu is synonymous with personality, leaving little doubt as to why Danquah thinks sunsum is personality.

Danquah again observes the connection between the word esu and water (nsu), river (a/nsu), and rain (osu) (1968: 111). The relationship makes sunsum a compound of three words,
namely, *esu* “nature,” *nsu* “river,” and *mu* “inside.”18 The literal transliteration would mean “the nature/character/quality coming from the river.” Other conceptions of *sunsum* agree with this meaning. Rattray, Busia, Ephirim-Donkor, and others think *sunsum* is a tutelary vitality. The Akan do not consider rivers and water bodies as only natural objects. Water is associated with tutelary deities called Abosom (pl.). The Abosom (gods) are spirits that reside in rivers and bodies of water (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 54). Their essence is spiritual and known to Akan people as *sunsum* and are identified with water. The Abosom help in the procreation of human beings through a spiritual element they give called *ntorɔ* (semen). Akan people believe only males transmit *ntorɔ* during the act of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman (more details below).19 Scholars like Rattray, Minkus, Busia, Meyerowitz, Wiredu, Ephirim-Donkor, etc. have all associated *sunsum* and *ntorɔ* with the Abosom, and the two terms are often nuanced with each other (Rattray 1923: 46; Wiredu 1987: 161). The intervention of the Abosom in procreation makes every Akan, according to Ephirim-Donkor, “the Ṣbosom willed into the corporeal environment” (2016: 83). Thus, their spiritual presence in the individual defines the spiritual attributes of personality in life. In effect, *sunsum* is the nature or character of the tutelary deity (river god) responsible for life forms.20

There is another common school of thought which holds that *sunsum* is nothing but a shadow or image (Meyerowitz 1951; Ephirim-Donkor 2016). This school of thought parallels the inherent *sunsum* to the shadow of a person on a surface projected by rays of light. Ephirim-Donkor writes: “So a human being, for instance, though not a Sunsum because he or she is a physical being, has a Sunsum nonetheless, which becomes visible under a light” (2016: 46). Ephirim-Donkor shares two ideas here. First, there is the imperceptible *sunsum* (spirit) hidden from the reach of the physical eye, and the second is the perceptible *sunsum* (shadow) which is a reflection of the inherent *sunsum*. This striking scenario points to *sunsum* as an unseen non-human agency, active, and revealed under the exposure of light as the double of the person (shadow). *Sunsum*, like the shadow, is intangible, beyond the control of tangible objects, and is an “active agency making it a spirit” (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 40, 48). Those who advance the shadow thesis do so because the majority of Akan people call “shadow” *sunsum* in the local

18 There are so many compound words among the Akan that a non-Akan may have trouble understanding. For example, Koofori is a compound of Kofi-Ofori, Tweduampon which is a compound of Twere-dua-ampom. Other words include, *konua* (*kɔn-mu-dua*) means yoke; *sunsuma* (*sunsum-ba*) (shadow), *ewiase* (*owia-ase*) meaning world, *nkrabea* (*nkra-bea*) denoting destiny, and many others.
19 For further studies on the relationship between water and Abosom, see Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 50-55.
20 This understanding falls within the methodological framework of this research, and it is my purpose to critically probe whether the primal conception of the *sunsum* whether is indeed from the tutelary deities or God or both.
languages, even though the “shadow” is not identical with the intrinsic sunsum. This notion seems to be a misnomer. The Akan name for shadow is sunsum ba, “child of sunsum,” or often shortened as sunsuma; hence asunsumabo, “to cast stones at a shadow.”21 Sunsuma is a term given to the dark reflection of a physical object illuminated by light rays. The name also suggests the physical presence of the invisible sunsum. This does not mean the two are identical or same. Akan thinkers do not have a dichotomy of a mystical sunsum (spirit) and physical sunsum (shadow). After all, Akan people do not consider the shadow to be mystical although superstitious myths exist around it, and no ritual is ever associated with a person’s shadow.

In connection with the shadow thesis of sunsum is darkness. The suffix of sunsum is sum, from esum (darkness). Sunsum, although not the same as darkness, may carry connotations of an intrinsic darkness and elusiveness (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 48). Darkness is the antithesis of light; it conceals visible objects from the naked eyes. The Akan spiritual worldview carries a similar idea of privacy, secrecy, and a world of entities that are invisible to the naked eyes. Ephirim-Donkor says, “all ethereal phenomena are subsumed under Sunsum, because, figuratively, anything that people do not understand or observe and yet think to be real or there is time tested” (2016: 48). The spiritual agencies are invisible, but they are capable of revealing themselves in the corporeal world. The suffix sum (dark) is a reminder of the mystical nature of sunsum, which Ephirim-Donkor thinks is always a mystery (2016: 48).

In summary, the section has dealt with the various meanings and etymology of the term sunsum. The different meanings of the word reveal the difficulty that students of Akan religion confront in their attempt to find a common meaning of sunsum. There are more dimensions of sunsum to look at in order to understand the overall usage of the term among Akan people. We will proceed to consider how sunsum underlines the conceptual framework of the meaning of reality and its consequences on ideas, values, and people’s attitude towards life.

4.4. Sunsum in the Akan Worldview

The first attempt to understand the Akan spiritual worldview will be a reassessment of its material and metaphysical conceptions. The two most fundamental terms to consider are wiase, translated into English as the “corporeal world,” and sunsum mu, translated into English as “spiritual.” 22 Wiase is a compound of owia (sun) and ase (under/below), i.e., “under the sun.”

---

21 Sunsuma (sunsum ba) is a shade or shadow (Christaller 1881: 464). Among the Ga people of Ghana, sunsuma means “spirit,” an equivalent of the Akan sunsum.

22 Even though a majority of scholars have translated sunsum mu as “spiritual,” I think it should rather be translated into English as “mystical” or “world of mystical forces,” based on reasons given in my discussion of sunsum and
Wiase involves all that pertains to the world under the sun. It is the world of natural objects comprising all objects under the category of visible objects that are observable in the world of natural phenomena (Gyekye 1987: 69). These may include animate and inanimate objects such as human beings, animals, trees and plants, rivers, stones and mountains, moon and stars, air and the sky, and all other things that are perceptible to human senses.

The metaphysical world, known as sunsum mu or the non-perceivable, involves all objects conceived and perceived in abstract terms and are physically nonconceptual (Wiredu 1987: 165; Gyekye 1987: 69). Sunsum mu is a realm other than the physical universe of matter. This assumption does not mean that sunsum mu is a specific universe outside our physical world; that explanation creates a dualistic view of the Akan universe. As we will explain later, the Akan universe is an inspired world. Sunsum mu is mystical, comprising abstract realities and beings including God, pantheon deities, spirits, forces, and other psycho-dimensional experiences such as in dreams and divination. In modern Akan linguistics, a phrase like wiase mu nsem, meaning “matters of the world,” has become the generic phrase to convey Akan’s cosmological interpretation of both the physical and non-physical world.

From this background, we understand the basis of the Akan cosmological conception of the universe as a composition of matter and a metaphysical world (Gyekye 1987: 69). Despite the seemingly dualistic cosmological ideology, contemporary Akan thinkers argue that there is an interpenetrating unity between these two-dimensional worlds, making it one and conveying the idea of the universe as one inspired universe. Akan religion postulates the physical universe as being ruled by the immaterial dimension of the world of powerful spirits and hypnotic forces that impinge on the material world; this conception explains why Akan people attribute physical causalities to the spiritual (to be described shortly). Reality is defined in connection with the spiritual world, although the physical world is also real (Minkus 1980: 182; Gyekye 1987: 69; Wiredu 1998: 29; Ephirim-Donkor 2010: 123). This definition of reality forms the foundation of Akan epistemologies and ontologies.

The Akan worldview focuses on two dimensions of both the spiritual and physical world. First, there are the mystical forces and entities: God, pantheon deities, ancestors, and other spirits.

---

honhom in chapter seven. The usual connotation given to sunsum mu expresses mystical forces. This argument is highlighted in my research, and further discussions will be provided in the subsequent chapters in an attempt to show that both sunsum mu and honhom mu may be identical and are in fact often used interchangeably. However, the separation here should not be seen as awkward, as further discussion will show that the two are not synonymous and that one has an ephemeral phenomenon while the other is eternal – not limited by time and space. For clarity, we will abide by the ordinary understanding of sunsum mu as “spiritual world” until further critical analysis has been rendered.
These form the basis for pneumatological studies and represent an essential cue to the expression of Christian thoughts and learning among the Akan. The second is the world of natural objects, comprising the concept of the human being, animals, plants, and all other objects perceptible to the human senses. Natural objects are animated by the spiritual and the relationship between the two is ontological. We will look at these two main categories in order to define the various terminologies and how they help to form the bases for further investigation.

4.4.1. The Supreme Deity (Onyankopɔn)

Akan spirituality is rooted in belief in a unique God named Nyankopɔn or Onyame Kwame, “Great God of Saturday.” In other words, “He whose day (of birth or worship) is Saturday” (Danquah 1968: 30). He is the creator (ɔbɔadeɛ), sustainer of life, the highest spirit-being, and progenitor of all, who lives in all. According to the Akan proverb, Obi nkyere abɔfra Nyame, meaning, “Nobody teaches the child to know God,” the Akan God is an absolute reality, self-revealing, and self-evident (Gyekye 1987: 70). Nyankopɔn is a suprasensible deity transcending all in God’s absolute reality. The various myths attach anthropomorphic characteristics to God as the great ancestor (Nana Nyankopɔn). Among the Akan, belief in God as the creator affects everyday life and activities because they believe God is immanent in the universe and present in us. God rules both the wiase (material) and sunsum mu (spiritual) world.

4.4.2. The Pantheon Deities (Abosom)

Akan people believe in pantheon deities or tutelary gods. These are localized and geographical protective deities that identify themselves with a group of people in a given place. One of such deities is the great god of the Tano River, often known as Ta Kora in the Ashanti region. Ta

---

23 Nyankopɔn or Onyankopɔn expresses the same idea of the unique God of the Akan. Akan people often use the name Nyankopɔn interchangeably with the distinctive Nyame, the generic name for the deity. The designation of Nyame to God perhaps evolved from “nyame” or “anyame” (gods) to disassociate the Supreme God from the pantheon deities.

24 The Tano River is a legendary river in Ghana. It rises from Techiman in the Brong Ahafo region and flows southeastward about 250 miles (400 km) through Ehy Lagoon, Tendo Lagoon and finally Aby Lagoon in Ivory Coast to join the Atlantic Ocean. The river occupies great significance in the making of a shrine among the Akan people. It is esteemed to be the greatest of all the gods. Ta Kora is the religious name given to the god of the river. Ta is the shortened form of Tano, being the name of the river. Kora is an Akan word that means “to keep” or “mend,” and that suggests the importance of this god as the keeper and protector of the people. Kora is most of the time confused with akora, which means an old man. According to legend, when “the Supreme Being was premeditating as to where he should set down the abodes of his children on earth, the goat heard of it and being a great friend of Bea [a river in Ghana] ran and told him that when his father sent for Tanno and him, he should rise up and go very quickly so that he should arrive there before his brother. So, when the children were called before their father, Bea came first and his father, as a reward, set his abode down in the coolness and shade of the forest country, whereas Tanno was given a home in the more open grass lands. In consequence, to this day the followers
Kora is one of the children of Nyankopɔn (so ascribed to other popular gods) and progenitor of several lesser deities (Rattray 1915: 146; 1955: 54). The Akan pantheon deities entail myriad gods acting as intermediaries between human beings and Nyankopɔn. Their roles as intermediaries make them superintendents of daily affairs. The Akan explanation for this mediation is in the belief of the absolute sovereignty of the supreme God whom they should approach according to what he prescribes. Others argue that God cannot be approached lightly or bothered with trivial affairs of human beings; therefore, he works in tandem with lesser deities that act in God’s stead as mediators, i.e., the Abosom “pantheon of gods” (Pobee 1979: 46; Gyekye 1987: 68, 69).

The essential description of the pantheon deities as children of God makes them inherently powerful like God. As spirits, they can penetrate the natural world through natural elements and means. Hence, they are able to take temporary residence in natural objects such as stones, trees, rivers, mountains, etc. to exercise their external manifestation to the natural world, especially to the person they desire to use as a point of contact. Several Akan people perceive these suprasensible beings in nature as sunsum. Consequently, it is held that everything has sunsum, meaning everything can exercise power. In Akan religion, God is not in matter, neither is He a distant God from His creation as may be understood in deistic theories. God transcends all things; it is the lesser deities who are identified as taking residence in natural objects. Therefore, animism can be a loose term to describe the Akan religion in general. But it cannot be ruled out that the concepts of panentheism and panpsychism are not in themselves principles of animism. How good are the pantheon deities to the Akan?

The gods are protective agents, and their work is to protect their people and the environment from harm. Nevertheless, they possess the potency to inflict evil. Breach of social norms (taboos) may incur the wrath of the gods, and without hesitation, they can respond with uncontrollable plagues. The situation will call for ritual sacrifices and pacifications to appease the gods in order to restore normalcy; this makes the nature of the gods partly good and evil. The lesser deities exercise absolute independent authority of their will, even though God created them (Gyekye 1996: 12).

The Akan religion has officials who have excellent knowledge about the religion. Among them are the traditional priests or priestesses through whom the gods manifest their presence. Akan

of Tanno, ‘turn their back on’, or ‘hate’, i.e. taboo the flesh of the goat” (Rattray 1915: 46, 47; Ref. Rattray 1955: 145-6).
people call these individuals Akomfoɔ, meaning “traditional priests.” Erstwhile missionaries demonized these individuals by calling them names like witch doctors and fetish priests. Their call to the priestly cult is personal and they serve as mediums for one or more of the gods.

4.4.3. Ancestors and other Spirits in Akan Cosmology

Next to the Abosom are the ancestors known in Akan languages as Nananom Nsamanfoɔ, or Mpanyinfoɔ; these ancestors are deceased family members. In the Akan religion, it is the matrilineal clan that confers ancestral status on the individual. These apotheosized beings, who were once among the living but have departed to Asamando, “the spirit world of the dead,” are said to be powerful to help their affiliates in the world. Their presence is summoned in prayer invocations through the pouring of libation, an act of summoning the benevolent spirits in the atmosphere. Ephirim-Donkor’s book, African Religion Defined: A Systematic Study of Ancestor Worship among the Akan thematizes on the subject of the relationship between the departed souls and the living, which forms an integral part of the African traditional religions.

The reverence given to the ancestors is periodic and ceremonial. Akan people do not worship their ancestors as they do to the deities; this is because the ancestors do not possess ultimate powers in themselves and neither are they counted among the lesser deities. There are no altars erected for the ancestors except the ancestral stools believed to contain the sunsum of the ancestors. An Akan will bow down before an altar erected for the lesser deities instead of bowing down before ancestral stools. The religious space for the ancestors is only for benevolence and is very much communal. Ancestors are benevolent spirits in the same way angels are benevolent spirits in Christianity. The concept of ancestors further expresses solidarity and communality since the Akan community “consists of the living, the dead, and the yet-to-be-born” (Pobee 1979: 49).

The ancestral cult has strong significance in terms of showing that life does not end in death. The general conception is that life is a journey and death is only a state of departure from the physical world to the spiritual realm of the dead (Asamando). After the ‘kra separates from the body, it does not make its final abode with God in heaven as is understood in the doctrines

---

25 This is not a separation per se because the belief in ancestors solidifies the bond between the dead and the living.
of Judaism and Christianity about the return of the soul to God.\textsuperscript{26} The ‘kra travels to the ancestral world, making the process of life among the Akan linear rather than cyclical.\textsuperscript{27} There are other spirits in Akan cosmology involved in human affairs apart from the ancestors. The religious belief that the universe is populated with evil spirits and powers that work to alter individuals’ destiny is interwoven with many aspects of life. Each ŋkra enters the mundane world with a specific destiny imposed by God. The Akan idea of destiny is positive in the sense that it determines the totality of the various temporal events and occurrences that bring luck to the person. It is by default an existential condition of a person’s spiritual and social wellness in life. The ability of evil forces to alter destiny exposes their evil nature and antagonism against humanity; few of these evil spirits are mentioned in Akan mythology. For example, sasabonsam is a forest monster, the prince of evil powers, and the master of evil acts (Pobee 1978: 48). Sasabonsam works in tandem with other cohorts, such as witches and evil dwarfs (mmoatia) who come under his command. Many human sufferings, such as sicknesses, accidents, barrenness, and all other suspicious ailments and misfortunes are said to be the result of their evil schemes. The dwarfs possess magical powers with which they can induce a person or lead one astray in the forest. Legend says they possess the secrets of healing and can train a person to become a magician.

\textit{4.4.4 The World of Natural Objects}

The world of natural objects is the physical world of experience. As previously indicated, these are objects under the sun that are subject to the animation of the spiritual world (sunsum mu) as well as the natural laws of physics. The most important to our present study is the human being who is the criterion of judgment within a given social experience or geographical context and the focus of anthropological discourses.

\textsuperscript{26} Ephirim-Donkor seems to propose the idea that the departed ŋkra lives in heaven, thus creating the impression of the return of the ŋkra to God (Ephirim-Donkor 1997: 87). However, a careful reading of Ephirim-Donkor reveals his use of heaven as a metaphorical interchange of the ancestral world (Ephirim-Donkor 1997: 52). Though his explanation makes sense, it does not justify the use of heaven as an accurate term in this context in the sense that such a terminology has no significant meaning in Akan traditional religion. It again carries an implicit theology that can mislead readers to think otherwise. Further critique on this is issued in Kofi Opoku Asare’s review of Ephirim-Donkor’s book \textit{African Religion Defined: A Systematic Study of Ancestor Worship Among the Akan} (Opoku Asare 1998).

\textsuperscript{27} The departed ŋkra does not wander to seek for a place of abode. The Akan believe in various rituals performed for the dead as a send-off to the ancestral world, which may include funerals and forty-day celebrations. The departed ŋkra knows where it is going; indeed, there are only few instances whereby the departed ŋkra will wander around. For example, Akan people believe the spirits of individuals who have died through accidents and suicides wander. These kinds of death are known as atsfowuo (premature death). It means the person’s destiny is altered. The akra of these individuals do not travel to the ancestral world; instead, they wander around revealing themselves to people.
In summary, the recent spread of Christian ideas has disrupted the Akan worldview, leading to a conflict of faith whereby many Akan Christian adherents are regularly caught in the web of traditional religion. There exists a constant fear of evil spirits and malediction from the spiritual world. Consequently, many Akan Christians tend to consult the gods they have previously denounced for protection. While they do not quit the Church, their faith is rather shaped, partly, by their traditional worldviews. In a deeper sense, many of them are struggling with the question of identity.

Again, today’s global influences, such as technology and education, are shaping how most Akan people perceive the world and live their lives. Sociologists and anthropologists have called this the social revolution. In part, we can see positive consequences regarding Ghana’s integration into the larger global sphere of communication, trade, and international relations for the common good. On the other hand, global integration raises the question of being, social organization, and habits that we must readjust into new situations because of social changes (Busia 1955: 16, 17). Most of the time, the latter fails and spawns a double standard of life or multifarious conflicts (Busia 1955).

4.5. **Sunsum in Akan Anthropology**

4.5.1. The Origin of Sunsum

It can be noted from the previous sections the various enigma posed by the meaning of *sunsum*. In this section, we will explore in greater length some of these difficulties, particularly the question of *sunsum*’s origin or source. Critical examination of the nature of *sunsum* requires an assessment of indigenous conception. The purpose of that assessment is to separate etic ramifications, i.e. descriptive view of the researcher, from emic conceptual epistemologies, i.e. objective view from the social group. Hence, we are going to begin a critical quest to establish some facts about Akan ontologies in order to lay the foundation for the development of a contextual Akan pneumatology.

There are currently two schools of thought concerning the origin of *sunsum* to occupy our attention. The first school of thought relates *sunsum* to the pantheon gods or tutelary deities, who through a male agent transmit their *sunsum* to a child. This conception reiterates the interpenetrating relationship between the spiritual and physical world. With that conception, *sunsum* becomes an essential quality of the deities that only males are capable of transmitting or passing to their offspring. The implication of this idea seems to be the reason why Akan people say that Ṣbaa nni sunsum, meaning, “a woman does not have *sunsum,*” or what some
accounts explain to mean men are more inspired than women. The rationality stems from the masculine mediumship of the sunsum. The gods choose males to transmit the sunsum for reasons that I will show later. For now, the sunsum makes each person bear the essence of the Obosom (god). Ephirim-Donkor (2016: 83) writes, “an Obosom, as Sunsum (spirit), is transmitted through a father’s semen (huaba/ntoro) during a sexual act analogous to spirit alightment during divination rites.” He then asserts a similar idea that “[t]he Abosom created life-forms that were of the same essence as themselves, comprised of the blood (Mogya) or matter, and spirit (Sunsum) as an activating agency” (2016: 152). Some scholars in this school of thought include Rattray, Mayerowitz, Busia, and Minkus. More will be said about these scholars in subsequent chapters.

The second school of thought is theocentric, which argues in favor of a panentheistic God whose sunsum vivifies the natural world. Danquah and Gyekye agree on this notion of the sunsum as a divine essence, even though they disagree in their conceptual understanding about the nature of sunsum. Danquah postulates: “Nyankopon is the Sunsum of Odomankoma, the Experience of Ultimate Being… Nyankopon is already an expression of Odomankoma, his Sunsum” (1956: 123). Gyekye likewise asserts that “sunsum derives ultimately from Onyame who, as the Supreme Being, is the Highest Spirit or Highest Power” (1987: 73). The concept of panentheism relegates the tutelary deities to positions of little involvement in life-forms. If anything they, too, like all other things, are animated by the sunsum of God. Does that prevent them from transmitting sunsum? We will investigate this question later. A contribution to this school of thought is Agyarko’s Onyame Sunsum (God’s spirit) and Sunsum Kronkron (Holy Spirit) pneumatology.

4.6. Various Categories of Sunsum

4.6.1. Sunsum in Sleep Peregrination

The idea of sleep peregrination of the sunsum in dreams is common in Akan worldview. An astral voyage occurs when the sunsum temporally vacates the body during nightly peregrinations in dreams, returning or not returning to its owner (Opoku 1978: 96; Appiah 1992: 157). A person is likely to die without the sunsum. This phenomenon happens when another spiritual force, such as a witch, attacks the person’s sunsum. The sunsum is dynamic,

---

28 The maxim is used metaphorically and comparatively to show that females possess a small portion of the father’s sunsum, hence are not high-spirited or able to transmit sunsum like men do. I intend to offer more details in Chapter Six.
making it liable to the manipulation of evil forces, either for good or evil purposes. Witchcraft is nothing but a sunsum that has become evil. The intrinsic vitality of sunsum is what makes witchcraft a superhuman phenomenon capable of attacking people during their sleep. The Akan use this rationale to objectify spiritual illness and misfortunes. Hence, religion and healing practices are indispensable. Some individuals are resistant to spiritual attacks. A person’s sunsum can act as protective paraphernalia against witches if that person has a strong sunsum (ne sunsum mu ye duru). A strong sunsum is the most effective protection against witchcraft (Opoku 1978: 97). Individuals with light sunsum (ne sunsum mu ye hare) are most vulnerable to witchcraft attacks.

4.6.2. Sunsum in Akan Mediumistic Experience

Akan mediumistic experience may also help in understanding the mystical operations of the sunsum and how a supernatural encounter with a human being has a close connection with the sunsum. Akɔm is a religious performance in Akan religion that entails the composition of a traditional ensemble of percussion, characterized by ecstatic experience of the supernatural in which a spiritual agent descends or alights on the Ɔkɔmfo (traditional priest) who serves the spirit. Akɔmfo (pl.) are cultic priests with a special call from the gods, who are trained to serve the gods’ interest for the good of the community. Their primary roles involve mediation between the natural and spiritual worlds. Traditional priests are religious leaders who offer sacrifices and intercede on behalf of people in various prayer rituals. They possess healing abilities, can exorcize witchcraft, and can communicate with the ancestors. They live in shrines dedicated to gods, and in some cases have intimate ties to the kingship.

Akɔmfo command great authority because they occupy the “highest socio-religious and spiritual estate, vested in the esoterica of ritual application and processes” (Ephirim-Donkor 2008: 56). The Akɔmfo undergo ecstatic prophesying when one or more of the deities take control of the consciousness through alighting, characterized by a state of trance or prophesying (akɔm). The Ɔkɔmfo becomes the medium of speech for the gods when the trance status is reached. The priest under ecstatic experience loses consciousness, his body shivers, he becomes uncontrollable, exhibits unusual strength, dances, jumps, falls, rolls on the ground, and may display diverse paranormal phenomena. Two or three, or more priests can experience spontaneous frenzy. Akan people judge this experience as the activation of the sunsum of the Ɔkɔmfo by spiritual agents. The deities inform the Ɔkɔmfo about what they want or what to reveal through the sunsum (Gyekye 1987: 102). Without the sunsum, a person may lack
transcendental rationality, or it may be impossible for any extrasensory experience to take place. The *sunsum* acts as a unifying force between the physical and spiritual, and often transposes itself into various dynamic interactions outside one’s body.

### 4.6.3. Sunsum as a Revengeful Force

There is a strong assertion of a telepathic interception between people’s *sunsum*. A majority of Akan believe a person’s *sunsum* can intercept another. For example, legend says a husband’s *sunsum* can seize his adulterous woman. It follows that the husband’s *əkra* will alert his *ntɔrɔ*, who will inform the husband’s *sunsum* to punish the woman. Hence, the saying *Me kunu sunsum akye me*, “My husband’s *sunsum* has seized me.” If the woman refuses to confess, the *sunsum* of the husband may kill her (Rattray 1955: 154). Some use this phenomenon as a basis for an entitative characterization of the nature of *əkra*, *ntɔrɔ*, and *sunsum*. Further analysis will challenge this interpretation, and even if one considers them as entities, for argument’s sake, then how many entities form the human being? The concept of consubstantial entities (hypostases) as found, for instance, in the Trinitarian conception, is absent in Akan anthropology. The various immaterial substances work in ways that are so mysteriously woven together to make a complete human being.

### 4.6.4. Sunsum in Akan Psychology

There is the psychological dimension of experience, which confers a psychical effect to *sunsum*. An Akan figurative speech goes like this, *Wo reku me sunsum*, “You are hurting my [soul] emotions.” Hatred, anger, evil thoughts, and other emotional burdens may ramp up against oneself or someone because the *sunsum* is sensitive to these psychological effects. Evil thoughts, whether self-inflicted or inflicted by another person, can overshadow or suppress the *sunsum* of an individual, resulting in sickness. In spite of this, this conception recapitulates why moral and ethical behavior is dependent upon one’s *sunsum*. It also expresses the relationship between the mind and body. Akan culture has a process of carefully dealing with the ill-effects of the mind through a formal ceremony of confession called *Apo* festival. During this celebration, individuals express uninhibitedly to another – including the king – what they think about them, without apprehension. In a practical sense, a person’s *sunsum* is supposed to be relieved from pain and evil thoughts (Rattray 1923: 153; Opoku 1978: 97).

### 4.6.5. The Collective Sunsum: Sika Dwa Kofi (The Golden Stool)
Besides the operation of the *sunsum* in the different dimensions of individual lives, families and groups may also have their *sunsum*, which holds their souls together. The sacred stool, or *Sika Dwa Kofi*, is said to contain the *sunsum* of the Ashantes (Figure 4). The history behind the stool epitomizes political power and patriotism among the Ashantes. Legend says Ōkomfo Anɔkye, the then supreme priest and friend of Osei-Tutu I, king of Kumasi and founder of the Ashanti nation, called for the stool from the sky, all covered partly with pure gold and rested on the lap of Osei-Tutu I, signifying the right of leadership of the Asante Confederacy.²⁹ Anɔkye decreed that nothing would harm the Ashante nation as long as they kept the Golden Stool.³⁰ He further cautioned the Ashantes to keep the stool from destruction or from being stolen, else “as a man sickens and dies whose *sunsum* during life has wandered away or has been injured by some other *sunsum*, so would the Ashanti nation sicken and lose its vitality and power” (Rattray 1923: 289, 290).³¹ The *Sika Dwa Kofi* represents the communal spirituality and serves as a unifying force or “a sacred place where the spirits could cool down, and the spiritual energy could flow openly between the ancestors, the clans and individuals” (Müller 2013: 123). Great reverence is attached to the Golden Stool, which is tightly guarded as a man will guard his *sunsum*, for whatever happens to it – good or bad – affects the nation (Opoku 1978: 97, 98). The collective *sunsum* gives us another perspective to understand the *sunsum* and its operations. Further analysis will bring out answers to questions like the source of the collective *sunsum* of the Golden Stool and how it helps to understand the nature of *sunsum* for the development of a contextual Christian pneumatology.

### 4.7. Conclusion

²⁹ Ōkomfo Anɔkye was a traditional priest and one of the legends of the Asante kingdom whose spiritual powers and wisdom helped the leadership of Osei-Tutu I in the 17th century to unify the Ashanti nation. Ōkomfo Anɔkye drafted the stratification of the Ashanti kingdom, kingship, and its constitution. He holds great prominence in Asante history, and many traditional songs hail his heroism.

³⁰ In 1900, the British attempted to seize the Golden Stool from the Ashantes. On 25 March 1900, Sir Frederick Mitchell Hodgson, then British governor to the Gold Coast (Ghana), met the Ashante leadership in Kumasi and requested to sit on the Golden Stool. The Ashantes saw the request as open defiance of the kingdom since a foreigner has no right to the stool. Hodgson also made it clear to the Ashantes that their king Prempeh I would be permanently exiled from the kingdom. The Ashantes, led by Yaa Asantewaa, the queen mother of Ejisu, mobilized their army against the British. The war ended in severe fatalities on both sides, but the Ashantes were defeated and Yaa Asantewaa, including several traditional leaders, were exiled to the Seychelles Island where she also died in 1921. The British could not retrieve the Golden Stool and never saw it. Read more from Louise Müller 2013.

³¹ Rattray recounts an attempt to replicate the Golden Stool by Adinkra, the king of Gyaman. He “saw or heard of the Golden Stool of Coomasie and made one similar to it. This so enraged the king of the Ashanti that he led an army against Adinkra, completely vanquished that chief near Bontuku (now French Ivory Coast) and cut off Adinkra’s head. This caused that chief’s golden stool to be melted down and cast into two masks representing Adinkra’s face; the masks were then hung on each side of the Golden Stool” (Rattray 1923: 291).
This chapter has, in part, discussed the essential basic framework for understanding *sunsum* in Akan worldviews and anthropology. We have noted the multivalent character of *sunsum* and how the various meanings imply an extensive polysemy of the term. Akan cosmology is an inspired world of spiritual and natural objects. The mystical, often known as *sunsum mu*, comprises varying degrees of spiritual entities and forces that exercise power over the world of natural phenomena. Entities include ‘Nyankopɔn (God), *Abosom* (pantheon deities), *NananomNsamanfɔn* (ancestors), *Sasabonsam* (wizard), *Abayifɔn* (witches), *Mmoatia* (dwarfs), and all animating forces belong to the *sunsum mu*. Along these lines, we understand *sunsum* to as all spiritual beings and forces in Akan ontology. Although the natural world of phenomena is real to human beings, the spiritual is the realest because causal realities in the natural world are often attributed to the spiritual. Everything in its natural state is animated by *sunsum* to exercise power for either good or bad. Here lies the spiritual rationality behind the Akan socio-religious practices and beliefs and the factors which shape the Akan worldview.

As to the question of the nature of *sunsum*, several questions need to be raised for further investigation. Should we understand *sunsum* in relation to the pantheon deities or directly from God, or both? How does that understanding affect the way Akan people perceive the nature of *sunsum? These questions require a historical inquiry, and this will be the focus of the next chapter.
PART TWO
THE GENESIS OF AKAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE SUNSUM HISTORIOGRAPHY

OWIA REPUE
“Rising sun”
Adinkra symbol of life-spark, progress, warmth, renewal, development, and vitality.
Chapter 5
The “Big Bang” of Akan Ethnography

“May those Africans who are enjoying the benefit of a Christian education make the best of the privilege; but let them not despise the sparks of truth entrusted to and preserved by their own people and let them not forget that by entering into their way of thinking and by acknowledging what is good and expounding what is wrong they will gain the more access to the hearts and minds of their less favored countrymen”—Johann Gottlieb Christaller, 1879.¹

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter has outlined the basic framework for understanding Akan anthropology and the concept of sunsum. The study raised questions about the nature and source of sunsum for further investigation. This chapter begins a thorough investigation into the meaning and nature of sunsum to find possible answers to the questions. The investigation will involve a historical understanding of the evolution of the meaning of sunsum since the early years of Akan scholarship to assess the various ideological trajectories and the contribution of scholars of Akan studies. The necessity of this investigation is that the meaning of sunsum has been ambiguous, in the sense that opinions exist and differ. There is also the problem of linguistics resulting from the English translation of sunsum as “spirit.” It seems the word “spirit” has become the closest translation of sunsum into English. This is not done for the sake of convenience, but some argue that sunsum is philosophically equivalent to the English term “spirit.” The result has propagated the pneumatic character of sunsum. Scholars who are not satisfied with this translation question whether there is any philosophical exactness between the Akan concept of sunsum and the Western conception of spirit. Wiredu and Gyekye battle this semantic inflection in the debate between the pneumatic character of sunsum and the philosophy of quasi-physicalism.

That said, we are faced not only with conceptual difficulties but also with philosophical interpretations and even more, as we will see in the progress of the study. Therefore, a historiographical approach is adopted here to investigate the historical thinking of scholars studying the Akan concept of sunsum. Of significance, we will take into consideration the historical development of the meaning of sunsum and how scholars from different fields of

study understood it and their impact on later scholars and socio-religious reforms. We will first begin by looking at one of the foremost scholars who studied Akan religion in the early twentieth century with a particular emphasis on the *sunsum* concept, namely Robert Sutherland Rattray (1881-1938). Rattray, a Scotsman, worked in Ghana as a colonial official and anthropologist.\(^2\) In doing this, I will review his ethnographical definition of *sunsum*. In the end, it is my purpose to present the best possible perspective of his characterization of *sunsum* and how such description has contributed to Akan literature and ideas.

### 5.2. Introduction to Akan Scholarship

The nineteenth century was a literary evolution for Akan studies. It became a period of scientific excavation of Akan traditional concepts for academic learning. The trajectories of that evolution can still be felt today. Indeed, the scientific method has had extensive coverage of studies that continue to stimulate academic interest and social reforms. It has also helped to shape the imaginations of many Ghanaians for the future. This present discussion of the concept of *sunsum* is one aspect that continues to shape Akan worldviews in the academic world and in socio-religious sectors. While it is deemed fair to explore the various categories of *sunsum*, it also requires a straightforward and constructive approach towards the development of a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary scientific study.

#### 5.2.1. Johann Gottlieb Christaller: A Precursor of Akan Scholarship

Akan scholarship is a significant area of research in the global academic sphere for reasons ranging from its extraordinary cultural richness to its pervasiveness in the Ghanaian socio-political and religious constructions. The genesis was an ethnographic big bang that for many years was going to change the way many Ghanaians live their lives. Its inception dates back to the early years of European presence in Ghana (then Gold Coast). Johann Gottlieb Christaller (1827-1895) was a German missionary, lexicographer, and philologist for the Basel Mission whose arrival in Ghana defined new methods of Christian missiology in the country, and who also gave great importance to the Twi language of the Akan (Figure 2). Christaller’s primary mission was to engage Christian missions with the vernacular of the indigenous Akan people of Akuapem. It was also his intention to provide a structured language for both Europeans and indigenous missionaries working among the Akan. As far as Akan studies are concerned, he became the architect of Twi scholarship.

---

\(^2\) Ghana used to be called Gold Coast then.
Christaller was sent to Ghana by the Basel Mission of Switzerland. He arrived in Ghana in 1853. Before his arrival, the Twi language was only spoken, never written. Twi scholarship mainly owes its origin to him. He transformed the oral traditions into literary scholarship which became the *modus operandi* of reaching the Akan indigenes in Ghana. Christaller believed the preservation of the Ghanaian vernacular could be useful knowledge for spiritual growth. Some scholars think otherwise and suggest that Christaller had nationalistic motives to give preeminence to the Ghanaian language over English as a counter-culture to the European Enlightenment that gave superiority to Western civilization (Hauser-Renner 2009). This is true of a man of a philological caliber. Christaller is reported to have protested against attempts to publish the Basel Mission Akan/Twi periodical *Christian Messenger* in English. He is quoted saying, “I . . . beg all true patriots among our Gold Coast Christians to watch over the purity of their own vernacular language, their mother tongue, and to help to cultivate it to the benefit of their own nation.” Christaller’s passion to transform the oral culture of Akan people into literary history was the basis of his academic and spiritual contribution to the then Gold Coast. His most successful contribution to Akan literature and Ghana’s nationalism was the translation of the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek to the Akan Twi languages. Indeed, his works in the vernacular were “a manifesto of cultural nationalism” (Sanneh 1993: 83).

Christaller, in collaboration with an indigenous missionary, David Asante, and other Akan indigenes began translating the Gospels and Acts into Akuapem-Twi. The completion took place in Switzerland where Christaller had retreated due to poor health and was published in 1859. The presence of David Asante in Switzerland facilitated the translation. Both returned to Ghana in 1862 where they began translating the Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians). The Epistles of 1 Timothy, Philemon, and Hebrews were completed in 1863. With the help of other translators, Christaller and his team finished translating the New Testament in 1866, adding the Psalms and Proverbs. The complete edition of the entire Bible was published in 1871 by the British and Foreign Bible Societies (BFBS) (Worae 2016: 19,

---

3 Ghana became the Basel Mission’s first and most successful missionary field in Africa after their first operation in the Middle East, specifically in Iran, had failed.
4 Two other missionaries by the names Andreas Riis and his nephew H. N. Riis had already begun the development of the Twi grammar. Andreas Riis produced a dictionary of about 1200 Twi words which was later expanded by H. N. Riis and published in German in 1853 and again in English in 1854. What makes Christaller stand out was his significant contribution in publishing in the Twi language. He is remembered for his immense contribution to West African linguistics in general “because he analyzed the characteristic vowel harmony system and the tone system […], their significance for the grammar.” E. K. Brown and Sarah Ogilvie. *Concise Encyclopedia of Languages of the World* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), 18.
5 Johann G. Christaller, *Christian Messenger for Basel German Mission Church on the Gold Coast, W. Africa* (a bimonthly paper) 2, no. 12 (December 1888), 198.
6 Ibid., 198.
20). In the inner cover of the Bible is the following inscription in bold letters, “The Holy Bible, translated from the original tongues into the Tshi (Chwee) language spoken by the tribes of Akuapem, Akem, Asante, Fante Etc., Gold Coast, Western Africa” (Figure 3). Here, we see the empowerment of the local dialects already at work as a vehicle for Christian civilization in the Gold Coast.

Christaller’s appreciation of the Twi language led him, with the assistance of both local and Western missionaries, to develop an English-Twi dictionary in 1874, Twi grammar of the Asante and Fante languages in 1875, and a dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language in 1881. He also compiled about 3,600 Akan proverbs in Twi in 1879. After his wife Christiane Emilie Ziegler died in 1868, Christaller left Ghana and never returned. He completed most of his significant works in the Twi language from Germany (Worae 2016: 19, 20). Christaller died on 16th December 1895 in Stuttgart, Germany. His work received little attention and was somewhat buried in obscurity for over thirty years until the Scottish anthropologist, Robert Sutherland Rattray, got permission from the Basel Mission to add English translation and notes to the Ashanti Proverbs (Rattray 1817: 7). As far as the history of Christianity in Ghana is concerned, Christaller remains one of the most influential missionaries, not only in the spread of the Christian message but also for his contribution to Akan Twi literature and scholarship.7

5.2.2. Christaller’s Definition and Conception of Sunsum

Christaller discusses the concept of sunsum as a philologist rather than a conceptualist. He describes the meaning of sunsum in a dictionary-like framework, allowing for possible future conceptualization of the term. His interpretation of the sunsum comes to the fore in his seminal 1881 work, Dictionary of the Asante And Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi). The book was widely regarded as the gold standard of Akan language in mainstream circles; an excellent translational text that fulfills the theological mandate placed upon Christaller and his advisers. In this dictionary, Christaller established a strong platform for a constructive linguistic engagement between local Akan culture and the gospel.

Christaller identifies sunsum with the personality or distinctive character and quality that covers the essentials of being. He made this clear through his study of the oral theology of the Akan people. While discussing the various traditional names for God, Christaller expounds on the Akan notion of Odomankoma (the Creator), who is known in the Akan world of experience as ‘Nyankɔpɔn (God). Christaller relies on the Akan expression Onyankɔpon onye Odomankoma

7 Read more from Lamin Sanneh, Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process, 82-85.
Sunsum, which he translates: “God is an Eternal Spirit,” to describe how Akan people experience the Creator. Danquah later questioned the use of “spirit” in this sense to translate sunsum (Danquah 1944: 66). It was out of this linguistic conjecture that grew immense pneumatic concepts in determining the spirituality of sunsum. Nevertheless, Christaller brings to our understanding how the Creator is known and experienced by the Akan. ‘Nyankopan as sunsum defines the personality of the Creator as “the boundless, infinite, interminable, immensely rich Being, or as the author, owner and donor of an inexhaustible abundance of things” (Christaller 1881: 89).

Christaller further translates the sunsum as the soul or spirit of man (1874: 112, 226; 1881:464). The traditional notion given by the terms “soul” and “spirit” refers to the ɔkra of a person. In this regard, he clung to the impression created by and espoused by traditional Akan people about the survival of the soul, leading to Christaller’s description of the sunsum also as a ghost. It is difficult to take this conclusion as applying to all Akan communities. Christaller’s dictionary contains Twi-Fante vocabularies, hence, the designation of sunsum to a ghost may vary from one Akan cultural group to another. Among the Fantes, for instance, the phrase Ne sunsum (His soul/spirit) may differ in connotation to the Twi-speaking Akan who will refer to his ɔkra—the deathless part of a person that survives death to become a ghost or ancestor. There is no synonymity between ɔkra and sunsum among the Twi-speaking Akan. Going by Christaller’s presumption that the sunsum is both spirit and ghost, it is safe to surmise that the English terms “spirit” and “soul” create ambiguity in the Akan community’s spiritual ontology.

It is worth noting that Christaller did not suggest that the Fante and the Asante employ sunsum and honhom, respectively, in reference to the Holy Spirit. Rather, his primary focus was on the connotations of both terms. He describes honhom, not sunsum, in polysemic terms to define biblical pneumatology (1881: 189).

Overall, Christaller’s dictionary commands significant influence, especially because it was and still remains the go-to reference for scholars and practitioners that want to translate the gospel to the Akan dialect. The missionaries that collaborated with Christaller, for instance, used the text to spread and shape their message and delivery. Since the Akan dialect is generally underpinned by homogeneity, Christaller’s definition of sunsum strikes a chord with the community in terms of comprehension and actualization of the gospel. Our encounter with Christaller does not end in this chapter. We will revisit his works more on Akan pneumatology in a later discussion.
Rattray (popularly known as captain Rattray) is an important figure in Akan anthropology, and his name is almost synonymous with the discipline. His research focused on the customs and folklore of West Africans, specifically the Asante cultural group of the Akan in Ghana. Captain Rattray’s contribution to scholarship is mostly related to the Asantes. As an anthropologist, he embarked on a wide range of studies in Asante social organization and law, art, and religion.\(^8\) He was born in 1881 to Scottish parents in India where his father, Arthur Rattray, worked in the Indian Civil Service. He received his education from Stirling High School and Exeter College, Oxford, where he earned a diploma in anthropology as well as his doctorate (D.Sc.). He served the English colonial administration in different capacities. Before joining the Gold Coast colony in 1907, Rattray served as a trooper in the Boer War in South Africa and received the Queen’s medal with five clasps.\(^9\) Between 1902 and 1907 he was on the staff of the African Lakes Corporation in British Central Africa. From here, he published *Some Folk-lore Stories and Songs in Chinyanja with English Translation and Notes* (1907) which contains a collection of Chinyanja folklore and customs of Central Africa. Upon arrival in the Gold Coast in 1907, he served in the Customs Service. Later, he was transferred to the administrative department and became an Assistant District Commissioner in 1911, a District Commissioner in 1915, and acting Senior Assistant Colonial Secretary and Clerk to the Legislative Council in 1920.\(^10\) As a government official, his task was to report colonial activities in the Gold Coast – specifically the customs of the Asantes.

The first anthropological department in Ghana was set up in the Asante region as part of the colonial exploration of practical administration among the indigenes of their colonies. The initial plan came from Charles Henry Harper, the then Civil Commissioner of Asante, and was later set up by the Governor, Sir Frederick D. Guggisberg in 1921 (Wilks 2000: 82). It was required of British officials serving the colonial administration to acquaint themselves with the customs and languages of the indigenes of the colony to effectively manage the relationship between the administration and indigenes. Regardless of its positive impact on Akan studies today, the newly created Anthropology Department served the colonial interest. It was more of an academic policy of the colonial administration than for the Akan people.

---

\(^9\) Ibid, 928.
Rattray became the first head of department, and whatever he thought of this newly created department – with respect to preparing the Asante for self-governance or preserving their customary integrity – it did not change its colonial agenda. This placed him at a more significant advantage, or responsibility, to begin a scientific inquiry into anthropological research within the Asante territories. As Rattray himself observed, he had a choice of two methodological approaches. The first, which he found nonproductive, was to make the Department the center of independent research where individual researches would be reviewed, examined and classified. However, he feared such an approach would create a greater collection of materials that may fail to receive proper scrutiny. The second approach was for him to take the work of research upon himself to investigate the beliefs and customs of the Asantes, which he did, producing a trilogy on Asante customs, arts, religion, laws, and constitution. The volumes became useful resources for all colonial officials and helped bring together the colonial administration in harmony with the Asantes.

How did Rattray gather information? How accurate was his knowledge of the Asantes? Rattray considered the Asante territory to be an area he had earlier termed as terra incognita to the European (Rattray 1915: 9). He felt this area was free from the contamination of European customs (Rattray 1923: 5, 6). As a consequence, he saw a world of anthropological opportunities that could provide an epistemological legacy to successive generations. Rattray describes how he sought information:

> It must be remembered that in Ashanti really valuable anthropological information is possessed by comparatively few of its inhabitants. Those who have accurate knowledge are the older men and women who have few dealings with the foreigner, live secluded lives in remote villages, and are ignorant of or indifferent to the social and religious changes brought about by the European (Rattray 1923: 7).

Rattray’s discussants were the grey-headed Asantes. Why? There are details to be given here which will facilitate rationalization of the relationship between old age and knowledge or wisdom among the Akan. These details will bring to light the perception of aging among the Akan and how that perception is construed in Akan societies.

There is a growing feeling of ageism among many world societies – even in Ghana and beyond. Ageism is a word associated with prejudicing attitude towards people because of their advanced age. In many parts of the world, the term “old age” may carry “negative connotations of ’decrepit’, ’decaying’, ‘worn out’ and ‘senile’” (Van der Geest 2002: 438). Ageism has risen to become a culturally embedded attitude among several African societies today. In Ghana, for instance, accusations of witchcraft are linked to old age (Van der Geest
the Akan, aging engenders positive feelings and it is a period of leadership and political power (Van der Geest 2002: 438). Even in today’s complex societies, old age continues to hold high social standards in Akan societies. It is often associated with gerontocracy, a society governed by elders.

Traditionally, the Akan conception of knowledge is informal and closely related to the elders. Nana or ṭpayin (elder) are Akan terms for the aged and both express a degree of honor. The English term “old age” may not have a direct bearing on what majority of Akan people consider as aged since the English term “old,” may somehow suggest expiring. Nana is a fundamental term that captures the ideology of respect especially in the Akan conception of God and ancestors. God is often assigned the title Nana ‘Nyankopon, meaning the “Great Ancestor” or “The Ancient of Days.” He is all-powerful and all-knowing. The same title is accorded to the ancestors (Nananom). Ancestors are a body of spiritual entities who were once among the living but are dead, and their spirits continue to live in the spiritual world. Because the Akan consider life as linear, meaning a journey, age and death are a journey towards perfection. Ancestors have attained spirituality to possess great power with which they can assist the living. Ancestors can provide visions and protect and respond when the living summon them. In Akan societies, it is the Nana (aged) with excellent social values who is revered as an ancestor. During the pouring of libation, the ancestors who form this band of spiritual elites are invoked and their presence duly recognized as such. For that reason, old age is considered a moment or stage in life where people reach their full potential to act in that respect as ancestors or guardians since they have now acquired wisdom and experience and can guide and protect the young to success (Van der Geest 2002: 438).

Akan people further believe age comes with experience and knowledge. The more one advances in years, the more knowledge, experience, and power the person acquires. This is a clear indication of why the power of performance is identified with gerontocracy in most Akan societies. For example, elders or older people who offer counseling relating to matters of kingship surround every king. Hence it is said, Ohene a w’antie ne mpaninfo asem no na ɔwe takraboɔ nɔn niti, literally, “A king who refuses to heed to advise from his elders eats a bird

2002), and this advertently causes panic among the growing youth for fear of being killed or meeting with misfortunes in life. Material wealth, childbirth, good health, and manifold prosperous dimensions of life are said to be the targets of witchcraft. Consequently, being accused of practicing witchcraft is a crime. Witchcraft accusations are commonly the new form of ageism in Africa and several old people have to face death or mutilation as a result. Traditionally, old age was never an indication of witchcraft among the Akan. Witchcraft-ageism is a modern phenomenon and distortion of social customs. Further information about ageism among Akan people is found in the research work of Van der Geest (2002).
without a head.” A bird without a head may somehow be a taboo bird supposed not to be eaten. There is another maxim that says, *Wo nni panyin wo fie a, due*, literally, “Woe to you if you do not have an elderly person in your house.” The maxim describes the role of elderly persons in guiding the affairs of the next generation. A popular Akan adage says, *Yen kɔ bisɔ aberewa*, meaning, “Let us consult the old woman.” The proverbial saying is applied when a group of elders overseeing a case withdraws into seclusion to render the final verdict on a matter.\(^\text{12}\) *Abrewa* is a symbol of progeny among the Akan people. This maxim stems from popular Akan folklore in which an old woman exhibited extraordinary wisdom that eventually repented the heart of a vicious king. For her reward, the king built a house for her, and whenever the elders found it hard to judge a case, they would consult her for advice. Hence, the expression “Let us consult the old woman” came into use.\(^\text{13}\) All these presuppose the importance of the elderly in Akan societies.

Now coming back to Captain Rattray, we have no difficulty concluding why he resolved to consult the elderly for information. If Rattray’s work were to bear any credibility at all, it would be because of its direct reliance on his aged informants who were considered as people of great authority and honor in Akan societies, and not just abandoned, stereotyped, and a class of good-for-nothing persons suffering from societal seclusion. His interlocutors helped him to produce the following books for the Anthropology Department: *Ashanti* (1923, 1955), *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927, 1957), and *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (1929, 1956).\(^\text{14}\)

In the *Ashanti*, Rattray set out the social ontology of the Asante by taking stock of the social stratification system from the *ntɔ*yɛ* exogamy, festivals and ceremonies, and belief systems. His initial assignment was to investigate the legal and political life of the Asante. However, he felt a proper understanding of the social organization would serve as a source of reference and background to future research in Asante politics (Rattray 1923: 7). Hence, he focused on the

\(^{12}\) An informant explained this thus: “This expression is used when the elders pronounce judgement over a case. The *ɔkyeame*, and a few important personalities who are trying the case, retire after the expression has been pronounced. They go to a secret, quiet place and decide what the judgement should be. After the decision, they come back and the group’s spokesman pronounces the judgement thus: *Wie mpanyinfo, yɛsɔreɛ se ye rekɔeresa aberewa. Yɛkɔɛ no na aberewa te awia mu reto awia.* ‘Well, elders, we retired to consult the old lady. When we went, the old lady was sunning herself.’ If it is evening, they will say, *Yɛkɔɛ no na aberewa renom n’abua, bo, bo, bo.* ‘When we went, the old lady was smoking her pipe – bo, bo, bo [the sound of her smoking]. When we related the case to her she said we did well to come and seek her advice. She listened and explained to us that if we hadn’t consulted her we would have passed a wrong judgment’ (Van der Geest 2002: 442; Twi corrected).

\(^{13}\) For an account of this folklore, see Van der Geest 2002: 442.

non-political, non-legal aspects of the Asantes (Herskovits 1939: 130). A further systematic inquiry led to the publication of *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927) which Rattray claimed was a continuation of the former. In this book, Rattray provided an ethnographic sketch of Asante religion by taking stock of the notion of God, pantheon deities (*Abosom*), and how religion pervades in the daily life of the Asantes. Rattray’s final legacy to the Asante Anthropology Department was *Ashanti Law and Constitution*. This book was his initial assignment, but for the reasons given above, it became the last to be published. The book outlines the legal and political structure of the Asantes.

With this extraordinary ethnographical inquiry, Rattray became the foremost European specialist on Asante socio-religious culture. His magnanimous contribution to Akan studies has distinguished him as an outstanding anthropologist and authority on the native people of West Africa. Although his research works focused primarily on the Asante of the Akan people, he extended the study among the geographical affiliations to the Asante territories of the hinterlands. The result led to the production of two volumes on the Asante cultural group of the hinterlands in 1932. In 1933, he received the Rivers Memorial Medal from the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for his contribution to the field of anthropology in the then Gold Coast (West Africa).

Captain Rattray possessed high linguistic intelligence, had a humble personal demeanor and approached his discussants with the spirit of a seeker of truths (Rattray 1923: 11). As head of the newly established Anthropology Department, Rattray emerged as a positive influence and one with great importance to both the British and the Asantes. His roles as a scholar and colonial official came out of the British need to facilitate colonialism. As an anthropologist, Rattray’s work stood at the heart of the colonial administration where anthropology became an imperial device to establish British conquest in Ghana. However, the necessity of the anthropological studies was primarily informed by the advancement of British interests and partly by academic progress of the Asantes. Rattray, therefore, became an instrument for extending British imperialism. His academic status in the colonial administration, coupled with great access to power (among colonial administrators and traditional rulers), made him successful in all aspects of his career in the colony. It is also noted that the range of his interest in research was unlimited as he could travel far and across the dense Asante forest with his car.

Having said all this, there is no direct intent to exonerate Rattray from any form of criticism. There are several criticisms which have been leveled against Rattray, from the point of view of the historical background to the assessment of his accuracy on information. Although we have
pointed out how old age plays a role in oral knowledge in Akan, it does not, however, become a yardstick for accuracy. Tom C. McCaskie is an expert in Asante history, and his appraisal of Rattray’s ethnography is a valuable source for studying the shortcomings of Rattray (McCaskie 1983). Nonetheless, for the sake of this present study we shall defer the criticism of Rattray’s major works since his construction of the sunsum comes with many criticisms.

Generally, Rattray’s work has had inevitable positive consequences on scholars – both past and present – studying Akan religion and culture. Besides his academic influence, Rattray set out a contextual framework upon which critical retrospection and constructive investigation of Akan realities permit interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary scholarship. Rattray retired in 1930 and died on May 14, 1938, while gliding as a pilot at Farmoor, near Oxford at the age of fifty-six years.

5.3. Rattray’s Conception and Definition of Sunsum

Rattray’s introduction to the sunsum concept appears in his trilogy on Asante customs, religion, and laws. Before these publications, the term was completely absent in his earlier translation and commentary on the Ashanti Proverbs, compiled by Johann Gottlieb Christaller in 1879. Two possible reasons can be given for this. First, Christaller did not use the term in the Ashanti Proverbs because sunsum is a rare term in Akan proverbs. Second, Rattray might not have been introduced to the term then, and even if he had had any knowledge about it at all, he might have preferred a substitutionary word instead.

There is enough reason to suggest that Rattray may not have had enough knowledge then about the sunsum. I will point out one instance in the Ashanti Proverbs. When speaking of the construction of Asante religion and how the traditional priest encountered the Abosom (pantheon deity), Rattray writes: “If you ask what the ‘it’ is he captured, he cannot tell, but will probably say vaguely ‘Onyankopon tumi’, or ‘honhom’, that is, ‘the power, spirit, or mana of Onyankopon’” (Rattray 1915: 22). Here in the Ashanti Proverbs, he uses mana four times to translate an impersonal power emanating from God, all linked to the essence of the Abosom (pantheon deities) whose nature is thought of as part of the power ascribed to God (Rattray 1915: 22, 30, 32). As to whether the terms he used were right or not, Rattray’s use of honhom and tumi, herein for the Abosom, concerning the emanating force from ‘Nyankopon establishes the first fact that Rattray never used the term sunsum to essentially denote God. It appears the identification of sunsum with God is completely absent in his writings as we shall soon see. Again, one may deduce that the expression Onyame Sunsum was not preponderant during
Rattray’s ethnographic study. We will encounter a similar case in the writings of Christaller in later discussion. The identification of *sunsum* with ‘Nyankopɔn appeared in later scholarship – as I will show in the next chapter.

Now, let us turn our focus to Rattray’s trilogy, *Ashanti* (1923), *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927), and *Ashanti Law and Constitution* (1929), where we encounter his ideas about the Akan *sunsum*.

### 5.3.1. The General Definition of Sunsum by Rattray

The pneumatic character of the *sunsum* first appeared in *Ashanti*, published eight years later after *Ashanti Proverbs*. In this book, Rattray, like Christaller, translated *sunsum* into English as “spirit,” reinforcing its pneumatic character. The general definition of *sunsum* appears in Rattray as “that *spiritual element* in a man or woman upon which depends – not life, i.e. breath, for that is the *okra* or ‘kra – but that force, personal magnetism, character, personality, power, soul, call it what you will, upon which depend health, wealth, worldly power, success in any venture, in fact, everything that makes life at all worth living” (Rattray 1923: 46; my emphasis).

The definition given here by Rattray admittedly presents a wider scope of meaning that is multivalent and dynamic. We can only understand it when further analysis is conducted within the larger context of his literature. Therefore, we shall focus on key conceptions in his definition.

### 5.3.2. Sunsum as “spiritual element”

*Sunsum* as a “spiritual element” in Akan worldview is basically a description of all objects that are conceived and perceived as physically nonconceptual. When Rattray used the term in connection with a human being, what did he mean? Is *sunsum* an astral component or a mysterious force? What is its origin? Rattray gives little information, but what is clear is that he brings out the dimension of a pneumatic character of the *sunsum* leading to the translation of it as “spirit” after Christaller.

We will not be quick here to think that there is a purported assertion by Rattray to characterize the *sunsum* as an entity – even if that is the case, there are few indications of that thesis. Rattray suggested somewhere that the tutelary deity called Bosomtwe is the child of the great Asante

---

15 In one of her articles, “The Reality of Spirits? A Historiography of the Akan Concept of ‘Mind’,” Louise Müller misquoted Rattray by suggesting this was the definition he gave to the *ɔkra* (Müller 2008: 172). Müller is a fellow and member of the LASC community at Leiden African Studies Center. Her research focuses on West African religions, mostly in Ghana.
tutelary god Ta Kora of whom one of his informants, a priest to be precise, was introduced during a ritual at Bosomtwe as *Sunsum kese a ɔwɔ baabi ara*. Rattray translated the statement in English as “great spirit which is everywhere” (Rattray 1923: 195-6). In as much as such an idea of omnipresence may underlie the statement, which is true based on the invocation of Ta Kora in the ritual, what the priest meant to say was “Ta Kora, the great god (*Bosomkese*) who is everywhere.” Rattray had already used the expression “great god” to designate the same deity (Rattray 1923: 102, 117, 157, 175). Akan pantheon deities (*Abosom*) are considered *sunsum* in the sense of their mysterious essence or nature.

A similar scenario is described by Rattray that purportedly characterizes *sunsum* as an intermediary spirit. At Tafo, near Kumasi, Rattray tells the story of an altar of *Nyame Dua* (God’s tree) that was located on the bank of the river Santan. Upon inquiry, the chief told him the altar was erected on behalf of one of his wives who was barren; after consulting a god, he was instructed “to set up the altar, in order that the *sunsum* (spirit) of the river might intercede for him to Nyame (the Sky God)” (1927: 305). Every well-informed Akan knows the expression “*sunsum* (spirit) of the river” was in reference to the *Abosom* (god) of the river. When Rattray further asked whether the river had a *sunsum*, the chief replied, “not only had it a spirit [*sunsum*], but that the whole village of Taffo belonged to it and owed its origin to the river” (1927: 305-6). Unless *sunsum*, in this context, is in reference to an entity it cannot intercede for the chief or become a progenitor of the village. The allusion here reminds us of the roles the *Abosom* play as progenitors of children by the transmission of the *ntorɔ* through a male agent.

---

16 Lake Bosomtwe is the largest natural lake in Africa, situated approximately 30km South-East from Kumasi in the Asante region. Scientifically, the lake was created by a chondrite meteorite. Legend says, according to an informant of Rattray, that “Lake Bosomtwe did not always lie in its present locality but was situated near the Bosomtwe Rock in Northern Ashanti.” Rattray “was taken and shown a large natural depression, now perfectly dry and covered with trees and vegetation, which the local people say was in ancient times the site of this lake, but owing to it not being able to get on with ‘his brother’ Tano it departed from here and went and made its home where it is now found.” (Rattray 1923: 195)

17 In Akan thought ’ɔwɔ baabi ara’, in reference to lesser divinities, refers to most or many places. Akan people do not attribute omnipresence to lesser divinities. They are regarded as creatures of God and limited in their activities.

18 See Ephirim-Donkor, 2016.

19 Tafo is a sub-region of the Kumasi Metropolitan District area in the Asante region. It was a village during the time of Rattray’s research and was notable for its crafts in pottery. There is a belief that the first potter came from Tafo. Her name was Osra Abogyo and legend says she learnt the art from the eternal God called *Odomankoma* (Rattray 1927: 301).

20 Rivers, although they can be considered sacred, are not in essence spiritual as one can fetch water and drink, but rivers may host or possess a spiritual agent. This relationship between water and spirits can be confusing, but it seems clear to the Akan that rivers are quintessentially deities and once the river dries, it will suggest the deity is departed.

21 There is no trace of the Santan River today since Tafo is now populated with houses and lies in the center of the city. Urbanization in most parts of the country has affected the ecological integrity of river bodies and the Santan River may be a victim.
This is one reason why Rattray often confused *sunsum* with *ntorɔ*. His use of *sunsum* for the river gods in the two scenarios is exactly the conventional description of the *Abosom* by the Akan people. The nature of Ta Kora and the other deities is interpreted synonymously as *sunsum*. The attribution of “great” and “everywhere” to Ta Kora defines the essential quality of the deity as *sunsum*. Therefore, *sunsum* becomes an alternative term to describe the nature of the lesser deities.

5.3.3. *Sunsum “in a man or woman”*

Rattray grapples with an important dimension of the *sunsum*, i.e. its anthropological connection. The definition given above by Rattray is anthropological. As already stated, Akan anthropology suggests that every human being possesses an immaterial substance called *sunsum*. The central idea here presents *sunsum* as a vital component of the human being. The human being is only a subject of its operational experience but the *sunsum* is never indispensable from the body. Rattray underlined this assertion with several experiences of the *sunsum* in the human being. A person’s *sunsum* can take sleep peregrination, and it can get knocked about by other *sunsum*, after whence the person may fall sick and die. For these reasons, Rattray identified the *sunsum* with volatility of the *ɔkra*. The *sunsum* is an advanced guard that protects a person (Rattray 1923: 152; 1927: 154). Among the Akan, only males transmit the *sunsum* just like the *ntorɔ*. Rattray supports this assertion with a popular saying among the Asantes that *Obaa unni sunsum*, literally, “A woman has no *sunsum*.” Further details given by Rattray imply that “a woman has no real soul (of this kind) of her own; it is true, they say, that she has ‘a small kind’ of *sunsum* which her father gave to her, but for all practical purposes she is nevertheless soulless, because she cannot transmit any kind of *sunsum*, but only her blood” (Rattray 1927: 318). Given the account by Rattray, the *sunsum* of a person cannot be said to be divine, neither is it feminine. It is exclusively a physiological and spiritual element coming from the father.

5.3.4. *Sunsum as “force” and “power”*

---

22 Further analysis, below, will reveal a thing called *sunsum* and a thing that possesses *sunsum*.

23 The anthropological aspect of *sunsum* is mostly talked about because it occupies a central place in understanding the concept of a person.

24 Ephirim-Donkor later expounded on this notion by taking it beyond the lesser deities to God as the supreme *Sunsum* who transmits His *sunsum* to activate the *mogya* (blood) of the female to become active, thus making conception possible. Hence, God becomes the progenitor or Father (*Agya*, meaning “Father”) of creation (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 78). In theory, the all-encompassing nature of *sunsum* as divine never appeared in Rattray, neither did he give any clue of that except our own deductive reasoning of the Abosom whose essence is thought of as *sunsum* and are said to be children of God.
The character of the *sunsum* appears in Rattray’s understanding as force and power. There is no equivalent word in the Akan Twi for “force” other than *sunsum*. Power may be rendered in Akan Twi as “*tumi,*” which is also equivalent to “authority.” *Tumi* may capture the intrinsic power of the *sunsum*, but it is never synonymous with it. Therefore, Rattray’s use of “force” should be understood as an emanating power or mysterious aura, even though sometimes he will use “spirit” to translate such notions. An informant recounted to him that in the event of a divorce, the children will always return to their father, without opposition from the mother or her clan because the mother is afraid of the father’s *sunsum* (spirit) (Rattray 1929: 9). Rattray elucidates the idea of the father’s *sunsum* seizing the wife in the event of adultery: “If a man’s wife is unfaithful, it is his ‘*kra* which will inform his *Obosom* (*ntor*), which will then let his *sunsum* know, and this last will seize the woman so that she may become ill and die” (Rattray 1927: 154). This hypothesis has been given a pneumatic interpretation to think of the *sunsum* as a spiritual entity as we will encounter in subsequent chapters. Rattray did not give further details beyond the statement. Neither did he mention any relative conception of that assumption. If we take it for the sake of argument that *ɔ kra*, *ntor*, and *sunsum* are spiritual entities, would that not suggest tripartite entities forming the human being instead of them being substances? The Akan talk of substance (genetic spiritual elements) and not entities. For all practical purposes, Rattray defined *ɔ kra* as the life principle, *ntor* as a physiological principle, and *sunsum* as a spiritual element. An exception is given here to the *ɔ kra*, whose nature presupposes properties of an entity, but this idea will occupy later discussion. Rattray describes the *ntor* as “the male totemic spirit which every child, male or female, inherits from its father. Like all supernatural elements it is powerful” (Rattray 1929: 8). Most Akan will not say that the *ɔ kra* is powerful; such a character belongs to the *sunsum*. For Rattray, the relationship between the *ntor* and *sunsum* is mutual, and both are forces without too much differing character (Rattray 1927: 154-5). In the case of the saying discussed, logically it is the *Obosom* (*ntor*) of the father that seizes the woman by its *sunsum* in the man. The *sunsum* remains the pervasive force that protects, acts, and experiences.

Further, Rattray talks about *sunsum* and witchcraft. Is the *sunsum* always protective? The answer lies in its moral character. Rattray says: “One’s *sunsum* may be an *obayifo* (witch)”

---

25 The usage of “force” here is not the application of pressure on an object to cause motion or act which in the Akan language is “*ɔhyɛ*.”

26 Rattray shortly nuanced this statement with a different meaning when instead of using the term *sunsum* used *nton* (totem) to speak of same statement (Rattray 1929: 11).
The mystical allusion here refers to the dynamic nature of the sunsum in becoming something else. The question as to how one’s sunsum becomes a witch is enigmatic, since witchcraft is not a possession by a foreign spiritual agent as understood by the Akan; rather, it is the use of one’s sunsum for such evil supernatural prowess. In fact, the sunsum is only an instrument and a power for achieving the ends of witchcraft. Witchcraft is a mysterious force and a power that can manifest its supernatural abilities all day long. This description adds to the popular assertion that witchcraft is a nocturnal peregrination. An informant named Yao Adawua described to Captain Rattray how a witch was known: “The conclusive evidence that any person is a witch is, he said, the discovery of her bayikuku (witchcraft pot)” (1927: 30). Witchcraft pots or cauldrons are mostly made of clay and may contain several amulets or ritual artifacts from whence the powers of the witch are derived. They are mostly kept out of reach, under a person’s bed, beneath the earth, or under a tree. The pot, just like a shrine, is transferable, making witchcraft inheritable. In cases where the cauldron is discovered and destroyed, the person will lose the spell of witchcraft. This makes the connection between witchcraft and one’s sunsum accidental rather than ontological. Adawua further told Rattray of how “he could tell a witch practically at sight” and when Rattray asked how, “he replied he could ‘see red smoke coming out of their heads’” (1927: 30). Adawua finally told Rattray about his ability to “cure people of being witches without having to kill them, provided that once he had treated them they did not resort again to their evil practices; if they did so, they would die” (Rattray 1927: 30). The power of witchcraft, according to Rattray, is a practice in relation to which a person’s sunsum becomes vulnerable to carrying out such evil activities.

5.3.5. Sunsum as “personal magnetism,” “character,” “personality”

A key feature of Rattray’s interpretation of the Akan sunsum is its operational force or determining principle for experience. The sunsum is responsible for the moral and psychological qualities of an individual. The human being is the subject of physicality and the projector of several psychosocial experiences. Rattray underlined this with specific descriptions

---

27 Prior to and during the advent of the Europeans, witchcraft ranked as one of the anti-social crimes. In most cases the penalty was excommunication or the culprit “was smeared all over with palm oil and cast into a fire, or clubbed or strangled or drowned” (Rattray 1929: 313). Most Akan communities continue to eschew witchcraft and victims often have to face brutalities from perpetrators if a quick intervention by rescuers does not take place.

28 It is unclear which spirits empower a witch. Our earlier discussion referred to Sasabonsam as the chief agent of evil and master of dwarfs and witches but there is no apparent evidence that witchcraft is a product of the power of Sasabonsam. Asare Opoku thinks the power of witchcraft stems from mysterious forces in the universe that manifest themselves as witchcraft, magic, and sorcery. Read further from Asare Opoku 1978: 140-147. At one point, Rattray did mention sunsum bɔne (bad spirit), but it is not clear what he meant by that statement (1929: 213).

29 That transfer has no boundaries like the ntorɔ and sunsum, of which only males are said to be transmitters.
such as “personal magnetism,” “character,” and “personality.” These aspects of a human being in the Akan worldview are not interpreted in abstract terms; instead, they are the ontological wholeness of a human being and a person’s spiritual and social experience. Personal magnetism is the power of attraction and influence that a person exerts in society with valuable results of goodwill. Rattray talks of degrees of sunsum as strong, weak and evil: Me sunsum edu (My sunsum is heavy), Me sunsum ye den (My sunsum is strong), Me sunsum gyina m’akyi (My sunsum stands at my back) (1923: 198; 1927: 154). In the same way, personality varies from one individual to another. Thus the sunsum remains a versatile force differing from one person to another. Suban “character,” according to the Akan, is a spiritual phenomenon of both inner and outward dimensions. The inner being is the real element, which is called sunsum, and the outward is the peripheral (suban). A person’s sunsum is the operational force for the formation of character and the art of being, which is personality. It is a person’s sunsum which interacts and operates on various aspects of personality and social interaction. The evil sunsum is the witch or wizard discussed above.

5.3.6. Sunsum as the “soul”

Rattray gives us a conceptual dualism about the soul. In his Religion and Arts in Ashanti, Rattray suggested that ɔkra is best rendered by the word “soul,” i.e. the soul of a man from God (1927: 153). Then shortly afterwards he wrote: “In life the ‘kra is considered partly as the soul or spirit of a person (cf. sunsum, honhom), partly as a separate being, distinct from the person, who protects him” (1927: 153). Having said this, he then purports to assert that the ‘kra and sunsum are both souls: “It is very difficult sometimes to distinguish between the ‘kra and the next kind of soul, the sunsum” (1927: 154). Rattray’s identification of the ’kra as a divine soul, and sunsum as man’s soul, creates a dual polymorphism of the term “soul.” In effect, a human being consists of a bipartite soul. Here, we see how the English term “soul” can be played with to describe two separate Akan realities. The idea put forth here suggests that Rattray created confusable alternative use of the term “soul” and “spirit” in reference to Akan spirituality. Rattray accepted his difficulty in finding the right word to define the concept when he wrote,

---

30 The evil sunsum is not only exclusive to human beings but also to trees (Rattray 1923: 258).
31 Suban is one of the closest words supposed to have derived from sunsum with the su (nature) being the prefix and short form of sunsum, whiles the ban means character. Hence, suban would mean the expression of a person’s sunsum in life. Ephirim-Donkor defines the su as the raw essence of the Ōbosom materialized in the corporeal world as a driven force in human beings. Su therefore corresponds with the intangible sunsum of the Ōbosom manifested as character and experience of physicality. Ephirim-Donkor emphasized that “the Su is raw essence and basis for all character traits and ethical principles...The Su develops into the Suban (essential character formation) when a child first develops awareness of itself as a child or self” (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 89-92).
“‘the sunsum is the soul, or power, or whatever we like to call it’ (1923: 293). This linguistic ambiguity did not stem from what the Akan meant by ɔkrə and sunsum, but rather from Rattray’s limitations in finding appropriate terms to characterize them. What Rattray does here with the sunsum is a description of how it operates but not what it is. How a thing expresses itself and what that thing is can vary.

Still on sunsum as the “soul,” it is important to underline an aspect of Rattray’s understanding of sunsum as innate anima in creation: “In the animistic creed of Ashanti everything in nature, animate or inanimate, has its sunsum (soul or spirit), and the osese tree is no exception” (1923: 296). The possession of sunsum by trees was the reason behind the interest in sacred arboricultural traditions among the Akan. Rattray did not pay much attention to the source of this innate power in creation. However, two propositions have emerged after him. First, there is the theory of panentheism, which suggests that the sunsum is the activating principle from God, a principle which is present in natural objects (Danquah 1967; Gyekye 1998).

Panentheism presents the view that there is an unconscious divine presence that regulates matter to produce its natural and spiritual experiences. This theory is central in the pneumatic conception of the sunsum. The second is the proposal that the essence of the Abosom (tutelary deities) is water that permeates and interpenetrates through natural objects as water is fundamental to natural objects (Ephirim-Donkor 2016). This may be the reason why sacrifices are performed to the sunsum of a natural object in the same manner as to a pantheon deity.

Further in this belief are the shrines of groves, rocks, caves, and mountains venerated as residence of the lesser deities. The question of animation is a suprasensible presence of a
supernatural deity which differs from the intrinsic vital consciousness found in natural objects. The offering of sacrifices to the *sunsum* of a tree agrees with sacrifices offered to a lesser deity, making this *sunsum* nothing but *sunsum* of the gods. My research will offer a reinterpretation of the Akan notion of animism in chapter ten.

5.3.7. The collective *sunsum* “soul” of the Asantes

Here again, it is necessary to revisit our discussion of the sacred *Sika Dwa Kofi* (Golden Stool) already underlined as containing the *sunsum* of the Asantes. It remains the most fascinating discovery of Captain Rattray. In his description, he saw the Golden Stool as exclusively religious and something that through hallowed custom and belief engendered the objective and consensual virtues of obedience, respect, and great loyalty, as well as being a symbol of power, health, bravery, welfare, and the shrine of the *sunsum* of Asante nationality (Rattray 1923: 287-93; McCaskie 1983: 197). In this sacred object rested the historical past, present, and future of the united independent state of the Asantes.

Rattray’s investigation of the Golden Stool emerged out of curiosity of a supposed desecration or destruction of it in 1921. The news had thrown the Asante people into national disarray, while within the circles of the British government in Kumasi there was fear of war (Rattray 1923: 287). The communal uproar at the hint of a possible desecration of the Golden Stool expresses the intrapsychic effects it brings, much in the same way a person’s *sunsum* can fret to become ill. Therefore, the sacrality of the Golden Stool engenders greater force for the welfare and unity of the Asantes, while an attack against it signifies a national decline. Rattray derived from this notion of the national *sunsum* an intra-relational intervention theory for peaceful cooperation between the British and Asantes – a contribution he is celebrated for

---

35 The sacrality of the Golden Stool is very much ambiguous because it also engenders political power as it is a symbol of right to rule. MacCaskie’s review of the Golden Stool saw it as an emblem that “propagated and fertilized dreams of power” (MacCaskie 1983: 198). He further underlined how it has been used as a political weapon to command authority for power and governance. He writes, “the Golden Stool was a sacred object, but its very sacrality ensured that it was a potent weapon in the strictly secular disputes of powerful – and often unscrupulously ambitious – men” (MacCaskie 1983: 198). He supports this statement with the following remarks: “In ca. 1800, Osei Kwame (1777-1803), in conflict with Asantehemaa Kwaadu Yaadom, seized the Golden Stool and the royal regalia and fled to exile in Dwenben, where he attempted to establish an alternative government... in 1823, Osei Yaw Akoto took possession of the Golden Stool and, fleeing to the south, used it to secure the army's support for his ambitions, thereby nullifying the claims of his rival Fredua Agyeman to be the successor of Osei Tutu Kwame... in August 1883, Akyememhene Oheneba Owusu Koko (1820-1884), sponsor of the youthful royal Agyeman Kofi, threatened to destroy the Golden Stool rather than let it fall into the hands of his client's dynastic rival, the deposed Kofi Kakari” (MacCaskie 1983: 198).
because of his Anthropology Department and knowledge concerning the Golden Stool, which proved how knowledge and politics were indispensable qualities for peaceful intervention.\textsuperscript{36}

Besides the knowledge provided to the British, Rattray’s own interpretation of the collective \textit{sunsum} enshrined in the stool was that of a transcending process upon which depended “an unfolding map of predictable development” that can forge successful socio-economic and political future of the Asantes.\textsuperscript{37} Rattray makes the connection thus:

\textit{“I have told them that they will become better and finer men and women by remaining true Ashanti and retaining a certain pride in their past, and that their greatest hope lies in the future, if they will follow and build upon lines with which the national sunsum or soul has been familiar since first they were a people.”} (Rattray 1923: 12; my emphasis)

A closer look at the above statement reveals his earlier notion of the Akan \textit{sunsum} as the reason for health, wealth, power, success in any venture, and everything that makes life at all worth living. Rattray consistently understood that \textit{sunsum} was the operational force for the welfare of its constituent agency. The \textit{sunsum} in all its characteristics appears as a dynamic vanguard or as Rattray himself puts it an advance guard which often sits at the door (1927: 154).

The \textit{Sika Dwa Kofi} brings out some of these significant idioms about the \textit{sunsum} into the memory of the Asante. The Golden Stool itself is not the \textit{sunsum}; it is a repository or, more specifically, the shrine of the \textit{sunsum} of the Asante state (Rattray 1923: 292). There are two main thoughts identified in this understanding. The first is in the semantics, where the collective \textit{sunsum} is spoken of in the singular, i.e. the \textit{sunsum} of the Asantes. Whatever character this \textit{sunsum} is given, it has a communal bond of strength. The single representation of \textit{sunsum} of the nation exemplifies the unification agenda of the Asante nation as one body. The second idea is the linguistic tradition of the fact that the \textit{sunsum} pertains to the people, not to a deity.\textsuperscript{38}

Although the Golden Stool descended from the sky – a sign from Nyankopon – there is no direct

\textsuperscript{36} It is necessary to reiterate how Rattray processed raw knowledge from the Asante customs to sustain the colonial administration in the Asante region. Knowledge and colonialism were like a single unit during the British presence in the Gold Coast. Rattray's knowledge of Asante customs and laws helped to forge a decisive alliance between Asante natives and the British and averted many possible wars.

\textsuperscript{37} Borrowed phrase from (McCaskie 1983).

\textsuperscript{38} Attempts have been made by other scholars to relate the Golden Stool to the Ark of the Covenant of the Israelites. Whereas the two may have similarities in the sense of their protective potency, their innate power is far the contrary. The Golden Stool, as already established, is the shrine for the \textit{sunsum} of the Asantes, a dwelling place of the communal spirits. On the contrary, the Ark of the Covenant of the Israelites, upon which rested the shekinah, the immanence of divine presence or visible theophany, was a sort of dwelling place for God. Rattray wrote somewhere: “It was He who of old left His own dwelling above the vauluted sky, and entered the tent of dyed skins where was His earthly abode and His shrine, when He came down to protect the Children of Israel in their march to the Promised Land” (Rattray 1923: 141). There are several other differences, but this is not the focus of discussion here.
reference of its \textit{sunsum} deriving from Nyankopon; neither did Rattray offer any details beyond that.

There are a few more questions to ask. From where derived the \textit{sunsum} in the \textit{Sika Dwa Kofi}? Why did Rattray refer to the Golden Stool as a shrine?

The question of the nature of the \textit{sunsum} in this national symbol of the Golden Stool is a paradox since it deviates from the usual cosmological understanding of \textit{sunsum} and turns into an artistic object that is entirely different from the iconic representation of the \textit{Abosom}. We could, perhaps, make a connection between the Golden Stool and the sacrality of the ancestral stools – which is believed to contain the \textit{sunsum} of the ancestors. That connection is possible since the \textit{Sika Dwa Kofi} is the single most sacred stool which contains the \textit{sunsum} of the Asantes. If that is the case, it will mean the spiritual energy or \textit{sunsum} of the Golden Stool is that of the ancestors. Rattray’s definition of it as a shrine agrees with this hypothesis and further shows the source of \textit{sunsum} of the Golden Stool.

The term shrine is often associated with a place of sacred meeting. Its root comes from the Latin \textit{scrinium}, which means “case or box for keeping papers.” Rattray did not justify his use of “shrine” for the Golden Stool, but the Latin root may be equivalent to the Akan word \textit{suman}. \textit{Suman} is any consecrated object by a priest or spiritual agent that has the potency to empower or create protection against evil. \textit{Suman} means “world of,” implying that it is an object that hosts spiritual energy.\footnote{More details about \textit{suman} will be dealt with in chapter six.}

On the accounts of the coming down of the Golden Stool, Rattray reported how Ṣokomfo An\textcircled{ɔ}kye “caused the King and every Ashanti chief and all the Queen Mothers to take a few hairs from the head and pubes, and a piece of the nail from the forefinger. These were made into a powder and mixed with ‘medicine’, and some was drunk and some poured or smeared on the stool” (1923: 289). The consecration ritual initiated the spiritual bond between the Golden Stool and the Asante nation, here represented by their chiefs and queen mothers. The Golden Stool, therefore, is a symbol of protection, making it a shrine or \textit{suman} for the Asante nation. That means it possesses an intrinsic power from Nyankopon to enable it to contain the \textit{sunsum} of the people. And since the \textit{sunsum} of the Asantes and their ancestors reside in it, the Golden Stool is not supposed to be sat on.\footnote{In March 1900, the Asantes besieged Kumasi, then occupied by the British, following a request by Sir Frederic Hodgson, then governor of the Gold Coast, to sit on the Golden Stool. The Asantes, seeing his request as open defiance of the sacred stool, declared war against the British, led by the then Ejisu queen mother Yaa Asantewaa. The war lasted for six months resulting in fatalities on both sides. Queen mother Yaa Asantewaa was captured alongside with other traditional leaders and was exiled to the Seychelles Islands where she died. This war marked...}
What if the Golden Stool gets stolen or destroyed? Will the Asante nation fall? The shreds of evidence we have gathered so far suggest the destruction of the Golden Stool will lead to the fall of Asante as a nation. We recall Ṣkomfo Anɔkye’s charge to the chiefs and queen mothers to keep the stool from destruction or from being stolen, else “as a man sickens and dies whose sunsum during life has wandered away or has been injured by some other sunsum, so would the Ashanti nation sicken and lose its vitality and power” (Rattray 1923: 289, 290). Besides the security measures to ensure the safety of the Golden Stool, Ṣkomfo Anɔkye made further provisions, should every measure fail. Rattray gives an account of a sacred stone at Kokofu known as Ahantan Bo (The proud stone). It is believed Ṣkomfo Anɔkye sanctified the stone with the rest of the portion used in sanctifying the Golden Stool including other ritual elements. The stone stands as an alternative shrine should the Golden Stool be stolen. Ṣkomfo Anɔkye “stated that this stone must stand for a symbol of the Golden Stool, and if that emblem were ever lost or stolen, the sunsum (spirit) of the Nation would enter this rock” (Rattray 1929: 218). The stone was not supposed to be stepped on because it embodies the same sacrality accorded to the Golden Stool, and periodic rituals are associated with it. The various rituals related to the preservation of the national sunsum signify its supreme importance and the place the concept occupies in the overall Asante traditional system. I have no doubt Captain Rattray understood this to the fullest.

5.4. An Overall Critique

In this section, I will offer an overall evaluation of Rattray’s conception of the sunsum. The purpose here is to underline some of the methodological problems that confronted Rattray which have directly or indirectly affected the sunsum discourse over time and how they form part of the contemporary criticism of the nature of the sunsum.

First, there is the problem of language. Rattray’s use of the English language to describe Akan realities was inevitable, but it led to problematic interpretations. Language embodies the essential elements of a people’s culture, and through it a person is introduced or oriented into the depths of a given cultural worldview. Rattray used the terms “spirit” and “soul” to translate

---

41 Among the people of Kokofu, the stone is widely known as Anokye boo (The stone of Anokye). An informant from Kokofu explained to me why it came to be called Ahantan boo. The stone was given to the then chief of Kokofu to carry it from his palace and walk a distance through the streets. Wherever he will drop the stone will become the center of the town. It is said that the chief, because of pride, carried the stone for a short distance from his palace and dropped it and to date, that spot has become the center of Kokofu. The stone has been fenced and considered sacred up to date.
anything non-conceptual as matter or bearing spiritual properties. For example, ṣkra, ntorɔ, sunsum, and the Abosom were often translated as “spirit” or “soul.” In most instances, the two English terms “spirit” and “soul” were used variably – if not interchangeably – to translate one word. An example relates to the nature of the sunsum, which Rattray saw as both polymorphic and polysemic. He translated sunsum interchangeably as “spirit,” or “soul,” and sometimes both (Rattray 1923: 12, 46, 195-6, 258, 289, 292-3, 296). Rattray further maintained ntorɔ as a “spirit” and wrote of the ntorɔ as a term best translated by “spirit” (1923: 45-6, 202). Whatever Rattray meant by the term “spirit” is up to us to decipher. The most obvious thing here is that his understanding of what a spirit is did not stem from the Akan context, but instead from his background as a European.

Second, we encounter the problem of description of Asante realities. Rattray’s work has been reviewed as descriptive and non-theoretical (Müller 2008: 167). He sought to undertake a comprehensive survey of Akan customs and religion. In the preface to Religion and Arts in Ashanti, he wrote: “I have striven throughout this volume and in Ashanti to make them as purely objective as the subject and scope seem to demand” (Rattray 1927: v). However, the description was not always “purely objective” as he encountered difficulty in distinguishing the relationship between ṣkra, sunsum, and ntorɔ. He wrote: “I have stated that ntorɔ may perhaps be translated by ‘spirit.’ Indeed, it appears to be used at times synonymously with sunsum” (Rattray 1923: 46). Again, in his attempt to explain the Asante concept of Akowuakra, meaning “when you die, you bid farewell,” Rattray said: “before death, the sunsum or ntorɔ or spirit, about to quit the body for ever, flits from wherever the dying man or woman may be… and says ‘good-bye’” (1923: 55). Indeed, there is a relationship between ntorɔ and sunsum, but the two are not synonymous. Also, an informant seems to have told him that ṣkra and sunsum are the same (1927: 155). The complex dialectical relationship between ṣkra, sunsum and ntorɔ was not only a conceptual problem for Rattray, but a difficulty that has been transmitted through subsequent scholarship, where both ṣkra and sunsum are often translated as “soul” (Meyerowitz 1951; Busia 1954; Müller 2013).

Third, it is evident that Rattray did not use the expression, “God’s sunsum,” or “God’s spirit.” Neither did he associate the sunsum with God. His discussion of the sunsum was more limited: it was limited to the pantheon deities, and so did not pertain to God. In speaking of the pantheon

42 Spirit and soul are two confusing words, both in Western philosophical and theological thinking. Chapter five of this study will take into consideration the need to expound on the meaning of the two terms in Western thought and why the quasi-physicalist objects its usage in dealing with traditional Akan thought forms.

43 Rattray maintained a consistent use of ntorɔ without an English translation in most of his writings.
gods as the spark of God’s power, Rattray used terms like ‘Onyankopon tumi,’ or ‘honhon,’ that is, “the power, spirit, or mana of God” (Rattray 1915: 22). Unlike the ɔkra that is indisputably from God, the possible source of sunsum for Rattray was from the pantheon deities who transmit their ntorɔ and sunsum through Akan males; this is another reason which led Rattray to confuse ntorɔ with sunsum. Sunsum then appears in his writings as an emanating pantheon force that protects the individual’s destiny.

Fourth, there is the question of the nature of the sunsum. There is no clue from Rattray that the sunsum is an astral personality or double of the person. If anything of that sort is inferred from his writings, it will be nothing more than a linguistic conundrum of his translation of sunsum in the English language as both “soul” and “spirit.” Even though Rattray tried to be candid and report what he saw and heard, his English background inevitably determined the various interpretations he gave of the Akan worldview. This led to the repeated difficulty he encountered in distinguishing between the ɔkra, sunsum, and ntorɔ.

Finally, Rattray gives us an idea of the Akan sunsum as signifying a personal presence of an emanating force or spiritual agent. Sunsum will always imply, or refer to, the presence of an agent. Examples include sunsum of a person, sunsum of Ta Kora, sunsum of a river, sunsum of the Asantes, sunsum of a tree, etc. When Rattray asked whether a particular river had a sunsum, the answer given to him was an emphatic “yes,” reaffirming the Akan view that all rivers are deities and therefore contain emanating force.

5.5. Conclusion

The rise of Akan studies is the bedrock for a historiographical quest to investigate the nature of the sunsum. The lexicography and writings of Christaller set the stage for subsequent research into Akan culture and religion. Another significant figure was Captain Rattray, who remains an important figure in the evolution of Akan scholarship as well as in his role as an anthropologist for the British colonial administration in the then Gold Coast. We know Rattray as an ethnographer rather than an ethnologist: he embarked on a descriptive study of the Akan culture rather than doing a comparative study between two or more ethnic groups. Rattray remains influential, and the most cited scholar in Akan scholarship. His contribution to the meaning of the Akan sunsum, with its various dimensions as force, personal magnetism, character, personality, power – upon which depend health, wealth, worldly power, success in
any venture, and everything that makes life at all worth living – agrees with most scholars studying the *sunsum* concept; the only exception his pneumatic characterization of the *sunsum* which my research seeks to critically engage, in order to argue that *sunsum* is not outrightly “spirit,” but a mysterious spiritual force. And in relation to this rejection, what my research is contributing is a pneumatological construction based on another Akan term for a spirit, i.e. *honhom*. For now, we will continue our historiographical investigation on the nature of the *sunsum* in the next chapter, through a consideration of the contribution of subsequent scholars studying Akan religion.
Chapter 6

Later Scholars and the Sunsum Construction

“Onyankopon’s value for life is any active value, a working value, the value for activity, of how best man should carry himself in conduct. Goodness implies value of something done. Onyankopon’s doing is good. Onyankopon is good, is in fact the Supreme Good, the Akan God of Beneficence, practical content of the moral life. Why should he not be worshipped?”—Joseph Boakye Danquah

6.1. Introduction

This chapter is a continuation of our historiographical investigation into the ontology of the Akan sunsum. In the previous chapter, we introduced the conception of Captain Rattray in his study of the sunsum among the Asante of the Akan ethnic group. Rattray’s work has been adjudged descriptive rather than theoretical in the sense that he wrote from an observer’s point of view. His work was more useful to the colonial empire than to the Asantes (Müller 2013: 167). Again, sunsum was not a subject of study for Rattray. Hence, little inquiry went into it—unlike his attitude towards the ntorɔ exogamy. Later scholars who studied Akan religion built their research around Rattray but with some theoretical divergences.

This chapter brings to the forefront some of these divergent views that have had impact on Akan religious practice and scholarship. The interlocutors in this chapter are chosen chronologically and geographically rather than according to a classification of Western and non-Western views. The reason is to ascertain the systematic evolution of the meaning of sunsum over time and to understand how the geographical backgrounds (or fields of study) shaped their perception about the sunsum. The following historiographical investigation focuses on the works of Joseph Boakye Danquah (1944), Eva Lewin-Richter Meyerowitz (1951), Kofi Abrefa Busia (1954), Heleine K. Minkus (1980), and Anthony Ephirim-Donkor (1997, 2016). These scholars are chosen not necessarily for their academic contribution, but also for their conceptual contribution to the study of sunsum.

6.2. Theological Encounter with Philosophy in J. B. Danquah

1 Danquah (1968: 152).
2 Although Akan people share common cultural traditions and languages, the meanings and application of certain terminologies may differ from one group to the other.
After Rattray came Joseph Boakye Danquah, a Ghanaian nationalist and theological philosopher that pioneered critical inquiry into the *sunsum* concept. Danquah hails from the Akyem group of the Akan ethnicity, from which his religious knowledge about the Akan was shaped. He authored the book *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944, 1968), which was published twenty-one years after Rattray’s *Ashanti*, and six years after Rattray’s death. The book outlines the Akan theology of God and culture, of which two aspects are principal.

First, Danquah argues that God is self-evident in human societies; however, God is known by different shades of varying degrees as well as numerous vernacular names. The concept of God reveals existential insights about God and how that revelation affects humans’ perceptions of a meaningful life. In spite of this, the reality of God is not always a simple notion, especially when what is meant by the term “God” can be subjective; this is because the question “what or who is God?” still exists today. Danquah tackles the question of the reality of God and the revelation of God in the context of human societies. However, there is merit in Danquah’s view that each society has discovered the supernatural; among the Akan, “there is a ‘native’ or seed-quality about their name for God, which is evidence that they had, of themselves, found God” (Danquah 1968: 1).

In Danquah’s opinion, the Akan religion recognizes only one God and the depths of that notion underline the framework of the spiritual and social construction of the Akan. Danquah’s first task seeks to diminish the former missionaries’ teaching of a Supreme or High God who they thought of as contrary to the God of African traditional religions. The West conjured up the term *fetish* to weaken the spiritual substance of African traditional religion. That attitude directly promoted the superiority of the Western God over that of Africans. The *fetish* cult, according to Danquah, is nothing more than a blend of superstition and individuals’ private quest for material fulfillment and should not be confused with the Akan religious conception of one God (1968: 39). The gods are not fetish either, and their spiritual representation in material objects does not define their essential qualities and should not be taken as such (1968: 7, 8). The Akan use images as symbols of their religious beliefs. Danquah argues that God is not an imported product of the West; neither is God to be identified with fetishism.

That polemical assumption drove Danquah’s desire to expound on Akan theology with greater emphasis and appreciation of his own traditional religious realities. Danquah argues in favor of his native religion which over the years has shaped his personality and worldview and which continues to shape the spiritual atmosphere of most Akan. As a staunch Christian, Danquah
remains one of the foremost African scholars who took a particular interest in dealing with the Akan traditional religion as worthy of study.

The second principal aspect of Danquah’s *The Akan Doctrine of God* is an investigation of the Akan religious system and the deity Onyame. Danquah makes nine postulates about Akan religion, which are classified into three classes by Kwesi Dickson (Danquah 1968: xxiii): (1) Individual Postulates: these are concerned with the life process of the individual and include *Esu, Sunsum, and Honhom*; (2) Social Postulates: this involves the ethical or moral aspect of life and comprise *Okra, Obosom, and Nana*; (3) Theological Postulates: these deal with the concept of God among the Akan. Here, Danquah pursues a tripartite conception of the Akan names for God, i.e. Onyame, Onyankopon, and Odomankoma. Onyame is the general idea of the deity. Onyankopon is the personality behind Onyame, i.e. a personal religious God, the Supreme Being. Odomankoma is the interminable or infinite being (Danquah 1968: 30). To the well-informed reader of Akan religion, Danquah has philosophically expounded on the concepts in ways that make them relevant to Western thought; still, some think of his postulates as neither Western nor consistent with Akan religion, but as his own ratiocination (Welbourn 1965; Basden 1944). There could be several questions concerning Danquah’s doctrine, but our concern now is how he conceived his ideas about the Akan concept of *sunsum*.

6.2.1. Danquah’s Conception of Sunsum

In order to understand Danquah’s construction of the *sunsum*, there is the need to state right from the start that it is not very simple to read his works. Reviewers of *The Akan Doctrine of God* have reacted negatively to his style of writing. G. T. Basden sees the language and terms used by Danquah as highly academic. He further observes the whole production of his work as more after the style of a degree thesis rather than a normal book (1944: 283). Edwin W. Smith compares the complicated writing style of Danquah to that of Hegel (1944: 186). Besides the complexities in his writing style, Danquah’s astute scholarship, combined with his first-hand knowledge of Akan religion and experience as a researcher in Western philosophy, gave him the skills to express his thoughts in a highly scholastic thinking. So, as we reveal his valuable contribution to the concept of *sunsum*, we will also keep in mind his philosophical interpretation of it.

Danquah’s interpretation of *sunsum* differs from Rattray’s anthropological view. For Danquah, our understanding of *sunsum* should begin with God. His first task was to dismiss the pneumatic

---

3 Danquah capitalizes the first letters of *Sunsum* and *Honhom* in sentences to refer to God or the Spirit of God.
character of the *sunsum* by analyzing the Akan maxim, “Onyankopon ye Odomankoma Sunsum,” translated by Danquah as, “God (Onyankopon) is the Infinite God’s (Odomankoma’s) Personality (Sunsum)” (1968: 66). The translation of *sunsum* as “personality” was Danquah’s way of brushing off earlier pneumatic translations of *sunsum* in the maxim as “spirit.” He says, “the notion which corresponds to the Akan ‘Sunsum,’ namely, not ‘spirit’ as such but the personality which covers the relation of the ‘Body’ to the ‘Soul’ (Okara)” (1968: 66).\(^4\) The justification for this is given in the wider view of Danquah’s definition of reality. *Sunsum* as “personality” makes it an experience where personal endeavors are realized in life. Nevertheless, Danquah has more to say about the relationship between personality and experience.

The application of *sunsum* to personality is pivotal to understanding reality. Experience defines reality in the sense that every experience is subject to reality. Danquah thinks *sunsum* is an experience of reality. He brings that notion to bear when he thinks of Onyankopon, the Akan name for the Supreme Being, as the ultimate source of experience whose nature corresponds to *sunsum*. Onyankopon is the reality that portrays the personality, that is, the nature of the deity Onyame (Danquah 1968: 41, 67). In other words, Onyankopon is ascribed the principle of experience, the *Sunsum* (Personality) of God. It is Onyankopon who is known to the Akan as the ultimate reality through whom the Akan worship *Odomankoma*. Onyankopon is just an image of *Odomankoma* as Danquah concludes, saying, “Odomankoma is best known to man in Nyankopon, in the domain or “house” of experience (Sunsum)” (1968: 68). From this background, we can better understand Danquah’s postulation of Onyankopon being *Sunsum* as only the appearance of the nature of the infinite (Odomankoma), and this *Sunsum* is what is known to the Akan as the personality of Odomankoma. Danquah makes a typological case in support of this assumption:

> Odomankoma is conceived as the Okara of which Nyankopon is the Sunsum or Experience, and the idea to be fulfilled is the evolved and completely realized Honhom or Spirit of the Thing. In other words, just as an individual personality has a *sunsum* for experience, so, too, the Thing [Odomankoma] has a Sunsum for experience (1968: 68).

\(^4\) Ephirim-Donkor classifies Danquah among the Akan scholars who followed Rattray in defining the *sunsum* as spirit (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 40). I am not convinced this is accurate. Even though Danquah seemed to postulate the ontology of the *sunsum* as an immaterial element, he never used the term “spirit” for the *sunsum*. It is the *skra* that is accorded with spirituality in Danquah’s doctrine. But this happens only after a metamorphism, in which the *e-su* has become *sunsum*, and *sunsum* has become *skra*, and *skra* “become a honhom, a fully developed spirit or mind” (Danquah 1968: 113).
We can determine how Danquah uses the typology of ɔкра and sunsum to shape his pneumatology. Odomankoma as Ɔкра is the infinite Creator, better known in the world of experience as Onyankopon (Sunsum) through whom the Akan experience the creative power which Danquah assumes is the final fulfillment or realization of Odomankoma’s Honhom.

We may find it challenging to grasp the full meaning of Danquah’s thesis, but two things are quite evident in this typology. The first has to do with the relationship between ɔкра and sunsum: he assumes the latter is the reflection of the former. The second is how he draws our attention to the difference between sunsum and honhom; sunsum being personality, and honhom being the Spirit. These two are relevant to our study and need to be given further elaboration in the context of Danquah’s pneumatology and anthropology.

Danquah says sunsum is the ideal of a prototype called e-su (phasis; ‘nature’ in English), which “provides the possibility of the incipient individual’s appearance in Nyankopon’s presence… to obtain his nkrabea, destiny or intelligence, his ‘message’ to earth, to realize the essence or capacity of his particular soul (okara)” (1968: 66, 67). The Akan term e-su, which means nature, designates the nature of an object that appears in experience. Suban (character) is an example of the e-su of a person. All personality traits are characterized by e-su. It is the distinctive quality of being and the definition of the degree of being. Danquah postulated that “e-su represents the fundamental bio-physical nature of man” (1968: 111). The nature of being can be characterized as “the distinctive capacities of a truly human being with a corresponding responsibility to realize those capacities” (1968: 111). Consequently, Danquah was right to see e-su as comparable to the Greek physis (nature) since it is the exclusive constitution of power that defines an individual. For example, it is the e-su that makes a person human. The e-su can be an animal, a thing, etc. In the origin of human beings, Danquah believes “the Akan took it to be the primitive root of being” (1968: 111).

In an attempt to offer further elaboration, Danquah perceives e-su as the “prime genetic basis for the origin of the social subject, i.e., man” (1968: 111). The e-su (nature) is a spark from Odomankoma, the source of race and humanity. In life, esu is known to the Akan as sunsum, the subject of experience of the ɔкра; making the two divine and counterpart. Here, we encounter one of the most complex aspects of Danquah’s anthropology concerning his definition of the origin of the human being. That complexity does not seem to stem from the Akan religion, but instead from Danquah’s own understanding of Akan traditional concepts.
Given the complexity, we shall examine his interpretation of e-su in relation to okra more closely in order to show how he connects his conceptual scheme to Akan religion.

The necessity for this question lies in how most scholars studying Akan religion think it is the okra, instead of e-su, that takes leave before God. Danquah seems to have answered this question in his attempt to outline the main argument for that postulate. The origin of the human being is an evolutionary process. E-su appears before Onyankopon for nkrabea (destiny) or purpose decree, thereby acquiring hyebea, the e-su’s soul or okra. The okra, being the bearer of that destiny, then comes to inhere in the human being to realize that purposed decree. The e-su does not disappear after acquiring a soul or becoming a human being; it is carried into the mundane world of experience, “where it is known under the term sunsum, the counterpart of the spiritual, of the okara” (1968: 112). The finality of the process makes e-su a determinant principle for personality (sunsum).

There is a further note on the relationship between e-su and okra; the connection is ontologically inseparable. The okra bears a composite principle of destiny that can only be realized by the e-su, “the bearer of conscious experience, the unconscious or subliminal self remaining over as the okara or soul, which the primitive e-su has to realize in its individual being” (Danquah, 1968: 112). The sunsum appears in Danquah’s doctrine as a panentheistic element or an “ideal archetype pre-existing in Nyankopon as the Sunsum of Odomankoma” (1968: 113). The operational force of the sunsum as a conscious counterpart of the okra is to prepare for the destiny to be made good and the message (nkrabea) to be carried out (Danquah 1968: 115). This preliminary theory by Danquah will suggest that destiny (okra), being inactive in itself, could be brought to activity or fulfillment by the sunsum.

The whole evolutionary process of the origin of the human being could be summed up thus: “E-su gets its okara or soul from Nyankopon. E-su is also the matter of experience, of being in the world of the living. It is the basis of the sunsum of man. Likewise, Nyankopon is the Sunsum of Odomankoma” (1968: 112-113). So, “from e-su to sunsum, and from sunsum to okara, this okara becomes a honhom, a fully developed spirit or mind” (1968: 113). Odomankoma (Okra) is the source of life (okra) of the human being, while Nyankopon (Sunsum) is the experiencing

---

5 This conception underlines Kwame Gyekye’s philosophical theory of an ontic unity of the okra and sunsum. More details in Chapter five.
6 In furtherance of this assertion, Danquah treats the sunsum with dynamic properties that may have the propensity to cause evil, not necessarily because it is evil in itself. Danquah writes: “Evil, therefore, exists but only on the sunsum side; the world of the sunsum not the world of okara. It consists in the neglect, the omission, or the furtherance through ignorance of the sunsum, to make itself acceptable for the habitation of its okara, or to perpetuate an error or evil” (1968: 87).
deity who emerges as the sunsum of life. Hence, a person’s sunsum is the act of experience of the ɔkra, which when it is fully experienced, earns participation in divine immortality where it becomes part of God, i.e. one in substance and being as spirit (honhom) or mind.

In this context, Danquah provides the theological basis for two of the Akan concepts of the ɔkra. First, the departure of the ɔkra at the point of dying is proverbially referred to among Akan people as Ne honhom ko, “His breath or spirit is gone,” to signal the death of the person. I will return to this in subsequent chapters. The second supports the notion of the immortality of the ɔkra, and indeed a majority of Akan people view it as deathless. This explains the belief in ancestral spirits.

The foregoing anthropological analysis may hardly correspond to the ordinary Akan thinker’s understanding of the origin of human beings. Indeed, we may get the same feedback if we compare Danquah’s anthropology to that of Rattray’s. What we appreciate in Danquah is how he provides new possibilities to examine Akan realities. He offers a philosophical and theological reinterpretation of Akan religion towards a new self-definition of how Akan people should regard their history as a people.

Danquah presents the nature of sunsum as responsible for personality in the world of experience. Its divine origin and role as the basis for conscious experience is stated with more specific emphasis on its non-pneumatic character. Danquah did not apply the English term “spirit” to sunsum. E-su, known in the individual’s world of experience as sunsum, is “personality,” but not “spirit.” The definition he gives to a “spirit” refers to an immaterial psycho-dimensional object synonymous with the mind or the ɔkra. Both ɔkra and sunsum are spoken of in psychological terms, and on several occasions Danquah equates the ɔkra to the mind, which is spiritual (honhom) and a fully developed individual.

Danquah’s reading of Akan religion has been adjudged nonindigenous and fused with Christian theological thoughts (Müller 2008: 173). He also fell victim to his own polemics against Western commentators on Akan religion because he tried to convince his readers that Akan religious concepts are compatible with Western thoughts, which does not appear to be the case.

6.3. Sunsum as the Personal Soul in Eva L. R. Meyerowitz

Eva Lewin-Richter Meyerowitz (1899-1994) is another European anthropologist whose competence in and contribution to Akan anthropology is highly praised. She was born in Berlin, Germany, and was married to sculptor Herbert Vladimir Meyerowitz in 1925. Both spent some time in South Africa where Herbert taught at the University of Cape Town and opened an art
school. Their interest in arts and crafts brought them to Ghana where both became supervisors of arts and crafts at Achimota College in Accra. Herbert suffered manic depressive cyclothymia in 1945 and died that same year from suicide in London (Cardew 2002). Mrs. Meyerowitz spent forty years among the Bono cultural group of the Akan people of Ghana and was made queen mother in 1950 in Tekyiman. Her contribution to Akan literature and ethnohistory is considerable.

Meyerowitz’s introduction to Akan studies began in 1943 while serving as art supervisor at the Achimota College. The quest for artistic interest in gold ornaments turned into lifelong research into the study of Akan history and ethnology. That turnaround in her career mirrored the heightened interest in Akan studies around the mid-twentieth century. Since 1943, she contributed significantly to Akan literature and remains one of the most cited authorities in Akan studies. The range of her interests in Akan studies covered areas in Akan nationalism, history, religion, and politics. Her books include *The Sacred State of the Akan* (1951), *Akan Traditions of Origin* (1952), *The Akan of Ghana* (1958), and *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (1960). Her research primarily focused on Akan settlement and migration.

Meyerowitz’s ethnohistorical research delved into the origins of primitive Akan beliefs. She relied partly on Danquah for interpretation and reinterpretation of Akan religio-cultural categories. Their paths sometimes even crossed. While she proved that the Akan had a great past, she stimulated their memory to envision a future that encompasses the whole of that history. Meyerowitz’s contribution met the approval of Danquah who recommended her work as inspiring a living future hitched to a history embedded in the beginning of things (Danquah 1952: 366). Readers appreciate Meyerowitz for her ambitious independent attitude towards the reconstruction of Akan history, although she was not competent in the Twi language like Rattray and Danquah. This lack of linguistic mastery might have contributed to her historical speculations in the attempt to connect the Akan people to ancient Egypt. As we review her contribution to Akan anthropology, we shall keep in mind some of these gross misrepresentations.

Meyerowitz’s views on Akan spirituality appeared in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* under the title, “Concepts of the Soul among the Akan of the Gold Coast” (1951a), and also in her book, *The Sacred State of the Akan* (1951b). These materials express in detail the depths of her understanding of Akan spirituality.
At first glance, one may question whether Meyerowitz is treating the Akan as a homogenous group. There are little indications of the Akan subgroups she is dealing with. Akan ethnicity is a complex reality with several sociological divergences from one cultural group to another. Meyerowitz’s work focused on the Northern sector of the Ashanti, precisely among the Bonos of the Akan ethnicity. On few occasions, she made references to fieldwork among the Akan people in the South.

6.3.1. The Concept of God Among the Akan

The premise given by Meyerowitz in speaking of Akan spirituality stems from her conception of the Akan God. Onyankopon, a “bi-sexual deity of the cosmos Nyame Amowia, visible as the Moon, gave birth to the Sun god, she gave him her kra, her eternal soul or life-giving power; hence his name, the Only Great Nyame (Nyame; ko- only; pon- great) generally drawn together as Nyankopon” (1951a: 24). Thus, the theory postulates a moon cult which in her writings seems to compel for a good ground to interpret Akan anthropology with a specific emphasis on the matrilineal and patrilineal systems. It further serves as the grounds for interpreting Akan political structure where the queen mother, represented as the Moon, enstools the king representing the Sun.

Danquah had earlier brushed off any connection of Onyankopon to the celestial bodies; thus, Onyankopon is “a personality that must be something divorced from the impersonal sky or the firmament” (1968: 39). Nonetheless, in a review of Meyerowitz, Danquah appears to agree with her connection of the Akan deity to the celestial bodies, but only as a typology that corresponds to some Akan realities (Danquah 1956: 362, 363).

Rattray did not say much about a moon cult, except on the accounts of some mural designs he saw on the wall of Ta Kora’s temple, where he described the arts of celestial bodies as depicted “in connexion with the Supreme God, ‘Nyame’” (Rattray 1923: 173). Besides this remark, there is no deification of the Moon and Sun in Rattray’s conception of Onyankopon. We will, therefore, read Meyerowitz’s understanding of God in relation to the celestial bodies as only a personification rather than deification. More details on this concept of God can be found in her book, The Sacred State of the Akan (1951).

6.3.2. The Construction of the Sunsum

---

7 The typology deduced by Danquah from the moon cult represents the celestial triad of Onyame, Onyankopon, and Odomankoma. This becomes the basis for the matrilineal triad of mother, son, and uncle, representing the terrestrial triad of queen-mother, king, and ancestor.
In connection with the foregoing interpretation, Meyerowitz assumes that the Akan matrilineal system is a representation of the Moon (Nyame). She writes: “a matrilineal ancestor, as representative of Nyame, endows a child with a kra, the child to be born and still without a kra, receives the sunsum from the hands of a patrilineal ancestor, also as representative of Nyame, in the samandow or nether world” (1951a: 26).8 The kra is an activation of the mother’s blood capacity to bring about life.

To understand the connection to the moon cult, we are here introduced to the female as the symbol of life. Besides the kra, the child is further endowed with the personal soul called sunsum, and a paternal spirit called ntorɔ from a patrilineal ancestor (Meyerowitz 1951a: 24, 25).9 Rather than God and the pantheon deities, it is the ancestors who play vital roles in the spiritual and physical formation of the human being. The Akan community involves the living and the ancestors, and with Meyerowitz’s conception of birth, the relational idea is strengthened even more. The role the ancestors play, as representatives of God (Nyame) in procreation, displaces the pantheon deities (Abosom) as progenitors of children as theorized by Rattray and other scholars. If the ancestors are capable of endowing these vital properties, then they are powerful just like the pantheon deities. However, the available evidence does not support Meyerowitz’s conception of the birth of the human being, even if the attribution fits perfectly with Akan realities.

How did Meyerowitz understand the kra? To her, the kra is not just a principle of life, but the twin or double of the individual. It is a spiritual being that reproduces itself in the physical dimension as a human being. Meyerowitz speaks of the kra thus: “The kra then is life itself; it is man’s vital force, the source of his energy, his great reservoir of strength and sustenance. It is, further, a divine spirit, and inspirations, dreams, visions, and phantasies are attributed to it. It is also regarded as a man’s instinct, which protects him and may save him from danger, and hence it is also called man’s guardian spirit” (Meyerowitz 1951a: 24).

There are divergent views here as to whether kra is the double of the human being. A majority of scholars favor sunsum as the image or double of the individual that wanders in sleep (Rattray 1923; Asare Opoku 1978; Gyekye 1987). Despite this, Meyerowitz makes a strong argument in support of her assertion by referring to the Akan maxim, Ne ‘kra n’edii n’akyi ntira anka w’avu, meaning, “But for his kra that followed him, he would have died.” The maxim

8 Meyerowitz tells another account of the sunsum as what a father passes on to his child during sexual intercourse. The father kisses the mother and lets his saliva mingle with hers (1951a: 27).
9 Later scholarship referred to the kra as life-soul, and sunsum as the personality-soul (Akesson 1965: 286).
presupposes two characteristics of the ṣkra; first, as an astral “spirit,” and second, as a person’s companion. The strength of Meyerowitz’s conception of the ṣkra as the double of the individual rests upon this fact. I will respond to this theory in the next chapter. But for now, similar statements in Akan purport to support her assumption. These include, Wo reku me ‘kra, meaning “You are killing my ṣkra,” and Me ‘kra redi awereho, meaning “My ṣkra is aggrieving.” These anthropomorphic sentiments are often attributed to the ṣkra as though it is an astral being that can suffer some form of physical experiences. However, the statements above do not define the ontological properties of the ṣkra. Proverbs are metaphors; they are not to be taken literally. Ṣkra is a principle of a life-force. Anything that diminishes life, for example, as in grieving, pain, and death, are attributed to the ṣkra. After all, Akan people believe the ṣkra cannot die; how then can one’s ‘kra be aggrieved to death if not in a figurative sense? Hence, the statements should be understood metaphorically rather than literal.

Meyerowitz seems, in part, to offer a solution to Rattray’s contradiction of the ṣkra and sunsum by translating both terms as “soul.” She wrote, “the kra is a divine, impersonal soul, the sunsum is regarded as the personal soul” (Meyerowitz 1951a: 26).10 The impersonal soul (ṣkra) is compared to Sigmund Freud’s Id, i.e., the unconscious and instinctual part of the personality; on the other hand, the personal soul (sunsum), is compared to the Ego, the conscious and principle of reality. The ṣkra is the uncoordinated drive or the unconscious impulses, the psychological disposition that is seeking fulfillment (1951a: 27).

Meyerowitz uses a Freudian analogy of the ego for the sunsum to convey the manner that the individual wishes to express itself in life, and the plans the person desires to put into action in the world (1951: 26, 27). Akan people refer to this life disposition as nkrabea (destiny); here, Meyerowitz attributes it to the sunsum – what Rattray said of as “upon which depend health, wealth, worldly power, success in any venture, in fact everything that makes life at all worth living” (1923: 46).

Both Meyerowitz and Danquah believe the sunsum is the bearer of nkrabea (destiny), although they disagree on the process. Danquah thinks it is the e-su (thing) that appears before Onyankopan to receive its hyebea (ṣkra) and destiny (sunsum). Consequently, in Danquah, the sunsum and ṣkra have ontic unity where the sunsum is the intelligence of the spiritual being, the ṣkra. Danquah further wrote: “In nkrabea, destiny or intelligence, both the sunsum, and the

10 The ṣkra as divine is not a contradiction of Meyerowitz’ reference to the ancestress as responsible for the ‘kra. The ancestress represents Nyame in the nether world where she receives the ‘kra from Nyame.
okara are immeasurably involved” (1968: 68). Meyerowitz, on the other hand, thinks the sunsum is given by a patrilineal ancestor from Asamando (the spirit world of the dead), but the nkrabea (destiny) is pronounced by Nyame. The only message given to the okra was a command “to be a good human being, and to do good deeds during his lifetime.” This is what Meyerowitz calls hyebea (hye – command, commandment; bea – type of) (1951a: 24). In this sense, both okra and sunsum are bearers of distinct messages.

According to Meyerowitz, the sunsum is the conscious structure that puts the unconscious pleasures of the okra (Id) into real balance or, to use Danquah’s words, “to live the objective and destined life” (1968: 67). Meyerowitz’s assumption agrees with the general conception among Akan people that the sunsum is the operational force for personality and the subject of experience. This is besides her perception of sunsum as the bearer of nkrabea – a majority of Akan people believe nkrabea is dependent upon the okra as the derivation of the term nkrabea (nkra + bea) suggests.¹¹

Whereas it may appear that the okra and sunsum are two separate entities, Meyerowitz sees them as two elements of one soul (1951a: 27). The okra and sunsum form a compound unity. This agrees directly with Rattray’s characterization of the sunsum as the volatile part of the okra, as well as the counterpart of the okra in Danquah (Rattray 1957: 154; Danquah 1968: 112). The unanimous agreement among scholars on the relationship of the okra-sunsum ontic unity lays the foundation for the idea that as the body cannot exist without an okra, so okra cannot function in the mundane world without a sunsum. According to Meyerowitz, the two elements are not one and same; however, they have ontic unity in their operation, making them co-existent.

Meyerowitz emphasizes the separation of okra and sunsum at death. In her anthropology, there is disembodiment of the human being at death when the okra returns to God and “the sunsum becomes a ghost or spirit (saman) in the image of the deceased and returns to the samandow, the realm of the spirits” (1951a: 27). She further alludes to the fact that the sunsum of the wicked individuals “are not wanted there and are condemned, after judgment in heaven, to live to eternity in the abronsamgyam, the place of wickedness or hell” (1951a: 27).¹² I cannot think of

---

¹¹ See explanation on chapter two.
¹² Meyerowitz absorbs Christian doctrines of “heaven,” “judgement,” and “hell” into Akan realities which I think nuances a comprehensive view of Akan religion. In Akan belief, the good ones qualify to join the ancestors and those who could not make it roam about in the spiritual world (occasionally revealing themselves to people) until Onyame gives them the chance to be reborn–reincarnation. The Akan believe that no one is ultimately doomed and ‘Hell’ is temporary excommunication from the ancestors.
any conception of heaven, judgment, and hell in Akan religion except in Christian doctrines that have found their way within the Akan culture. But given the benefit of the doubt, we are interested in her thoughts about what becomes of the sunsum after death. If sunsum survives death and can become a ghost, or is judged to spend eternity in hell, could it then be thought of as entitative? It appears to me as such, even though Meyerowitz had earlier rejected the nature of the sunsum as not divine but “only a shadow, which lives as long as a person can throw a shadow, and can therefore not be reincarnated” (1951a: 26). If that is the case, would it not be logical for one to assume that sunsum perishes at death or it does not go to Asamando, let alone suffer hellfire since a dead person cannot throw a shadow? Other scholars discuss the postmortem reality of sunsum, which we are going to look at in the next discussion after Meyerowitz.

To sum up everything that Meyerowitz had to say on sunsum and Akan anthropology, we come to the following observations. Meyerowitz differs widely from both Rattray and Danquah on the notion of ɔkra and sunsum. Whereas Rattray believes the ɔkra is the bearer of nkra (destiny), Meyerowitz attributes the bearer of destiny to the sunsum. And whereas Danquah presents a metamorphic evolution of e-su to sunsum to ɔkra and finally to honhom, Meyerowitz considers the three as separate soul components whereby the ɔkra is divine, coming from Onyankopɔn, and sunsum is an ancestral spirit rather than divine. Meyerowitz believes sunsum is a patrilineal spirit, unlike Rattray who linked it to the Ɔbosom (ntɔrɔ) of the father. There is an entitative conception of the sunsum in the account of Meyerowitz, which is related to the notion that it survives death and eventually becomes a ghost, a fully developed spiritual being. The question, then, is how was the sunsum apotheosized as a living entity (saman/ghost) without the life force, i.e. ɔkra? In our next chapter, we will show how Kwame Gyekye seeks to solve this dilemma. But before that, let us consider several scholars who have something to say about the sunsum.

6.4. Sunsum as a Paternal Biogenetic in Kofi Abrefa Busia

So far, the idea of a transmission of sunsum through males has been recurrent in the study – with the exception of Danquah. Sunsum is a paternal biogenetic predisposition of the male line, not the female blood (Rattray 1923; Meyerowitz 1951). More elaboration is given by one of the most important authors of Akan anthropology and a Ghanaian statesman, namely Kofi Abrefa Busia (1913–1978). Busia was born into a royal family at Wenchi in the Bono-Ahafo region
The admiration is even more striking when one considers what Busia said of Rattray: “But the most intimate and accurate knowledge of the Ashanti we owe to Captain R. S. Rattray whose books Ashanti, Ashanti Law and Constitution, Religion and Art in Ashanti, and Ashanti Proverbs have covered in an admirable way different aspects of Ashanti culture” (Busia 1954: 190). As a consequence, Busia shares many common ideas with Rattray, especially in the conception of sunsum as it relates to the human being and the entire universe.

6.4.1. Busia’s Anthropology and his Conception of the Sunsum

The conception of the human being is a duality of biological and spiritual components. First, the biological nature consists of the mogya from the mother that creates the matriclan (abusua) affinity. The mogya gives the child status and membership within the lineage, the clan, and the community, as well as the child’s rights and obligations as a citizen. The mogya ideology forms the basis of the matriclan, the concept of the life hereafter, and the consequent ancestral cult that provides the religious link and unbroken continuity with the individual’s kin (Busia 1954: 199, 200). Second is the spiritual, the ntorɔ, which is received through the father from a tutelary spirit. The mogya and ntorɔ determine the social organization of the Asante where an individual’s genealogical connection links the person with kinsmen, fellow citizens, and society (Busia 1954: 196, 197). Besides the mogya and ntorɔ, the Akan child receives two other distinct spiritual gifts, i.e. sunsum and ɔkra. The two are not synonymous and identical, according to Busia. The sunsum is transmitted from the father to the child to mold the child’s psychological and spiritual disposition or distinctive character. Every male child possesses this “personal power, or cast of countenance” from the father (1954: 197). The expected result is that the child will uphold moral qualities commendable to shape the accepted social values that hold the community together.

Busia further asserts, like Meyerowitz, that the sunsum is not divine, but perishes with the person at death. It is not clear what Busia meant by the perishability of the sunsum. Meyerowitz’s interpretation of that assumption alluded to the disembodiment of the sunsum from the body, which ultimately becomes the ghost after death. Rattray had asserted repatriation of the sunsum to its source, thus a return to the tutelary deity (Rattray 1923: 55). Danquah did not talk about the perishability of sunsum since it is only a personality and has ontological unity with the ɔkra. Busia did not give further details about the posthumous state of the sunsum; rather, he seems to say that there is no experience in a dead person since the sunsum is departed.

14 See also (Akesson 1965: 286).
In speaking of the ṣкра, Busia considered it to be the life force, a spark of the Creator that lives in every person’s body. The ṣкра is deathless, the bearer of destiny and the part that returns to God after the individual dies (Busia 1954: 197).

To look further into the nature of the sunsum, Busia characterizes it using pneumatic terminologies, although he does not seem to call it a “spirit” categorically. He technically calls it “spiritual gift” from the father that binds the child to him. He writes: “Sunsum is that which you take with you to go to the side of the woman and lie with her; and then the Onyankopon, the Great One, will take his kra and bless your union. You give your sunsum to the child, not your kra” (Busia 1954: 197). The relationship between the child and the father is a spiritual bond. Rattray had already stated the pervasive force of the father’s sunsum over his wife and children (Rattray 1927: 154; 1929: 9). Busia integrates that idea into his understanding to reinforce the father’s role in the transmission of the sunsum. He sees the sunsum as a biogenetic component, a paternal spiritual gift transmitted during the act of sexual intercourse. The character of the sunsum as “spiritual” is here used by Busia in a felicitous manner to ontologically designate it as something intangible, not necessary a spirit-being or an astral entity. How does Busia trace the origin of the sunsum?

It has already been indicated that Busia directly relies on Rattray’s ideas, making them a pedagogical basis for his anthropology. He contributes to it as an indigenous scholar whose cultural background is shaped by those ideas. That reliance supported Rattray’s work in a pervasive manner as Busia clarifies most of the terminological nuances, especially the relationship between the sunsum and ntorɔ. Busia’s conception of the ntorɔ indirectly answers to the question of the origin of sunsum. He believed it is the ntorɔ that is technically transmitted by the father to his child, although many Asantes gravitate toward sunsum instead. An “Ashanti will say that a man transmits his ntorɔ (spirit) to his child” (Busia 1954: 197). Busia continues to assert the fact that “ntorɔ is the generic term of which sunsum is a specific instance” (1954: 197). In this sense, Busia says the two terms are used synonymously but in a different context. This means sunsum has an innate affinity to the ntorɔ, even though the two are not the same. Ntorɔ is the carrier of the sunsum and forms a part of the whole ntorɔ spirituality.17 That

---

15 This belief demonstrates the authority of the Akan father over both his wife and children. Consequently, Ashantis believe a child cannot thrive if his father’s sunsum is alienated or may fall ill if the father’s own sunsum is aggrieved (Busia, 1954: 197).

16 The ntorɔ as a generic term was earlier used by Captain Rattray (1923: 45).

17 This conceptualization forms the premise for a later designation of the sunsum as a counterpart of the ntorɔ transmitted to a child at conception (Wiredu 1987: 161; Ephirim-Donkor 2008: 57). The ntorɔ denotes character resemblance and gives general characteristics to the group of which the father belongs. The twelve chief
conclusion brings to mind Rattray’s statement on the symbiotic relationship of the ntorɔ and sunsum (Rattray 1923: 46).

Like Rattray, Busia affirms ntorɔ as a tutelary spirit or under the aegis of a god (Abosom). These gods, widely considered among Akan people as representatives of God, share in his spiritual nature. Busia continues to add that “the Ntoro are children of the rivers from whom they derive their spirits; and in the same way that the Ntoro is a child of the river, so the sunsum of a man is a child of the Ntoro and shares its nature” (1954: 198). The affinity between the ntorɔ and sunsum is ontological. We arrive at a conclusion to view the intrinsic vitality of sunsum as coming from the tutelary deities (Abosom/NTorɔ). Once again, we find in both Rattray and Busia the same conclusion concerning the sunsum as an emanating force from the Abosom who transmit their ntorɔ through the father to the child. Busia, like many Akan, knew all too well that “all spiritual power derives from the Supreme Being,” and therefore sunsum is indirectly a divine essence (1954: 198, 200).

To sum up, the question of the nature of the sunsum appears in Busia’s conception as a personality, personal power, and a spiritual bond between the father and child. It is not a spiritual being that can live independently of the person. Sunsum as an individual’s double did not appear in Busia’s anthropology, and neither did he make any reference to any sleep peregrination. These omissions do not prove that he doubted such experiences. Busia’s overall assessment of the sunsum makes it only a personality, a form of charisma. It is not just a concept, but an ontological reality that comes with the ntorɔ from the Abosom. The father who transmits it is only an instrument in the same way that the gods serve God as intermediaries for humanity (Busia 1954: 198, 200). So, even though the Akan will say of the sunsum that it is the father’s “spirit,” it derives in essence from the Abosom. Reference to the habitation of the Abosom in natural objects such as rivers, trees, stones, mountains, etc. help understand the pervasive nature of sunsum in natural objects.

The attribution of mortality to the sunsum directly challenges the pneumatic nature theory since, as Wiredu puts it, “spiritual beings are supposed to be immortal by nature” (Wiredu 1987: 163). The use of spiritual by Busia makes the sunsum an intangible force, rather than a living entity. When he spoke of it as mortal, this refers to its disembodiment at death, not necessarily to its characteristics of ntorɔ are listed in chapter four and chapter eight of this dissertation. Further studies on the ntorɔ can be found in Rattray (1923) and Busia (1954).
destruction. After all, most Akan people believe the ntorɔ is inheritable; the same is true of the sunsum (Asare Opoku 1978: 98).

6.5. The Exclusively Spiritual (Ye Sunsum) and the Inspirited (Wo Sunsum) in Helaine K. Minkus

The various descriptions given to the sunsum find a wider rational expansion in Helaine K. Minkus, an American international cultural anthropologist who spent two years in Akropong in Ghana from 1969 to 1971. She learned the Akan Twi language and researched the traditional concepts of the Akwapim people of the Akan group. She was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 28, 1943 and died on July 16, 2015, in Charleston, South Carolina. Her research in Ghana formed part of her Ph.D. dissertation, which she completed at Northwestern University (Evanston) in 1974.

Minkus contributed to Akan literature through her detailed understanding of Akan spirituality and causality. Two of her articles, “The Concept of Spirit in Akwapim Akan Philosophy” (1980) and “Causal Theory in Akwapim Akan Philosophy” (1984), are regularly cited in Akan studies. Minkus was an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire from where she lectured and retired. We may not have much to say about her biography and scholarship, but she is known among Akan academics because of her literary connection with the Akan people. Her thorough ethnographic sketch on Akan pneumatology advanced the sunsum historiography and contributed to its constructive evolution.

6.5.1. Ontological Definition of Sunsum

Minkus’ commentary described the concept of sunsum as a major premise in Akan philosophy. It forms the basis of several categories such as ontology, psychology, epistemology, and theory of causality (Minkus 1980: 182). She may be considered the foremost scholar to have investigated the ontology of the sunsum in a much broader sense, and her work may also be seen as a sound representation of contemporary Akan cosmology. In a few words, Minkus defined the sunsum thus: “The sunsum, so necessary to existence, is not conceived as an indwelling spirit foreign to the object in which it resides. Rather the sunsum is the essence of the being or object, its intrinsic activating principle” (Minkus 1980: 182). This statement from Minkus forms the basis of my discussion of her work.

Minkus believes the Akan universe is not a duality of spiritual and material worlds, but one inspirited universe. There is no exclusive material world with its material objects, distinct as it were from a spiritual realm of spiritual existents. As she wrote, all that exists is inspirited or
active (Minkus 1980: 182). This assumption stems from her understanding of the *sunsum* as an essence of natural objects and the principle of intrinsic activation. Without an innate vitality, life ceases to exist. She writes: “In Akwapim Akan thought, anything which exists in its natural state has *sunsum*. It is the *sunsum* which enables the being or object to exercise power and to function in its characteristic manner” (1980: 182). Hence, the world and its natural objects are active because of the *sunsum*, and because of *sunsum* they are capable of possessing power and vitality in themselves. This indication explains the idea of animism among the Akan.

Animism presupposes that natural objects (both animate and inanimate) possess souls or consciousness in themselves. Although Minkus did not use the term animism, the notion of an inspired universe yields the tendency of animistic conception. There are several reasons to justify this assumption, particularly from Minkus’ insistence that there is no matter without awareness or action. She also seems to come to the same conclusion with Rattray who saw *sunsum* to be an innate *anima* in creation. Rattray wrote: “In the animistic creed of Ashanti everything in nature, animate or inanimate, has its *sunsum* (soul or spirit)” (Rattray 1923: 296). Instead of thinking of *sunsum* as separate from the object, we are led to think of it as the essence of the object. The all-pervading spirituality of *sunsum* is a spiritual substance rather than an indwelling spirit (entity) foreign to the object. All these give support to Minkus’ view of the unitary nature of the universe.

When we look at the source of *sunsum*, Minkus comes to the same conclusion as Busia that all spiritual powers or *sunsum* are indirectly from God. Minkus refers more specifically to *sunsum* as proceeding directly from the Supreme Being, the Creator and source of all existence (Minkus 1980: 182). But whereas Busia talked of intermediaries in the transmission of *sunsum*, Minkus links the activities of *sunsum* directly to God, creating an intimate connection between creation and God. We have here the reason why Akan religion is panentheistic, and not pantheistic. God is not immanent in person as nature, but God’s *sunsum* is absorptive in the universe, making God immanent.

Minkus’ divine association of *sunsum* with God strongly aligns with Danquah’s thesis that Onyankopan is the personality (*sunsum*) of Odomankoma, and therefore the universe itself is Onyankopan’s universe, making it capable to be experienced. Their point of departure, however, consists in the nature of *sunsum*. With Danquah, *sunsum* is only a personality. Even though Minkus agrees with Danquah’s assessment of *sunsum* as partly a force for personality, she thinks *sunsum* is a generic description of spiritual existents and forces, and a spiritual force.
for activity in the universe. These are the bases for her pneumatological background of Akan religion.

Minkus explores the concept of *sunsum* as the essence of existents that are observable on two categories. The first is the exclusively spiritual (*ye sunsum*). This may comprise entities conceived of as spiritual beings, e.g., God, gods, dwarfs, ghosts, and other spirits. Here, we can see a radical evolution of the nature of *sunsum*, from an emanating force to the very essence of being. That means *sunsum* has become a generic term for beings and objects that are nonphysical or spiritual. In other words, there are, on one hand, objects that are non-conceptual as physical, i.e. beyond the reach of human perception and senses (1980: 183). On the other hand, there are objects that are inspirited, i.e. those that have *sunsum* (*wɔ sunsum*), e.g., human beings, animals, plants, stones, rivers, etc. The exercise of their essential qualities is dependent on *sunsum*. These two categories represent the definition of the *sunsum* in Minkus’ pneumatology. Further details will throw more light on these two categories.

**6.5.2. The Exclusively Spiritual (Ye Sunsum)**

Minkus classifies God, the deities, the ancestral spirits, and personalized talismans as *sunsum* because their substance and whole being is *sunsum* (Minkus 1980: 183). Akan religion recognizes myriads of entities that are exclusively force-beings. These are part of the world but outside the reach of physical contact. An exception is given to God, whose nature and existence transcend this world although it is not without God’s presence. Exclusively spiritual objects are described to be *sunsum* because their mode of operation is not open to ordinary perception but requires extraordinary or spiritual means to determine their existence (Minkus 1980: 187). Spiritual existents can, according to Minkus, “sometimes materialize and appear to have a spiritual analogue to physical form which may be perceived by certain people with special powers” (1980: 183). The observation is true but needs further clarification to avoid confusion with other Akan realities.

---

18 It will be appropriate if we classify talismans as part of the inspirited objects rather than the exclusively spiritual objects. Talismans are materials made to absorb spiritual powers and do not seem to qualify to be called exclusively spiritual.

19 The acquisition of extraordinary powers to perceive the unseen is further detailed by Minkus as: “Persons with exceptional power to see and hear in spiritual ways (described as *ohu n’ani so ade* and *ote n’aso so ade*) are able to see the spiritual forms of the deities, personalized talismans and spirits of the dead, and to hear what ordinary persons cannot. Such persons can determine the causes of illness, misfortune and death, can detect witches, and are able to foresee future events. The power of special vision and audition is acquired through the application of an herbal concoction, or as a gift from God, or, according to some informants, may be inborn. Any person who applies the medicine to his eyes and ears will thereby be enabled to see and hear in an extraordinary manner. The medicine is employed principally by medium-priests but can be taken by any individual who can persuade
Spiritual entities may choose, on rare occasions, to reveal themselves in physical forms to people. In such transfiguration, it does not always require any extrasensory abilities to recognize them. Akan people are made aware of the presence or influence of spiritual forces in the physical world, and this is the reason why the community involves unseen existents. Spiritual agencies like gods, ghosts, and others, are capable of materializing themselves and entering into communication with human beings. Ephirim-Donkor writes: “the unseen, the spiritual, will, from time to time, materialize just enough to remind people that they are still around, like when people claim to see the dead momentarily” (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 3). The ancestors, herein referred to as the dead by Ephirim-Donkor, possess the spiritual qualities that make them capable of entering the physical world to exercise physical contact. Their nature in the temporary manifestation or physicality is not “an intrinsic or defining aspect of their nature” (Minkus 1980: 183). Apart from God, who no one claims to have seen or heard among the Akan, all the spiritual existents can make themselves known or take upon themselves appearances of physical properties.

Coming back to the discussion of what is exclusively spiritual, Minkus establishes that people with special spiritual abilities may perceive spiritual existents. She writes: “individuals with special powers, innate or gained through the application of medicine or by divine gift, are believed capable of perceiving what is not ordinarily perceivable” (1980: 183). In as much as this is true of Akan religion, in some rare cases non-clairvoyants are capable of perceiving spiritual existents especially when the spiritual agent desires to be seen. Now, in order not to confuse what is essentially sunsum with what is spiritual in the general sense, it is better we give further explanation.

The underlying problem in the contemporary argument of the nature of the sunsum is the question of whether sunsum should be rendered as “spirit.” That is the idea we get from Minkus, who follows Rattray and translates sunsum as “spirit.” Should anything that cannot be perceived with the naked eyes or be felt by the natural senses be rendered as sunsum or spiritual? In my analysis above, and also according to Minkus, “the designation ‘spiritual’” ought to be “reserved for extraordinary perception” (Minkus 1980: 184). Extraordinary perception defines what is spiritual, which the Akan calls sunsum. For the sake of argument, we shall take the òkra as an aspect of spirituality, since Minkus calls it “another spiritual component” (1980: 184). In someone who knows how to make it to give it to him. However, the ability to see and hear in extraordinary ways is potentially dangerous. A person who does not have a strong sunsum will be frightened by the strange sights and sounds he encounters and may become mad” (Minkus, 1980: 184).
general, Akan people believe “highly developed medicine men are claimed to be able to enter into communication with an ‘okra,’ and those that have eyes with medicinally heightened perception are said to be capable of seeing such things” (Wiredu 1987: 161). As a spiritual element, does it qualify its essence so that we should conceive of it as sunsum (ye sunsum)? I do not think so. Busia refers to the okra as a spiritual gift, but never did he, or any Akan scholar, call its essence sunsum. To call it sunsum would engender much confusion in the Akan worldview, especially when the two terms have distinct religious significance. Even scholars who think that the okra and sunsum have ontic unity would never describe the nature of the okra as sunsum. Therefore, it should be clear that not anything rendered spiritual in the English language can be translated as sunsum in Akan languages. And when Akan people use the term “spirit,” they refer to what is describable, as Minkus rightly noted, and not merely something which is abstract (1980: 182). On the other hand, Akan people talk of sunsum mu nsem (mystical matters) to describe the mysterious part of the world. They employ the term sunsum to define the unseen of which aspects may qualify the okra. An example is the act of entering into communication with the okra. Akan people will consider the process as sunsum mu nsem (mystical) because the passage is not done through the ordinary world. In every practical sense, the essence of the okra may be best described in the Akan language as honhom, i.e. breath, as I will attempt to show below.20

6.5.3. The Inspirited (Wo Sunsum)

The second category in Minkus’ description is the inspirited or what possesses sunsum (wo sunsum). Here, she presents sunsum as an essential component of experience in everything that exists in its natural state in contrast to spiritual objects. Human beings, animals, plants, rocks, bodies of water and other objects that exist in their natural state possess sunsum as their intrinsic activation. Minkus says their entire being cannot be said to be sunsum, and yet it can only exist when their constituents are inspirited with sunsum (1980: 183). Life constitutes in itself the vitality of sunsum; without it several aspects of experience may not be achieved. The expression given here has been the framework upon which several Akan scholars have dealt with the sunsum, either as the principle of animation or of experience.

Minkus reconciles with Danquah, Meyerowitz, and Busia to designate wo sunsum as personality (ego) or character, although she is more inclined to side with Danquah, who at one

---

20 Further discussion will reveal how Gyekye identifies the okra as honhom or the breath of life (Gyekye 1987: 88).
point talked of *sunsum* as “the power that sustains a person’s character or individuality” (Danquah 1945: 22). Minkus likewise thinks of it as “the power which underlies and enables the manifestation of those activities and traits which mark a person as both a human being and an individual” (1980: 185). A person’s *sunsum* is the force for higher intelligence and those things that pertain to being human in the sense of functioning as a human being. The character disposition in daily choices to realize one’s destiny is all dependent on the *sunsum*. Minkus reminds us of Rattray’s definition of *sunsum* as “everything that makes life at all worth living” (Rattray 1923: 46). There is a far-reaching experience of being inspired by *sunsum*.

There are many aspects of the *wo sunsum* that Minkus articulates in agreement with other scholars. Minkus believes *sunsum* is primarily an enabling power, “an intrinsic source of spiritual strength and resistance to attack through spiritual mean” (1980: 185-6). The statement is made in reference to the dynamic nature of *sunsum*. There are those with strong *sunsum*, meaning they are high-spirited. Akan people have the adage: *Ne sunsum mu ye duru*, i.e. “his *sunsum* is heavy.” Others are said to have weak *sunsum*, e.g., *Ne sunsum mu ye hare*, meaning: “he has a weak *sunsum*,” or “he is a coward” (Minkus 1980: 187; Rattray 1955: 198; 1957: 154). These varying degrees of vitality define an individual’s charisma and how one can protect and withstand danger. Someone with strong *sunsum*, according to Minkus, “can repel evil spiritual agents and forces, can safely take the medicine for special visions and auditions, and is viewed by others as an imposing and influential figure” (1980: 186). This is not the case for those with weak *sunsum*.

Like her predecessors, Minkus links *sunsum* to males. We have already established that Akan people perceive the *sunsum* to be a patriarchal substance that runs through the father’s lineage. Minkus underlines this about the maxim, Ṣbaa mni *sunsum*, which means: “A woman does not have *sunsum*.” She explains this in the following way: “a woman is not as strong spiritually as a man and cannot transmit her *sunsum* to her children” (1980: 186). The principle of the relationship between spiritual force and human nature is discussed as a fundamental reality in this maxim. The Akan do recognize the *sunsum* of women (Rattray 1927: 318). The maxim implies that the woman transmits only her blood, a physical bond, and the basis of Akan social organization. This is equally important, just like the father’s *sunsum* that establishes the spiritual bond with his offspring. If there is any gender “inequality” among Akan people, it is not so much determined by the agency of *sunsum* than to other social forces. The dynamic nature of

---

sunsum makes each person prone to being weak or strong. For this reason, one cannot entirely regard the maxim as ontological – universally – than a biopsychological diversity. When one examines the differences in the psychology of males and females, particularly variegated in personality, we come to the conclusion that the Akan have found some key answers to gender identity in their social framework.

Minkus stresses the strong influence of the father’s sunsum which makes it a mystic bond rather than a magnetic attraction. It is thought that the sunsum of the father protects his offspring, “especially during childhood when the child’s own sunsum is weak” (Minkus 1980: 186). In case of divorce, the mother of a sick child will take the child to the father for spiritual reinforcement to heal the child. In cases where the man feels alienated by his offspring, Minkus says the man can spiritually take revenge to harm the children (1980: 186). The spiritual bond is unbreakable as long as it is a mystical definition of one’s self.

There are other qualities of wo sunsum mentioned by Minkus. She sees sunsum as the basis of moral qualities. Persons who commit morally commendable acts are thought to possess good sunsum (sunsum pa), or their sunsum is good (ne sunsum ye). These are individuals who uphold commendable moral qualities. The opposite is individuals with bad or evil sunsum (sunsum bɔne). An evil sunsum will seek to damage or kill others (Minkus 1980: 186).

In most cases, Akan people associate sunsum bɔne with witchcraft. Witches are not spiritual beings. They are humans who use supernatural methods to assume their operations. Witchcraft is the development of the evil sunsum that makes the witch proficient in the exercise of witchcraft power (Minkus 1980: 186). Minkus’ comments agree with Rattray (1927: 155).

The sunsum of the witch is separated from the body during nightly peregrination. This brings Minkus to the same conclusion with Rattray that the sunsum is the volatile soul or spiritual element of the okra (Minkus 1980: 186; Rattray 1927: 93, 154, 192). The evil sunsum must not

---

22 In one of her ethno-psychiatry studies of Ghana, Margaret Joyce Field, a clinical psychiatrist working with the British in then Gold Coast administration, observed this traditional belief in an occasion of a sick child who was brought to the shrine for treatment. She writes: “One ailing child whose parents were on bad terms and whose father was seldom at home was pronounced by the priest to be ‘getting no sunsum from its father.’ I was surprised, at my weekly clinic at Mframaso, to see how often it was the fathers and not mothers who brought children for treatment. The small child regards its father as its natural worshipper” (Field 1960: 27-28; Cited in Ephirim-Donkor 1997:15).

23 The idea that witches can be hunted and trapped by witch hunters suggest that they are not spirits but can perform spiritual activities analogous to spiritual beings.

24 We can be cautious here not to think of the sunsum as being the witch. It is the contamination of the sunsum that makes witchcraft possible. Witchcraft is a supernatural practice that is made possible by a willing sunsum. When one’s sunsum is not willing, the person cannot become a witch. This explains why individuals can be cured of being witches. See my discussion with Rattray for more details (Rattray 1927: 30).
always be a witch in order to carry out evil actions. Acts of violence, dehumanization, and felony are attributed to an evil sunsum since they threaten the social order.

What happens to sunsum after death? Minkus says sunsum does not go to the netherworld with the deceased and neither is it transformed into a ghost (1980: 186). To sustain that assumption, she relied on her informant who said, “it is the sunsum of the dead chief, not his ‘ghost’ (osaman), which is thought to enter the ancestral stool when invoked during ceremonies” (1980: 186). Minkus appears to distinguish the sunsum of the deceased from the ghost (osaman). Unless given further details, but Minkus is silent about it, we are led to believe that an ancestral spirit is not subject to the character traits of sunsum.

Why then does she classify the ancestors as part of the exclusively spiritual (ye sunsum) dimension? The only reason given is because they are spirit-beings, whose nature is not subject to physical constraints. The osaman is nonphysical but not in essence sunsum. Ephirim-Donkor contrasts the world of “spirits” from the ancestral world (Asamando/Asamandzie) by looking at two aspects of the spiritual realm. He says, “the Samanadzie is different from the realm of Àsunsum (spirits)... the Abosom – who are incapable of death – do not enter the realm of the Samanadzie because the Samanadzie is reserved for only those who have tasted death and been resurrected as Nananom Nsamanfo or just Nsamanfo (spiritual or abstract personalities)” (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 2). Thus, our historiographical review establishes the premise that sunsum proceeds from a spirit-being whose very essence is sunsum.

Minkus again points out the influence of an ancestor’s sunsum in child naming. Akan names are significant in meaning. There are at least three dimensions of it, namely the kradin (natal names or soul names), family names (Ntorɔ/paternal spirit names), and affectionate names (after an important personality, ancestor or event). When an affectionate name is given after an ancestor, the child “may exhibit some of the behavioral traits which were characteristic of the person” (1980: 186). In this instance, the character of sunsum seems more likely as a spiritual force rather than entitative.

In summary, Minkus’ contribution to Akan literature comes with a categorization of spiritual realities according to the Akan people of Akwapim. She adopts this approach of reconstructing reality to examine the notion that spirits are definable or describable, unlike the spiritual among the Akan. The most significant aspect of her contribution is the generic, instead of a specific, use of sunsum to describe all spiritual existents. There are spirits in the universe that are unperceivable by human senses unless through extrasensory means. These immaterial beings
or forces do not operate from another world to exert their influence and manipulation in the ordinary world, but they form part of a single inspired universe.

Given all this, she deals with the concept of *sunsum* from the various categories given to it, i.e., what is exclusively spiritual (*ye sunsum*), and what is inspired or have *sunsum* (*wo sunsum*). Minkus believe these two categories provide the lens through which Akan ontology, epistemology, psychology, and the theory of causality can be explained.

**6.6. Ṣbosom: The Sunsum of the Human Being – Anthony Ephirim-Donkor**

Anthony Ephirim-Donkor is a significant scholar in Akan scholarship. He hails from the Fante cultural group of the Akan group. There are two Akan subgroups, namely, the Twi-speaking Akan, and the Fante-speaking Akan. The Fantes are predominantly found in the South (mainly on the coastal areas). There is a large extent of shared similarities between the Fantes and the other Twi Akan subgroups. Ephirim-Donkor’s recent contribution to Akan literature from his Fante background has been well received and commented. He remains an authority in Akan spirituality and personality, especially on his studies of the concept of *sunsum*.

Besides his academic credentials, Ephirim-Donkor has been an ardent practitioner of the traditional Akan religion as a local chief working with traditional priests and other religious officers in Ghana. The chieftaincy, with its associated religious rituals, brought him closer to the Abosom (pantheon deities). He claims experiential knowledge of the Abosom through divinations and other ways (2016: xi). As an informed Akan who had witnessed divinations in my own local town, I have no doubt of the claims of Ephirim-Donkor. Two of his significant books on the study of *sunsum* are *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* (1997) and *African Personality and Spirituality: The Role of Abosom and Human Essence* (2016). Both books provide detailed information about the meaning of *sunsum* from both previous and contemporary scholars. However, I find the latter more insightful on the meaning of *sunsum* from his own conception and construction of Akan religion.

**6.6.1. The Meaning of Sunsum by Ephirim-Donkor**

The notion of *sunsum* appears in Ephirim-Donkor’s understanding as a determining principle for Akan spirituality and personality. Through this view, he argues that *sunsum* is an essential quality known to the Akan as a shadow, image, or double of the individual. It is the self, the spiritual aspect of an individual. Ephirim-Donkor adds that *sunsum* also defines anything intangible or unseen; as a result, he translates *sunsum* as “spirit” to capture the idea of it being
a non-human, unseen, and independent agency (1997: 20; 2016: 35, 40). In its anthropological conception, *sunsum* is an essential part of the human being that is capable of influencing objectivity and the bases for achieving personality and spirituality. Of greater significance is his treatment of *sunsum* to characterize God, the Abosom (pantheon gods), and all other spirits as the locus of religio-spiritual reflection on Akan cosmological realities. For God to be exceptional, God should be differentiated from the Abosom (gods) who are primeval offspring of God. That means, God is not an Ōbosom, but the single most supremely powerful, incomparable Sunsum of all sunsum (2016: 40). How does the essence of the divinities as sunsum affect the overall understanding of sunsum in Ephirim-Donkor’s writings?

6.6.2. The Role of the Abosom in Akan Anthropology

Much of what to expect from Ephirim-Donkor on the notion of *sunsum* is dependent on his understanding of the Abosom. To him, the Abosom are “spirits of God… unseen primeval forces of incredibly immense might,” and possessing power and intelligence, “with the capability of materialization and transformation into anything they desire” (2016: 43, 44). He further explains that the Akan classify them as gods because the essential qualities of the Abosom and God are the same. Nevertheless, “God is the ultimate combined spirit of all the Abosom, and so to speak of the Abosom is to speak of God because the Abosom are on earth at God’s behest” (2016: 44). This conception agrees with the Akan general notion of the Abosom as children of God. The relationship between human beings and the Abosom is indirectly with God. Therefore, the Akan rendition of worship to the Abosom does not cause any contradiction of allegiance to God; instead, it is a normal worship procedure at the superintendence of God as long as the role of the Abosom is in loco dei.

Ephirim-Donkor continues to argue that it is the essence of the Abosom, i.e., water, fire, air, and blood that defines the basis of human nature because the essence of the human being is the Ōbosom incarnate. This conclusion follows his analysis of the Akan maxim, "Nyame mma, obi ara nye asaase ba," i.e. “Human beings are the progenitors of God and none is a child of the earth.” The interpretation given to this maxim by Ephirim-Donkor connects human beings directly to the deities and not the Earth. It is necessary for such an anthropological definition of personhood to give reasons why “God’s offspring must also be of the same spiritual substance or essence as God, without material properties, as the Abosom” (2016: 78). The implication for all this is that human beings have divine origin other than the Earth, and the rationale behind human beings’ capacity to continue to live after death among the Akan. On the contrary, if human beings were of the Earth, Ephirim-Donkor explains, “then there will be
no afterlife because when people die that will be the end… But since human beings are children of God, it means that there is life after death because the Sunsum survives death and the basis for ancestor worship proved” (2016: 78). The relationship between God and the universe, hence, is established by the sunsum. How do human beings, qua material, share the same essential qualities with the Abosom, who are purely spiritual beings?

Ephirim-Donkor draws from the divine origin of sunsum as the basis to define the spiritual part of human beings. His assumption defeats any belief that relates the spiritual part of the human being to the physical body. The physical part, instead, depends on the spiritual, this advances the notion that sunsum is not just an abstract reality but a “spirit” in a material body. The nipadua (body) is only material and subject to perish contrary to the real, which is spiritual and immortal because the human being is a direct product of the divinities or the divinities themselves. Ephirim-Donkor affirms the latter by linking the origin of human beings to the Abosom instead of directly to God. Human beings are Abosom incarnate; hence, every person is an Ṣbosom ba (child of a deity or Ṣbosom). Ephirim-Donkor explains that “before an Ṣbosom becomes a human being, the head, or father, of an Abosom Kuu (group, pack, family) selects or appoints the Ṣbosom to relocate to the corporeal” (2016: 80). This statement is in support of his belief that human beings are willed directly by the Abosom, not God. The doctrine of incarnation is quite observable in Ephirim-Donkor’s definition of the human being, which shows the capability of the Abosom to put on the conditions of the human being. Apparently, this rational argument implies that sunsum is an indwelling “spirit,” an entitative object herein discussed as the Ṣbosom in corporeality.

At this point, the difficult question, also raised by Ephirim-Donkor, is: how is it possible for an Ṣbosom to turn into a human being? The question is important because any explanation given to this mode of transition should be coherent with the essence and purpose of life. Again, if spirits can take the form of physicality, then it means their mode of transformation would call for a mysterious metamorphosis even if such transformation would also require some sort of physical means. As to how an Ṣbosom becomes a human being, Ephirim-Donkor answers that the “Abosom intrinsically take hold of material subjects conjugationally resulting in deposition of active essential attributes in living things which ultimately becomes the basis for ethical living” (2016: 77). The Abosom infiltrate their essence through the act of conjugation and copulation between a male and female.

It so happens that the dynamic and corporeal adaptation of the Abosom is through a human agency. The act of “copulation – or rather semen (huaba/ntoro) – then becomes the means,
mode of delivery of an Ṣbosom” (Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 82). Or, “an Ṣbosom, as Sunsum (spirit) is transmitted through a father’s semen (huaba/ntoro) during a sexual act… the Sunsum triggers an activity that transforms an otherwise inactive Mogya (blood) or egg of a female into what becomes a human being” (2016: 83). The symbiotic relationship between the ntorɔ and sunsum in Busia’s anthropology is once again established here by Ephirim-Donkor. However, unlike Busia who thought of the ntorɔ as the Ṣbosom, and sunsum as child of the ntorɔ, Ephirim-Donkor defines sunsum as the Ṣbosom (2016: 83). Ultimately, the human being, the Ṣbosom incarnate, is of both spiritual and physical nature, which in fact allows for the possibilities of achieving the highest goals in life and beyond.

Ephirim-Donkor further affirms some aspects of the sunsum in agreement with the majority of Akan scholars. He affirms the masculinity of sunsum as a paternal spirit, hence, transmitted by males only to a child. The rationale is that the “Abosom are masculine agencies” explains Ephirim-Donkor: “It happens that what they transmit retains their masculine essential attributes in terms of activity” (2016: 83). He emphatically states: “Men then transmit an active agency called Sunsum” (2016: 84). Children exercise their power from a male progenitor. Therefore, it is said in Fante language, Agya ni sunsum hata biribiara do, meaning, “the Sunsum of a father hovers over all things physical as well as spiritual” (2016: 86). Sunsum establishes the basis of male influence because everything that comes under the aegis of the father is protected by his sunsum. So, sunsum qua Ṣbosom, also has an emanative effect.

We can now determine the origin and essence of sunsum underlining the conception of Ephirim-Donkor’s pneumatology. Sunsum is a spirit, herein identified as an Ṣbosom (pantheon deity), also incarnated as the human being. Observation of the nature of the human being now becomes the Ṣbosom in corporeality. Hence, the concept of both Ṣbosom and sunsum together are the bases for exploring an objective approach to defining the nature and mystery of human existence.

Of particular emphasis, the notion of sunsum as Ṣbosom may form the basis of the inspired universe of the Akan. There is nothing at the moment to suggest that there is a kind of sunsum that exists independently without the Abosom. Sunsum is either entitative or emanative. So, the idea that the universe is populated by varying degrees of spiritual entities and forces shapes Ephirim-Donkor’s understanding of the Abosom (pantheon deities) and the role they play in human procreation and Akan cosmology.
Ephirim-Donkor has answered the question of the origin and nature of *sunsum* by looking at the role the Abosom play in Akan cosmology. By so doing, he entered into difficult expositions on Akan worldviews and perhaps raised some more controversial questions about Akan anthropology. For example, the description given to *sunsum* and *ɔkra* calls for a more avid clarification to avoid incoherencies and varying interpretations of Akan realities. Ephirim-Donkor believes *sunsum* survives death; either it is reincarnated in some circumstances or returns to join the phylogenetic Abosom (2016: 80, 156). The *ɔkra*, on the other hand, though coming from God as a life principle, does not travel to Samanadzie/Asamando (land of the departed spirits), but returns to God (2016: 108).25 Neither is the *ɔkra* the part of the human being that becomes an ancestor. To him, the *ɔsaman* (ancestor) is an abstract personality that emerges spiritually from the *sunsum*, *mogya* and *ɔkra* (2016: 156). He emphatically says “the Ɔsaman does not need the original Ɔkra… no longer has needs for the Sunsum that enabled it to be active” (2016: 156). Although Ephirim-Donkor seems to assert that “the Ɔsaman is the same as the Sunsum,” in reality, he meant to say that the *ɔsaman* is an abstract creation, “an imprint of its creator, the Ɔbosom that became a human being” (2016: 156). That means, in the end, none of the core essences of the human being, namely *ɔkra*, *sunsum*, *ntorɔ*, and *mogya* goes to Asamando. This construction disagrees with the majority of scholars who accept the *ɔkra* incarnate as *ɔkrateasefo* (a human being) and with a strong emphasis on the survival of the *ɔkra* as an ancestor upon death.

6.7. Summary of the Overall Discussion

The table below shows a summary of the various interpretations given in this chapter concerning the *sunsum*. From the table, we can deduce specific claims. For example, there is almost a unanimous agreement on the masculine transmission of *sunsum* to an individual. Most scholars also agree on the perishability of the *sunsum* at death. It is also obvious to see how the indigenous scholars, namely Danquah and Busia, did not translate *sunsum* into English as either “soul” or “spirit,” unlike their foreign counterparts. For the indigenous scholars, *sunsum* is only a personality or the power behind the personality. Danquah and Busia indirectly connected

---

25 Ephirim-Donkor gives elaborative accounts of the *ɔkra* which the current researcher finds strange or new. He states the *ɔkra* is inhaled at birth – outside the womb – as the first breath of the neonate. The *ɔkra* is feminine. He further states the *ɔkra* resides on the shoulders of the body. Finally, the *ɔkra* returns to God (See also Ephirim-Donkor 1997: 72). Although he gives extensive explanation to support all these assertions, the current researcher is not convinced and the majority of Akan scholars would contest this characteristic nature of the *ɔkra*. On the other hand, these characteristics do affirm the reality of the *ɔkra*. 

140
sunsum to God. Ephirim-Donkor thinks sunsum is synonymous to the Abosom and all other unseen realities, although he calls God the incomparable Sunsum of all sunsum.

Table 2: Summary of the character of the sunsum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Generic</th>
<th>Posthumous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rattray</strong></td>
<td>That spiritual Element (force, personal magnetism, character, personality, power, soul) upon which depend health, wealth, worldly power.</td>
<td>Soul, spirit</td>
<td>Force, pneumatic</td>
<td>Abosom, Father</td>
<td></td>
<td>Repatriation to its source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Danquah</strong></td>
<td>It is only an experience and not outrightly “spirit.”</td>
<td>Personality, power</td>
<td></td>
<td>Esu, God</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meyerowitz</strong></td>
<td>The sunsum is regarded as the personal soul.</td>
<td>Personality, Ego, shadow</td>
<td>Personality, Ego, bearer of destiny</td>
<td>Patrilineal ancestor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perishes, becomes a ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Busia</strong></td>
<td>It is a spiritual gift that serves as the personal power or cast of countenance from the father.</td>
<td>Personality, Ego, spiritual gift (charisma)</td>
<td>Abosom, Father (indirectly from God)</td>
<td>Patrilineal ancestor</td>
<td></td>
<td>Perishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minkus</strong></td>
<td>It is the essence of the being or object, its intrinsic activating principle.</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Pneumatic, Spirit, Force</td>
<td>God, Father</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Returns to the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ephirim-Donkor</strong></td>
<td>It is a shadow, image, or double of the individual. It is the self, the spiritual aspect of an individual. It</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Òbosom, Spirit, Shadow, Image</td>
<td>Abosom, indirectly from God</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Reincarnated or returns to the Abosom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
also defines anything intangible or unseen, non-human agency and unseen as independent

6.8. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to look further into the historiographical development of the meaning and nature of *sunsum* after Captain Rattray’s pioneering ethnographic literature. The largest proportion of their findings were emic studies, i.e. a description of the internal elements of the Akan religion. This approach made their findings static or objective, with the exception of Danquah, whose approach was a subjective philosophical analysis of Akan religion as a theological framework. Danquah, Busia, and Ephirim-Donkor are indigenous scholars of Akan religion, unlike Meyerowitz and Minkus who were Western scholars studying Akan religion. The general definition of the *sunsum* is not as much about their background as the context from which they gathered their information. Unlike Rattray who engaged in gathering raw information among the Ashanti, these scholars more or less relied heavily on literature available to them, even when they seemed ethnographic.

The study of the *sunsum* did not end with these scholars. In the next part of this research, we will look in more detail how the conclusions of these scholars underpin contemporary academic debate about the nature of *sunsum*. In the following chapter, we will encounter a critical, subjective, and theoretical interpretation of the nature of *sunsum*. The bone of contention for discussion is whether *sunsum* is “really” a spirit.
NEA ONNIM NO, SUA A OHU

“He who does not know can know from learning”

A symbol of knowledge, life-long education and continued quest for knowledge
Chapter 7
Towards A Philosophical Decolonization and Deconstruction

“Let me begin by defining what I mean by decolonization in African philosophy. By decolonization, I mean divesting African philosophical thinking of all undue influences emanating from our colonial past. The crucial word in this formulation is "undue". Obviously, it would not be rational to try to reject everything of a colonial ancestry. Conceivably, a thought or a mode of inquiry spearheaded by our erstwhile colonizers may be valid or in some way beneficial to humankind. Are we called upon to reject or ignore it? That would be a madness having neither rhyme nor reason.” – Kwasi Wiredu¹

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapters focused on divergent views of sunsum from scholars studying Akan religion. For the most part, their approach was objective, i.e. descriptive accounts on hard facts. The adoption of a historiographical approach brought out the different perspectives on the nature and meaning of sunsum to lay down the fundamental framework for further theoretical analysis.

This chapter will focus on the contribution of contemporary philosophers studying the Akan concept of sunsum. Contemporary philosophers are more critical and analytical than their predecessors. They employ a subjective approach to treat Akan religion as a dynamic structure of ideas that is capable of transformation, and capable of philosophical discourse. Instead of treating sunsum within the spectrum of static ethnography, contemporary philosophers treat sunsum as a philosophical concept that has its own presuppositions for defining the principles of being within the larger context of Akan livelihood.

What are the issues that Akan philosophers grapple with as they consider the sunsum? The dilemma revolves around the nature of sunsum, particularly its translation into English as “spirit.” As I will point out, contemporary scholarship focuses mainly on analytical critique. For this reason, I will begin to examine how the contemporary scholarly approach is linked to the ethnographic approach, and why contemporary scholars seem to question the nature of the sunsum. The discussion will focus on two significant Akan philosophers, namely Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye. The two

contemporary philosophers have significantly contributed to Akan scholarship by way of their philosophical interpretation of Akan religion.

Kwasi Wiredu criticizes several African concepts as being ostensibly contaminated by Western colonial scholarship. He attributes this to the English medium of instruction. Wiredu identifies two major problems pertaining to how these colonial modes of conceptualization find expression in African studies (Wiredu 1998: 17). The first is foreign conceptual influence, and the second is the problem of indigenous susceptibility to embrace Western philosophies (Wiredu 1998: 18–20). The two problems convince him to see the task of deconstructing the African pedagogy as technically a philosophical decolonization and necessarily a conceptual enterprise (Wiredu, 1998: 18).2 His philosophical ideas revolve around this conceptual agenda. As further details will reveal, Wiredu thinks the nature of the ōкра is not spiritual but quasi-physical. So it is with the sunsum – it is not pneumatic but quasi-material. This manner of defining Akan worldview is the meaning of his philosophy of quasi-physicalism. I intend to give more details about these terminologies in subsequent sections.

Kwame Gyekye, on the other hand, disagrees with Wiredu and argues in favor of sunsum as indeed pneumatic, which means a “spirit.” He disregards the philosophy of quasi-physicalism as running counter to Akan belief in disembodied survival or life after death (1987: 86). Gyekye is among the few contemporary Akan philosophers whose work has influenced modern African philosophy. He focuses on personhood and community as ontologically inseparable, i.e. an individual’s identity stems from the community. He borrows from philosophers and thinkers before him, as well as from contemporary traditional thinkers. A great deal of his argument stems from Danquah, but he also manages to bring forth a comprehensive and coherent construction of the Akan philosophical agenda. In my view, Gyekye comes across as pro-Danquah, in the sense of his designation of sunsum as a divine essence and experience (Gyekye 1987: 102). In Danquah’s philosophy, sunsum is a divine essence.

Gyekye crosses paths with Wiredu on what Akan people consider to be spiritual. Wiredu believes the Akan worldview is not strictly spiritual but quasi-physical. Gyekye will not accept that but

---

2 Wiredu does not singularize Africa’s complex conceptual diversity and its diverse accidental colonial ravages. He uses the term “African” in the context of his paper to articulate a phenomenon common in most of Africa’s socio-cultural pedagogy. Meanwhile, he focuses strictly on the Akan community of West Africa as a subject of discussion (Wiredu 1987: 153).
defends the dominant pneumatic worldview. Their main point of departure is based on the nature of the ɔkra and sunsum, which essentially is the question that occupies this chapter and the whole of this present research. In the subsequent sections, we will look at the emergence of the philosophy of quasi-physicalism, its background, and how the quasi-physicalist characterizes the sunsum. We will also explore how Gyekye argues in favor of the pneumatic nature of sunsum against the philosophy of quasi-physicalism, and how he makes a strong argument in redefining Akan cosmology.

7.2. The Emergence of the Philosophy of Quasi-physicalism

The philosophy of quasi-physicalism may sound new to many people. Nevertheless, it has been around for almost three decades, and many contemporary writers around the world are engaging with it. Some notable scholars who have studied the theory include Gyekye (Gyekye 1987), Safro (Safro 1992) Majeed (Majeed 2013), Müller (Müller 2008), among others. The philosophy is Wiredu’s creation and marks his attempt to speak of certain aspects of Akan metaphysics and philosophical conception. I find the theory very essential to my research based on two reasons. First, it questions the nature of the sunsum as not pneumatic, and second, it is a resourceful philosophical concept for the study of Akan religion. It is emphatically stated here that Wiredu became the first Akan scholar to question the English translation of sunsum as “spirit” and its pneumatic character. He dismisses the English description of sunsum as “spirit” and neither does he characterize it with any property of physicality (Wiredu 1987: 162–163). It, therefore, becomes essentially expedient to discuss Wiredu in any pneumatological discourse in Akan studies, and even beyond.

Not many scholars identify themselves with quasi-physicalism, but there is one passionate quasi-physicalist in the person of Kwame Safro. He is an Akan philosopher whose research areas cover African philosophy and the philosophy of computers. He currently lectures at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Safro has embraced and formalized in detail the philosophy of quasi-physicalism in his articles, “Why I Am Not A Physicalist” (1992), and “Quasi-Materialism: A Contemporary African Philosophy of Mind” (2004). So, what are the details in quasi-physicalism?

7.2.1. The Meaning of Quasi-Physicalism?

What is considered quasi-physical, according to Kwame Safro, are those objects that belong “to a category between the realms of the obviously physical, i.e., those objects that obey the known laws
of physics, and the realm of the so-called spiritual or completely immaterial objects that do not obey all the known laws of physics” (1992: 193). The quasi-physicalist imagines a realm that supposedly lies between the physical and spiritual. Safro does not believe in a spiritual world like the ordinary Akan do. It is the reason why he uses the phrase, “so-called spiritual.” He feels more comfortable using the term quasi-physical for existents like God, ghosts, okra, etc. (Safro 2004). In other words, the realm of these objects is beyond the physical or human physical senses but can be reached through extrasensory perception or what he presupposes could be subject to scientific verification in the future. In all practical sense, quasi-physical is not synonymous to a spiritual realm. If you ask a quasi-physicalist to describe electromagnetic waves, whether they are physical, spiritual, or quasi-physical, the answer to expect will be that they are “physical” since electromagnetic waves react to the laws of physics. That means the theory of quasi-physicalism is not about what cannot be seen, but rather what is beyond the confines of the laws of physics, yet not characterized as spiritual. With this background, we are now in a better position to read Wiredu.

7.2.2. Wiredu’s Akan Anthropology

Wiredu lists five substances of the human being, namely ni padua (body), okra (life-giving entity), sunsum (that which gives a person’s personality its force), moyga (literally blood and the basis of clan identity), and finally ntorɔ, which is the basis of membership in a patrilineal group. Wiredu claims the doctrine of moyga and ntorɔ is bound up with some rudimentary genetics (1987: 161). His definitions open a wide curiosity of scientific, philosophical, and ontological inquiry into Akan religion. Of particular interest is how Wiredu provides a logical framework for interpreting Akan religious ideas. His anthropology largely follows the fundamental definition of the human being. However, he seems to have more to say about the nature of the okra and sunsum.

Wiredu thinks the okra is not spiritual but quasi-physical. He says this to prove that it has no spiritual properties to be characterized as such. And this is not only about the okra, but the sunsum as well. Wiredu perceives them as seemingly possessing entitative qualities with physical properties. However, they are not entities in the usual sense of the word (1987: 161). If we are to even think of them as entities, then they are not spiritual. Wiredu comes to terms with Danquah who had earlier hinted at what could be termed as “concrete personified entities” for the okra, sunsum, and honhom (Danquah 1968: 146). Wiredu’s quasi-physicalism designates the sunsum and okra as mere personified entities but not outrightly spiritual or physical. The rejection of the spiritual is directly
related to his conceptual decolonization agenda to free “African frameworks of thought from colonial impositions” (1998: 44). As we will discuss in the next section, Wiredu gives more details on the necessity of decolonizing African conceptual thoughts to set the context for the philosophy of quasi-physicalism.

7.2.3. Quasi-Physicalism as a Matter of Philosophical Decolonization

Wiredu is a reconstructivist and who thinks Akan beliefs can be studied in a better logical framework that is distinct from Western philosophies, that is, within the Akan conceptual realities. Quasi-physicalism is one of his rational approaches to interpreting Akan realities. We will at this point look further into the rationale behind his rejection of the pneumatic nature of the ōkra and sunsum, and how his interpretation of these concepts is construed.

As we saw earlier, Akan scholarship emerged largely as a product of Western colonialism. The English language, which was (and still is) the medium of exploring knowledge, determined most of the meanings we ascribe to Akan realities. An example is the translation of the Akan term ōkra into English as “soul.” Language embodies the expressions of essential thoughts that define the worldview of a group of people. Wiredu knew this very well and thought some Western terms could not correctly define Akan realities, and one of them is the “soul” (Wiredu 1996: 137). He bases his suspicion on the definition of the soul in Western thought as a “purely immaterial entity that somehow inhabits the body” (1987: 161). In our previous historiography, we saw how Rattray, Meyerowitz, and Minkus translated ōkra as “soul” or identified it with the Western concept of the soul. Wiredu thinks it is entirely misleading and quite definitely wrong (1987: 161). He believes the Akan understanding of the ōkra and the Western conception of the “soul” are two entirely different things to identify one with the other. The contrast he draws between the two terms is based on their inherent conceptions.

Wiredu’s definition is akin to Homer’s view of the soul. There are two main distinctive usages of psuche (soul) in Homer’s poems. First, the soul is something that a person risks in battle and loses in death (Lorenz 2009). The second conception of the soul is its departure from the person’s limbs at death to travel to the underworld, a place of relief from pain. The two ideas have the same connotation. One can risk and lose one’s soul and, after death, it endures as a shade in the underworld. Homer’s view of the soul is related to life and specifically, the life of a human being.
There is no life without the soul, and it is the soul that distinguishes the living human body from a corpse. The soul, according to Homer, is only a life entity and nothing more (Lorenz 2009).

In subsequent years, at the end of the fifth century BCE, the Greeks came to identify the soul with “a wide variety of activities and responses, cognitive as well as emotional, and to think of it as the bearer of such virtues as courage, temperance and justice” (Lorenz 2009). Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle saw the soul as imperishable, i.e., it survives death. It was also viewed in terms of cognition and intelligence. For both Socrates and Plato, the soul became the essence of the human being. To Plato, the body is perishable and the soul imperishable. Socrates believed the soul to be responsible for vitality. The soul is deathless, immortal (Lorenz 2009). All other subsequent philosophies of the soul have been interpreted upon these fundamental conceptions until the turn of the modern era, when Western philosophers began to understand the concept of the soul as part of an individual’s intuition and transcendence. In Emmanuel Kant’s transcendental philosophy, transcendental knowledge is considered to be the activity of the soul (Bishop 2000: 262-267). Ralph Waldo Emerson views the soul as the source of self-transcendence in a human being and that it is connected to the Spirit of God (Emerson 2009).

Wiredu sees the ṣкра, by contrast, as quasi-physical. It is not a physical object; neither is it fully subject to spatial constraints. The human eye cannot perceive it. However, highly developed medicine men and those with extrasensory abilities are capable of communicating with the ṣкра. Therefore, Wiredu claims to credit the ṣкра with paraphysical properties, not strictly a spiritual entity because its conception is redolent of/with material analogies (1987: 161, 163).

Additionally, everyone possesses a unique ṣкра as the proverb says, Obi rekra ne Nyame no, na obi nnyina ho, literally, “When one was taking leave of God (before birth), no one was there.” The proverb means the ṣкра or nkrabea received from God varies from person to person. From this account arises the reason why Akan people believe a particular ṣкра may be allergic to certain taboo foods while the same taboo foods may be nutritious to another ṣкра. In the event where such taboos are violated, Wiredu says, “the okra may need to be pacified with offerings of appropriate

---

3 In some traditional accounts, medicine men could only sense or read the intention and actions of the ṣкра. There seem to be no traditional Akan expressions to suggest that medicine men communicate with ṣкра as in the case of the ancestors. The ancestors express their wishes and grievances to the traditional priests and medicine men in a dream and other means.
food and drinks” (1987: 161). The Akan concept of ūkra is obviously not the same as the Western concept of the soul.

Wiredu continues to defend the non-identical conception of the ūkra and “soul” with more evidence. He advances to a controversial aspect of the notion of the ūkra as the double of the individual.4 It is “conceived in his material image complete with a head, hands, legs, and all” and can at times go its separate way from the body (1987: 161). This may seem not too far from the classical definition of the soul in Western thought as given above. However, Wiredu sees differently and argues that the fact that the ūkra is a principle of life and at the same time a separate entity that can go its own way from the body is evidence that the ūkra and “soul” are non-identical concepts (1987: 162).

Wiredu’s most convincing argument comes as a result of the difference he draws between the ūkra and “soul”, namely that “the ‘okra’ is very distinctly, indeed categorically, different from ‘adwene’ (mind),” whereas “the soul seems to be regarded as being the same as the mind” (1987: 162). The concept of the mind as immaterial and non-substantial apart from the body is one of Wiredu’s important contributions to Akan philosophy. “Mind” and “soul” are analogous in English philosophy, but the application of such an analog among the Akan would be, as Wiredu says, “the veriest babble” (1987: 162). He argues that the mind, which in Akan is adwene (the verb form is dwen “think”), is not ontologically a material component, neither is it identical with the ūkra or sunsum. Wiredu thinks the mind is non-substantial, not an object but only “a logical construction out of actual and potential thoughts” (1987: 159); this explains why Akan people do not list it as a constituent of a human being (1987: 163). In this case, many Akan will see adwene (mind) as a product of living entities since it is spiritual, physical, or quasi-physical.

Wiredu further associates the mind with thoughts. Thus, adwene produces thought, which is not conceived as an entity, “neither material nor immaterial, physical nor nonphysical” (1987: 169). Therefore, adwene is not an entity (1987: 163-164). On the contrary, ūkra is a living entity, whereas adwene is an abstract capacity in charge of thoughts in an individual. ūkra may possess adwene, according to Wiredu. Akan people believe the ūkra had a pre-existence, and before its entrance into

---

4 We encountered this conception in Meyerowitz’ anthropology, even though Wiredu cites from a later account in Asare Opoku (1978: 96). The amount of evidence provided in my present research suggests that it is the sunsum instead of the ūkra that roams about in nightly peregrination.
the mundane world, it appeared before God to take its message, thus nkrabea (destiny). Wiredu thinks it is logical to conclude that ɔкра “must have the capacity to understand a message or transmit one” (1987: 162). Here, we see a clear point of divergence between the preexistence of the ɔкра, which is not the same for the soul in certain quarters of modern Western philosophies. As a consequence, Wiredu prefers to define the ɔкра as “that whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual’s destiny from God” (1987: 162).

Wiredu says little about the nature of the ɔкра after death. Akan belief postulates the ɔкра as becoming an ancestor after death. The living summons ancestors through the performance of libation and offerings, but this does not seem to be the same for the “soul” in Western civilization. For conceptual reasons, Wiredu is right to leave ɔкра untranslated, especially when conceptual blunders already exist between the English translation of terms such as ɔкра and sunsum. So, on the part of Wiredu, the linguistic distortion is not only a form of colonization, but an undermining mechanism for understanding Akan world views.

7.2.4. Spiritual or Quasi-Physical?

How do we differentiate the spiritual from the quasi-physical? The definition of what is spiritual as nonphysical, according to Wiredu, is too superficial to capture the whole idea of the meaning of the term. He is not convinced and argues that the word “spiritual,” understood in the sense of “nonphysical,” is for him “very far from a determinate idea,” and he “cannot see that there is anything in Akan language corresponding to it” (1987: 163). He does not seem to deny the existence of “spirits,” since it is a fundamental belief in African traditional religions, and since several religious beliefs and rituals are associated with it. In spite of this, he contends that “these ‘spirits’ are not conceived of as spiritual entities” (Wiredu 2007: 30). Wiredu’s definition of a spiritual being is “an entity that is non-extended, non-spatial, immaterial, as opposed to extended, spatial, material” (2007: 30). The definition does not come as a description of the Akan understanding of a spiritual being, but a Cartesian rationality of what is spiritual. The separation of the immaterial from the material (mind-body dualism) is credited to Descartes. The dualistic notion presents the spiritual as an independent essence that is capable of consciousness, and the material as a mechanical object of the spiritual. Wiredu does not consider this definition applicable to Akan realities of spirits.
In the case of the ancestors, Wiredu says they were not always spirits. Ancestors are extended beings because they once lived as human beings. He cites the philosopher Okot p’Bitek from Uganda, and the British anthropologist Kenneth Little, who researched among the Mende of Sierra Leone, to buttress this point. Both talk about the anthropomorphic character of the ancestors as extended beings. In comparison with the Akan view of ancestors, Wiredu comes to this conclusion:

The ancestors are, in terms of imagery, like mortal persons, but they are not perceivable to the naked eye and are conceived to be exempt from the ordinary law of motion. Ontologically, all the entities or forces referred to above as spirits are of this kind: they are physical in image, but not subject to all the laws of the ordinary world. Let us call them, for convenience, quasi-physical. Then it would follow from our earlier considerations that spirits are admissible in an African ontology only in a quasi-physical sense. The place of the dead would thus be a quasi-physical environment (Wiredu 2007: 31).

Wiredu uses this argument to advance his quasi-physicalism to assume that, instead of a “spiritual” realm and of “spiritual” objects, Akan people should start speaking of a quasi-physical realm and quasi-physical objects. If there is any validity in quasi-physicalism, it is centered on the above statement. With this description of the ancestral world, Wiredu seeks to dislodge the idea of a spiritual worldview or the notion of spirits possessing spiritual properties. This would seem to suggest at least two levels of realms, namely a quasi-physical and a physical realm.

7.2.5. Critical Assessment of Quasi-Physicalism

My critique follows that, first, the Supreme deity, lesser deities, and the ancestors are correctly spiritual beings, even if they are spoken of in quasi-physical terms. Second, the ɔкра and the phenomenon of sleep peregrination of the sunsum may conveniently be qualified with quasi-physical properties. Third, ordinary perceptible objects that follow the laws of physics form the physical realm. These three realms need further clarification.

5 Okot p’Bitek says the ancestors “were not spirits but the ancestors as they were known before death; their voices could be ‘recognised’ as they spoke through the diviner, they ‘felt’ hungry and cold, and ‘understood’ and ‘enjoyed’ jokes and being teased, etc. They were thought of as whole beings, not dismembered parts of man, i.e., spirits” (p’Bitek 1971: 104).

6 Likewise, Kenneth Little came to a similar conclusion that in the ancestral world, “the conditions of this world are apparently continued in the hereafter, and the life led by the ancestral spirits seems to be similar in many respects to that of the people on earth. Some informants described them as cultivating rice farms, building towns, etc. It also seems that the spirits retain an anthropomorphic character and much of their earthly temperament and disposition” (Little 1954: 116).

7 Minkus comes to the same conclusion by identifying a three-pronged mode of perception among the Akan. Although she did not use the term quasi-physical, she seemed to have hinted at the existence of quasi-physical objects. Her
A quasi-physical realm sits well with the Akan worldview, but not in the way Wiredu speaks of it, especially his view that spirits are not spiritual. The emerging problem is how a spirit-being is not qualified to be spiritual. It is particularly useful to state that Akan people have their unique way of describing their worldviews. Even in the West, what is a spirit or spiritual has different meanings. In Western idealist philosophy, the spiritual is the ideal in its absolute form, e.g., God, spirits, soul, etc. I mentioned in this chapter that the spiritual in the Cartesian school of thought is a conscious substance, while Hegel defines it as consciousness in activity. The different ways of describing the spiritual also follow for the Akan people. Minkus concluded how Akan people describe spirits but not necessarily what is spiritual. Existence is real because it can be described. These descriptions carry expressions familiar to the Akan worldview. If you ask an Akan whether ghosts do exist, the response is always, *saman wɔ hɔ*, meaning, “ghosts are there (real).” The phrase “wɔ hɔ” is used to express existence. Wiredu explains the *hɔ* (there) as spatial, at some place.

Spirits exist, and although these immaterial existents are unseen, Akan people have formulated their ideas to relate to them. One such idea is the nature of the pantheon deities, which since time immemorial Akan people have represented in visual arts and carved objects. A common misconception is that the object itself is the god; the reality is that it only serves as the abode for the spiritual agent, making it a localized deity. Early Europeans misunderstood these physical representations of the gods and characterized Akan religion as a fetish religion. The essential point here, however, is that the material representation (artistic objects) of spirits do not represent their real essence. Even if they do represent their being, they cannot purely and simply be identified with their being. Similarly, the anthropomorphic descriptions of spiritual beings, and the ascription to them of physical properties reflect the whole system of the Akan religion, where the spiritual is perceived through the known (material), or when spiritual beliefs tend to take the form of physical expressions. This mode of description transcends across the various world religions and is often the reason behind the emergence of idolatry.

---

Analysis follows thus, “In general, what cannot be seen using the ordinary faculty of vision can also not be perceived through the other senses. Exceptions are wind, cold and heat, which may be felt but not seen. The kind of seeing referred to in the above dichotomy is the ordinary perception of normal, living persons. Certain individuals with special powers, innate or gained through the application of medicine or by divine gift, are believed capable of perceiving what is not ordinarily perceivable. No one, however, would claim to see or hear the Supreme Being. The twofold division is actually a threefold one: the unperceivable, the extraordinarily perceivable and the ordinarily perceivable” (Minkus, 1981: 183).
Wiredu seems to have missed this connection by taking the physical descriptions in human terms as reality or as ontological. In this context, the argument for quasi-physicalism fails, in my opinion. The world of spirits, including the resting place of the ancestors, cannot be said to be quasi-physical. However, if the argument for quasi-physical objects does hold, that will not contradict the overall Akan worldview. My argument follows that spirits are dynamic beings that possess the quality of interpenetrating the various realms of the Akan world. Spirits are spiritual beings not because they are unseen, but because they represent the ideal forms of being supernatural. Quasi-physical objects, as understood from the discussion, are found in a quasi-physical realm where extraordinary perception can discern their reality.

And finally, natural objects belong to the natural world of experience where everything is perceptible with the naked eyes. The approach of quasi-physicalism is a Cartesian methodic doubt, even as it seemingly postures itself as a direct opposition to Western philosophies.

7.2.6. Definition of Sunsum by Wiredu

The core principles of the philosophy of quasi-physicalism take away the spirituality of sunsum – the reason why my research has to deal with this philosophy. Wiredu denies the spirituality of the sunsum in the same way he denies the spirituality of the ɔkra, especially its translation in English as “soul.” In essence, he thinks the sunsum also calls for a similarly circuitous translation (Wiredu 1987: 162). To translate sunsum as spirit or soul will characterize it pneumatically. Wiredu avoids the English translation as he proposes that the term should not be translated, but rather understood as “that which is responsible for the total effect communicated by an ‘individual’s personality’” (1987: 162). If so, per Wiredu’s conception, it becomes certain that sunsum is not spiritual at all, but only a force for personality. The definition does not follow the overall understanding of the concept of sunsum, but instead an anthropological definition. Wiredu’s conclusive view follows that:

As for the ‘sunsum’, it is not altogether clear that it is unambiguously conceived of as a kind of entity. But even if we assume that it is thought of in this way, it still cannot be called ‘spiritual’ in the present sense; for, apart from anything else, the ‘sunsum’ is believed by the Akans to perish at death, whereas spiritual beings are supposed to be immortal by nature (Wiredu 1987: 163).  

---

8 I have already explained what some of the Akan thinkers meant when they used the phrase “to perish” for the sunsum. It simply means sunsum does not go to Asamando (ancestral world) with the ɔkra because it goes back to its source.
Wiredu is pro-Busia in the sense that the significant point he draws about *sunsum* from the above statement is referenced to Busia. He succeeds in bringing together the anthropological ideas of Busia about the *sunsum* into a philosophical school of thought. Busia saw the *sunsum* as a spiritual gift (charisma), a child of the *ntoro*, a spiritual substance passed from the father to his offspring, and that which perishes at death. Wiredu does not see any characteristic of a “spirit” in the description of *sunsum* by Busia. Hence, the *sunsum* is neither spiritual nor material but quasi-material. In referring to dream peregrination of the *sunsum*, Wiredu thinks the dreamland is not a spiritual realm but quasi-physical, and if it is to be considered a spiritual world, the *sunsum* does not belong there, as it will always return to the individual. The image in the dream is limited by space and time. On the contrary, the fact that it can travel through space means it is not entirely material (Müller 2008: 173). Consequently, Wiredu sees the *sunsum* as quasi-material.

### 7.3. The Argument Against Quasi-physicalism

In following Wiredu’s critique of the *ɔkra* and *sunsum* as strictly not spiritual, two Ghanaian philosophers, Kwame Gyekye and Mohammed Majeed, have sought to refute the philosophy of quasi-physicalism (Gyekye 1987; Majeed 2013). Gyekye, for instance, thinks such a philosophy is “completely wrong” and “runs counter to the belief of most Akan people” (1987: 86). Majeed follows with a similar critique that “aspects of the doctrine of quasi-physicalism itself are utterly inconsistent with some basic Akan beliefs” (2013: 24). He argues that such a theory is philosophically indefensible. Gyekye and Majeed remain strong opponents of the philosophy of quasi-physicalism. Their arguments are brought here as well as their philosophical conception of the *ɔkra* and *sunsum*. The late Malawian philosopher Didier Njirayamanda has observed the disagreement between Gyekye and Wiredu as “not so much on the existence of the *ɔkra* as a constituent of a person, as on its nature” (Wiredu 2004: 333). There are three ontological concepts which underline the critique of Gyekye and Majeed. First, it is correct to translate *ɔkra* into English as “soul.” Second, the philosophy of quasi-physicalism is mistaken. Third, *sunsum* is better translated “spirit” and is, therefore, pneumatic.

#### 7.3.1. *ɔkra* as Soul?

Gyekye defines *ɔkra* as “that which constitutes the innermost self, the essence, of the individual person…the individual’s life…the embodiment and transmitter of the individual’s destiny (fate: *nkrabea*) …a spark of the Supreme Being (Onyame) in man. It is thus described as divine and as
having an antemundane existence with the Supreme Being” (1987: 86). Akan people often refer to the human being as ɔkrateasefo (a living soul). Gyekye makes the connection that the expression identifies ɔkra with life; that makes it a vital element upon which rest activity as well as a determinant for life and death. The nature of ɔkra as an essence of God makes it capable of surviving death and defining the rationality behind life after death or immortality of the soul. The ancestors are departed akra (plural form of ɔkra). Gyekye sees that as a good reason to characterize the ɔkra with spirituality, and more importantly “as the equivalent of the concept of the soul in other metaphysical systems. Hence, it is correct to translate okra into English as soul” (1987:85). Majeed supports Gyekye’s assumption that “although not necessarily Cartesian, is ultimately dualistic; and I am more inclined toward it than toward Wiredu’s and Kwame’s” (2013: 25).

Another point of departure between Gyekye and Wiredu is their analysis of Western philosophical thought on the meaning of the soul, especially in Descartes. Wiredu concludes that the mind-soul concept in Descartes is essentially “thought” and not entitative. He writes: “When Descartes says that the soul is a thinking substance (res cogitans) he does not merely mean that it is a substance which can think; he means that it is a substance whose whole essence is thought” (1987: 171). The only place for the ɔkra in Western metaphysics is in “pre-Cartesian notion of the soul as the principle of life” according to Wiredu (1987: 171). Gyekye thinks Wiredu’s use of “thought” is in the ratiocinative or cognitive sense and that it is too narrow to capture the full essence of the soul in Cartesian philosophy (1987: 87). Gyekye thinks “what Descartes means by mind or thought is consciousness” and that “consciousness, which is equivalent to the soul or mind in Descartes, can be a translation of okra” (1987: 87). Gyekye draws this conclusion to support his view that “thought (adwen) in the narrow sense is in Akan philosophy an activity of the sunsum,” which he interprets “as a part of the soul (okra)” (1987: 87). He finally concludes that the mind is appropriately sunsum. In other words, sunsum produces thought.

However, the problem arises for the ɔkra as consciousness. To think of consciousness as synonymous to ɔkra will imply that consciousness is a life-principle. The Cartesian consciousness is a cognitive process, whereas the Akan concept of ɔkra is a life entity. We know unconsciousness may occur without losing the ɔkra. Losing the latter will lead to death. Again, the synonymity of ɔkra and soul (consciousness) runs counter to the entitative nature of the ɔkra in Gyekye’s own conceptualization. How can the ɔkra, being entitative, having the capacity to travel through space,
as the bearer of destiny, and its extension as a ghost after death, be equal to the Cartesian notion of the soul as consciousness? The analogy is philosophically incongruent since the concept of okra among Akan people “seems to be born out of hypostasis” (Wiredu 1987: 172). As already mentioned, for linguistic convenience, the okra may be translated into English as “soul,” but conceptually, both have different meanings, and this is how scholars over the years have treated it.

7.3.2. Against the Philosophy of Quasi-physicalism

Gyekye thinks the philosophy of quasi-physicalism is contrary to the already established Akan conceptual position on spiritual objects. He sees it as completely wrong. Gyekye agrees with Wiredu that highly traditional medicine men “or people with extrasensory (or medicinally heightened) perception in Akan communities are said to be capable of seeing and communicating with the okra” (Gyekye 1987: 86). Wiredu thinks this phenomenon of extraordinary perception proves the fact that the okra has spatial constraints, and by empirical methodologies, one can see it. Therefore, it is better be rendered as quasi-physical. Gyekye rebuts the views by stating, “these phenomena do not take place in the ordinary spatial world; otherwise anyone would be able to see or communicate with the okra (soul)” and “the fact that the okra can be seen by such people does not make it physical or quasi-physical (whatever that expression means), since this act or mode of seeing is not at the physical or spatial level” (1987: 86). Majeed argues in favor of Gyekye by theorizing that since “a person’s ‘kra is believed to be linked or subsumed with his body, and the person lives in a world which is both physical and spiritual, he or she is possibly not prevented in the physical realm from reaching to the nonphysical side” (Majeed 2013: 26). Gyekye and Majeed believe a cross-realm effect or interaction is possible between the material and immaterial. They hold this view to support their view of the okra as a spiritual property instead of quasi-physical.

The rejection of the philosophy of quasi-physicalism by Gyekye and others renders the theory not only indefensible but needless. Safro notes that Gyekye and others reject the philosophy of quasi-physicalism because “they ignore the category of the quasi-physical and, hence, have no other choice once they acknowledge that traditional Akans believe in entities that are not completely materialistic in the classic sense” (2013: 347). The quasi-physicalist holds the view that a spiritual entity is non-spatial, non-extended, and immaterial. Wiredu and Safro do not see the okra as possessing these qualities. The okra is only a life-entity subsumed to a person’s body to give life.
If correctly understood, we may call it a prisoner of the body, released at death. The \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) cannot go its separate way from the body since that will result in the death of the individual.

The most vital question in the debate is not whether the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) can continue to exist after death or not; both Gyekye and Wiredu agree to that fact. The question is how then does a life entity become an ancestor, complete with anthropomorphic character, and called upon in the rituals of the living? The question is important because it determines the strength and weakness of each side of the debate. Does the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) flit out of the body as a “living soul” or as a transfigured object? It is not so difficult for dualists like Gyekye and others to accept the former. Akan worldview suggests both a linear and cyclical view of life. The linear view means the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) survives death and continues to live on as an entity in an immaterial world of ancestors. And the cyclical view means the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) can be reincarnated into the material world under certain circumstances. Gyekye thinks a quasi-physical object that is “seemingly physical,” or “almost physical” cannot achieve such spiritual degrees unless it is something completely immaterial. He fears the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) as a quasi-physical object “would mean the total or ‘near total’ (whatever that might mean) extinction of the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) (soul) upon the death of the person” (1987: 86, 87). He, therefore, sees the ability of the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) to continue to exist independently in the world of the ancestors (Asamando) as being more than just a life entity.

Quasi-physicalists accept a transfiguration of the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) because ancestors are only extended beings. I am more inclined to accept this view, even though I do not entirely deny the entitative nature of the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \). The idea of the apotheosized \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) is a suprasensible attainment that makes it capable of intervening in the affairs of the living simply because a transfiguration has taken place. At face value, we may deny this as incongruent with Akan thought. But in every practical sense, Akan people believe ancestors are more powerful than the living and can help the living in ways that are beyond their abilities. The honorable status of ancestors in the religious rites is one of the most important in Akan religion. The rationality that living \( \text{\textit{akra}} \) (human beings) are calling upon departed \( \text{\textit{akra}} \) (ancestors) for help sustains this argument. It occurs naturally to think that the present state of the \( \text{\textit{kra}} \) is not envisioned as possessing such spiritual abilities like the ancestors. A transfiguration must take place to allow it to function in that respect. As to the question of how this transfiguration occurs, I do not intend to enter into that argument here. Danquah had already dealt with this subject in his evolutionary theory of the Akan concept of life in *Akan Doctrine of*
For the purpose of this present research, we will focus on Gyekye’s view of the sunsum, and how his pneumatic conception directly confronts the philosophy of quasi-physicalism.

7.3.3. The Pneumatic Conception of Sunsum in Gyekye

The last argument Gyekye draws against the philosophy of quasi-physicalism is the spirituality of sunsum, which quasi-physicalists reject. The pneumatic character of sunsum is not a recent development. We already encountered the trend taking shape in the works of Captain Rattray and other subsequent scholars. On several occasions, sunsum has been confused with ṣkra in the same way some use “spirit” and “soul” interchangeably. Gyekye thinks a distinction can be drawn although he sees sunsum and ṣkra in an ontic unity as we will soon discuss. Gyekye remains one of the few contemporary thinkers and students of the sunsum who, like Wiredu, chose a career path in philosophy which, instead of contributing to Akan religion with empirical studies, focused more on the analytical study of existing literature on Akan religion (Müller 2008: 169). Gyekye thinks the term “spiritual” is better rendered in the Akan language as sunsum, and since sunsum is the principle of animation, Akan ontology is essentially or primarily spiritual. Gyekye believes the sunsum is divine, spiritual, and the activating principle in creation. In other words, the spiritual supersedes or transcends the physical. This view makes the spiritual an ethereal part of the physical or as he concludes, “[w]hat is primarily real is spiritual” (Gyekye 1987: 69).

Gyekye continues to maintain a dualistic worldview of a spiritual-physical realm where the physical is dependent upon the spiritual, and the more reason he claims an aspect of the human being, i.e. ṣkra, as spiritual. His overall views on the sunsum are drawn from his conception of it as a mystical, unempirical, and nonphysical spiritual element. The point of departure between the pneumatic and quasi-physical conceptions is the different point of views of Akan metaphysics. For example, Wiredu’s metaphysics is quasi-physical, whereas Gyekye’s is spiritual. We will examine in detail the claims of Gyekye on the sunsum.

7.3.4. The Meaning of Sunsum According to Gyekye

Gyekye provides an alternative view of the Akan sunsum. He translates sunsum as appropriately “spirit.” The reason for this stems from the definition he offers that sunsum refers “to all

---

9 Although Gyekye is not an ethnographer, there are considerable amounts of sources from field work. Most of his ideas result from discussions with traditional rulers and people with traditional knowledge about Akan religion and culture.
unperceivable, mystical beings and forces in Akan ontology, and specifically to refer to the activating principle in the person” (1987: 88). Anthropologically, sunsum, the activating principle, is responsible for the formation of an individual’s personality, i.e. “a set of characteristics as evidenced in a person’s behavior – thoughts, feelings, actions, etc.” (Gyekye 1987: 90). Qualities associated with personality include courage, jealousy, gentleness, forcefulness, and dignity. These psychological qualities are not sensible or material (Gyekye 1987: 90). It gives Gyekye reason to characterize the sunsum as something immaterial, mystical and nonempirical and the basis for the spiritual universe of the Akan.

To Gyekye, the Akan universe is “endowed or charged with varying degrees of force or power,” which means, “all created things, that is, natural objects, have or contain sunsum; every deity (obosom) is a sunsum, but not vice versa” (1987: 72, 73). Thus, Gyekye thinks sunsum is something more than a “father’s spirit” to his child. He also denies its affiliation with the ntorɔ, already given by Busia. He then, however, applies a generic conception that will make it more reasonable for acceptance, that is, sunsum derives from God, the omnipotent (1987: 73). The ontological implication here labels the sunsum as divine, and consequently immortal, contradicting the perishability of the sunsum at death. This also forms the basis of spiritual unity between ɔkra and sunsum as argued by Gyekye (to be discussed later). Again, the designation of God as sunsum or the ultimate source of sunsum, recalls Danquah’s theory of Onyankɔnɔ, the Sunsum of Odomankoma, as the essence of all universal experience.10 That means sunsum is required for experiential activation. This leads Gyekye to characterize Akan worldview using panpsychism; thus, “everything is or contains sunsum” (Gyekye 1987: 75).11

The views of Gyekye are not far from (if not identical with) Minkus’ category of ye sunsum (exclusively spiritual) and wɔ sunsum (the inspirited). Gyekye does not make any direct reference to Minkus, but he states, “the word sunsum is used in two different but related senses.” As he sees

---

10 Sunsum is the subject of experience that makes activity possible. “Experience is the awareness of something” says Gyekye, and since “a purely material thing, such as wood or a dead body, cannot experience anything, it follows that the sunsum, qua subject of experience, cannot be material” (1987: 91).

11 According to Akan religion, it is not God who is present in creation. The forces identified in natural objects are the pantheon deities. God works through a pantheon of gods who act in His stead. It is the gods who take residence in natural objects, not God. Pantheism is never practiced in the Akan religious experience. Gyekye writes: “Such an impression, however, would be erroneous, for Akan thinkers do not maintain that Onyame (God) is identifiable with the sum of all things. They do not identify the creator with the creature, the author with his work” (1987: 75). God is never identifiable with His creation. It is rather the emanating sunsum of God and the other deities who are present in creation.
The first refers “to any self-conscious subject whose activities are initiated self-consciously.” This may include God, lesser deities, and spiritual beings with intelligence and will. The second refers to the mystical powers in the world that “constitute the inner essence or intrinsic properties of natural objects, and are believed to be contained in those objects” (Gyekye 1987: 73). So, Gyekye uses sunsum “in both a specific sense, to refer to the essence of a particular deity or man, and a general sense, to refer to all beings and powers unperceived by man” (Gyekye 1987: 73). The pneumatic character of sunsum lies in this rudimentary rationality.

Gyekye gives more details on the notion of sunsum and its distinction from okra. It has been a matter of difficulty for some to draw a difference or relationship between okra and sunsum. Rattray first saw the difficulty of distinguishing “between the ‘kra and the next kind of soul, the sunsum, and sometimes the words seem synonymous” (Rattray 1927: 154). At different times, Rattray thought of sunsum as either the soul or the volatile part of the okra (Rattray 1923: 152; 1927: 153, 154). Danquah likewise saw the sunsum as the counterpart of the okra (1968: 112). Perhaps the most constructive among all was Meyerowitz (1951: 27), who saw okra and sunsum as two elements of one soul. None of the scholars saw the two as identical. Gyekye expounds on the non-identical nature of the two by referring to specific attributes given exclusively to the okra that Akan people do not attribute to the sunsum. For example, the Akan will say, “His ‘kra is sad” (ne ‘kra di awerehow); never, “His sunsum is sad.” Or “His ‘kra is good,” meaning, the person has a fortunate soul. On the contrary, if the Akan say, “His ‘kra is not good,” it will mean the person is unlucky. To say a person’s sunsum is not good means that person is an evil person or a witch.

Again, Akan people will say, “His sunsum is heavy” to designate a person who possesses a strong personality. Never will the Akan say, “He has a heavy ‘kra.” Gyekye uses these illustrations to demonstrate the nonidentical nature of the okra and sunsum. However, he is convinced that the two have a constitutive unity or ontological relationality, meaning they form a single spiritual element from God. His emphasis on okra as divine and spiritual forms the basis of this assumption. As a result, Gyekye rejects any tripartite view of the Akan concept of person, that is, okra, sunsum, and nipadua, to embrace a dualistic character where okra (soul) and sunsum (spirit) form one spiritual element, whereas the nipadua or honam is the material that constitutes a human being. Consequently, an individual is “made up of two principal entities or substances, one spiritual (immaterial: okra) and the other material (honam: body)” (Gyekye 1987: 99). The “soul” then,
according to Gyekye, is ɔkra plus sunsum. Unlike quasi-physicalists, Gyekye does not see any contradiction between the Akan concept of ɔkra and the Western philosophy of mind or soul.

7.3.5. A Critique of the Pneumatic Conception of Sunsum

My response at this time is directly affected by the evidence provided in this debate and my own conceptual convictions in this debate. I have already underlined that Gyekye is a comprehensive thinker and one whose analytical approach to Akan religion provides a coherent Akan philosophical framework. However, there are aspects of his views on the Akan sunsum that cannot altogether be accepted as entirely indigenous. While Wiredu conceptualizes Akan religion to give it a logical balance that is free from Western conceptualization, Gyekye uses, as Müller commented, “only Western or etic concepts to articulate” Akan spirituality, as though Akan religion is compatible with Western thought (2008: 175). This is the reason why he accepts “soul” and “spirit” as appropriate terms for translating ɔkra and sunsum, and more radically embraces an ontic unity of ɔkra and sunsum.

Gyekye’s views are not without weaknesses. First, it is unquestionably true that the ɔkra is divine, bearer of destiny, and that Akan people believe it is immortal. We find the proof in its character as a life entity. Nobody expects a life principle to die; it is instead a determinant object for life and death. It is also observed that the views of Gyekye on the sunsum as cosmic, immaterial, mystical, and nonempirical, conform to the general conception of sunsum among Akan people. This definition has been quite recurring in my historiographical investigation, and it resonates well with several scholars studying Akan religion. What is at stake is how Gyekye characterizes the sunsum as divine, generic, and having an ontic unity with the ɔkra in its anthropological conception. These are not entirely indigenous, and it undercuts the Akan religion in several ways, as later analysis will reveal.

Second, besides the overwhelming evidence from our historiographical inquiry about the male’s role in transmitting sunsum, one example which suggests that sunsum is not divine and that it cannot be generic is the notion among Akan people of sunsum bône, often referring to an evil spirit, witch or wizard, and Onyame Sunsum, translated here as God’s Sunsum. Is the sunsum in both cases the same generic divine sunsum? I doubt it. Even if one takes the two, for argument’s sake, as generic, it still cannot be accurate because it will raise a theological question. How can the sunsum from Onyame in its practical experience be manipulated for an evil course? In reality, Akan
people do not associate evil with God, and since evil is found on the side of the sunsum, it cannot follow that this sunsum is generically divine because, for all practical intents and purposes, the essence of the Supreme Being is morally good. This is exactly so for the okra, whose essence shares in the divine attributes of being deathless and without evil. Danquah says the okra “is in its nature divine, and no contamination with sin or evil is possible for it... God never made a decree for an evil soul. God never made an evil man” (1968: 87). He then designates sunsum as the depository of evil in an individual. He thinks evil “exists but only in the sunsum side; the world of the sunsum not the world of okara.” There is evil in the world which, through neglect and submission of the sunsum, perpetuates evil in the individual. In other words, no one is born evil. Evil is an inclination of the sunsum due to the evil in the world. It is a contradiction to perceive sunsum as immanent to God and at the same time, susceptible to do evil. Sunsum can be evil because other means, other than God, transmit it. Onyame Sunsum should be distinct from all other sunsum we might consider.

Third, it follows that the ontic unity theory is also questionable. Gyekye articulated this theory to explain why the okra is active and why it can take a message or transmit one. According to this theory, the sunsum is a part of okra and is the bearer of consciousness responsible for thoughts. The ontic in unity theory justifies the capacity of the okra to possess thought or to have consciousness. It justifies why Gyekye embraces a dualistic soul-body anthropology, rather than a tripartite (soul-body-spirit) conception. Nevertheless, the theory belittles the Akan belief of the disembodied okra and sunsum at the death of the individual. When death occurs, it is the okra, not the sunsum, which is apotheosized to travel to the realm of Nananom Nsamanfo (The Eminent Ancestors). The sunsum returns to the father’s family to wait for the next embodiment. This is what led Busia to see the sunsum as a patrilineal biogenetic that runs through the father’s family (1954: 198). This recurring effect is not same with the okra. Minkus (1981: 186) confirms that it is the sunsum, rather than the osaman, of the deceased or ancestor that influences the character disposition

---

12 Gyekye himself identifies the cause of evil from the malevolent lesser deities (witches and other spirits) and the human freewill. The lesser deities “are held either to be good and evil or to have powers of good and evil.” Their potency to cause evil stems from their very nature that is partly evil. They have the power to cause sickness, natural disasters, and even to kill individuals without strong sunsum. Gyekye notes that “though the deities were created by God, they are believed to operate independently of God and in accordance with their own wills: they can, and do, use their independent wills to pursue evil.” The human freewill involves “character, conscience, thoughts and desires.” The freewill makes human beings architects of their moral standards. A person always has the capacity to choose to do what is good as well as evil (Gyekye 1996: 12).
of the one who bears his or her name. Rattray and other ethnographers saw a dichotomy between the ɔkra and sunsum, with the former being divine and the later terrestrial. Danquah was the architect of the divine origin of sunsum and its ontic in unity with the ɔkra. He considered the mind to be the spiritual, the end of the evolution of the sunsum and ɔkra. Danquah avoids several traditional conceptions in his attempt to demythologize Akan religion and to make it more pro-Western, if not Christian.\textsuperscript{13} We can observe the same tendency in Gyekye’s logical conclusion in his attempt to make the Akan concept of mind compatible with other metaphysical systems and more straightforwardly against the philosophy of quasi-physicalism.

Fourth, another implication following the ontic unity theory is that it relegates to the background the fact that only males can transmit the sunsum. Akan people do not say that just for natal purpose, but it has to do with the position of males in society. A Ghanaian Akan highlife musician, Akosua Agyapong, mentions in one of her songs titled, “Frema,” “Mmarima sunsum kata mmaa so,” which I have translated as, “The sunsum of men hovers over women.”\textsuperscript{14} Besides the lyrical evidence of the sunsum of a man, she explains why majority of Akan people believe that the agency of the sunsum is masculine and more powerful than that of the woman.

Another example is from one Yaw Tano, from Wiamoase in the Ashanti region. Mr. Tano has been an adherent of the Akan traditional religion for more than thirty years and happens to be my uncle. He served as one of the officiants of the god Jenchu, whose priest is Kwaku Anokye, also from Wiamoase. When asked about the sunsum, Tano said to me that it is the father’s “spirit” to his child. Although he now professes, to an extent, the Christian faith, he did not allow his new faith to influence his traditional conception. The views he expressed agree with what Ephirim-Donkor has recently concluded, namely that “only males are bearers of the Sunsum making males progenitors of life, their offspring... Sunsum (spirit) is transmitted through a father’s semen (huaba/ntoro) during a sexual act” (2016: 83).\textsuperscript{15} Ephirim-Donkor also commented that “the Sunsum of a father hovers over all things physical as well as spiritual” (2016: 86). The sunsum places men in a position of significant influence and authority over their offspring, and it tends to have significance in Akan social setup. The ontic in unity theory of the ɔkra, whereby sunsum, instead

\textsuperscript{13} Danquah is quoted as saying, “Christianity is a fulfillment of the religious conceptions of our own people” (Danquah 1968: xxv).

\textsuperscript{14} “Frema” was her first album released on the Jan. 1, 1990.

of being transmitted by the father, comes directly from God, takes away this important masculine role in Akan anthropology.

Fifth, Gyekye contradicts all others to further argue that “sunsum cannot derive from the child’s father” (1987: 91). The reason behind his objection is that trees, plants, and other natural objects also contain sunsum. Gyekye’s denial is only an attempt to ascertain his general conception of sunsum as deriving directly from God, and to formulate a logical system that can better position Akan philosophy in the academic sphere. Other than these reasons, the divine origin of sunsum in his anthropological understanding is entirely nonindigenous. Others have asked Gyekye whether trees should have human fathers for their sunsum to be passed on to their offspring. The logical argument follows that one would think that the reproductive activities of trees and animals are sufficient to pass on their sunsum to their offspring (Coetzee & Roux 1998: 220). The meaning of sunsum is polarized in ways that make a generic description impossible.

Sixth, having disputed the divine origin of sunsum, it follows that the ɔкра cannot have an ontic unity with it. I, therefore, stand with others who see ɔкра as distinct and as having a sort of superpersonal wholeness. What then do we do with the ontic unity theory? Should it be out of the question, or there is a place for it in Akan religion? I will answer these questions in favor of the theory, but not in the way Gyekye explained. In life, a logical conclusion can be made to suggest that an ontic unity occurs when ɔкра and sunsum are reunited in the same way the ntorɔ of the father and mogya of the mother unite to form the human body. Rattray and Meyerowitz give us a reason to accept such a proposal. Rattray, for instance, suggested that perhaps the sunsum is the volatile part of the ɔкра, and the reason a person may die when the sunsum is attacked. Meyerowitz too saw an ontic unity when she referred to the ɔкра as the unconscious and sunsum as the conscious, together they make two elements of one soul (1951: 27). The newborn child is a developing personality in whom the unity of the ɔкра and sunsum play vital roles. Each has its distinctive role to play yet integrated into a single whole.

So far, Rattray, Danquah, Meyerowitz, and Gyekye all agree on an ontic in unity of the ɔкра and sunsum, but they disagree when it comes to the origin of sunsum.

7.4. An Evaluation of Quasi-Physicalism and the Pneumatic Conception
The ongoing debate has brought forward two important views of Akan realities. The first has been the philosophy of quasi-physicalism, which argues that Western conceptualizations have influenced the study of Akan religion, and therefore a philosophical decolonization is required to get rid of conceptual blunders and misunderstandings. Part of that effort has been the question of the English translation of ɔkra and sunsum as “soul” and “spirit.” Although Gyekye strongly maintains that these translations are appropriate, Wiredu, the precursor of quasi-physicalism, disagrees and thinks ɔkra is not spiritual but quasi-physical. He says the same of the sunsum, namely that it is not categorically a spirit or spiritual, but quasi-material. A great deal of his disagreement has been that “soul” and “spirit” have philosophical connotations that are not the same as the Akan notion of ɔkra and sunsum; as such, they cannot be identical. Gyekye works out his philosophical defense against the philosophy of quasi-physicalism from this backdrop.

The strength of Gyekye’s argument is in the fact that sunsum is an immaterial entity that can be rightly translated as spirit, as well as the bearer of consciousness. Gyekye sees the sunsum as the basis for psychological phenomena. That means the mind is not the kind of abstract phenomenon thought by the quasi-physicalist. The mind is a spiritual entity, a substance synonymous to sunsum, which makes a thinking being in essence partly spiritual (1987: 88, 164). Gyekye uses sleep peregrination of the sunsum to illustrate the connection between the mind and body:

> The fact that dreaming occurs only in sleep makes it a unique sort of mental activity and its subject, namely sunsum, a different sort of subject. A purely physical object cannot be in two places at the same time: A body lying in bed cannot at the same time be on the top of a mountain. Whatever is on the top of the mountain, then, must be something nonphysical, nonbodily, and yet somehow connected to a physical thing – in this case, the body. (1987: 93)

Given this is the rationale behind Gyekye’s duality of the concept of a person, Wiredu says it is a hypothesis which does not have a place in Akan thought, on the account that mind is not a substance of the body and neither is it identical with sunsum. Wiredu argues in favor of the nonsubstance conception of mind (1987: 160). The sunsum, too far removed from being identical with the mind, would have to be a possessor of mind in order to act in dreams (Wiredu 1987: 163). How can sunsum, a spiritual entity qua mind, act in dreams without a mind of its own? It is true that dreams do not occur in the material world even though it is a mental activity. However, since a human being has a sunsum, everyone is involved in sunsum mu nsem (matters of the spiritual realm).
My own conclusion supports Wiredu, for the following reasons: the *sunsum*, which is on the top of the mountain in the dream, is not logically the person’s physical body. It has to be something that Wiredu considers as a quasi-physical being. It is represented as the person’s double in the dream, possessing a complete physiological identity and in a quasi-physical world. Whatever one comes to experience in dreams is just a replica of some physical realities. This accounts for the identification of familiar persons and places in dreams because they are all perceptions of physical elements presented in quasi-physical images. That world that the *sunsum* dramatizes in dreams is not a spiritual world; neither is it a physical world. It is a quasi-physical world, and the *sunsum* does not belong there.

Regarding the expression “quasi-physical,” both Gyekye and Majeed did not consider it as a philosophical subject worth dealing with. A thorough assessment of the expression does not seem to concern them any more than the nature of the *ɔкра*. Gyekye understood “quasi-physical” to mean “seemingly physical” or “almost physical” (1987: 86). Majeed, on the other hand, relied mainly on Safro’s definition to engage the theory in detail. Based on their analysis and understanding of the term quasi-physical, both arrive at a conclusion to reject quasi-physicalism for other philosophical interpretations that support the spirituality of the *ɔкра*. Gyekye thinks the *ɔкра* may be subject to total or “near total” extinction upon the death of the person if characterized as quasi-physical properties (1987: 86, 87). The assumption is a conceptual blunder because the quasi-physicalist believes in the immortality of the *ɔкра*. Wiredu believes the apotheosized *saman* (ghost) in the netherworld is an extended form of the *ɔкра*.

Gyekye and Majeed misunderstood the concept of quasi-physicalism due to their definition of the term as “almost physical.” The quasi-physical and paraphysical character of the *ɔкра* makes its existence a paranormal phenomenon. It does not have any straightforward physical properties. Nevertheless, it relates to a physical phenomenon, a kind of “parasitical on material analogies” for which no adequate laws of physics or scientific explanation exists.16 There is no scientific explanation to ascertain how the *ɔкра* subsumes the body. Neither do the traditional concepts offer any clue. The physical proof is that its presence means life and its departure is death, and that traditional medicine men who possess extrasensory abilities can enter into communication with the

---

16 Borrowed phrase from Wiredu (1987: 175).
This is the background that shapes Wiredu’s conception of why any theory of souls or spirits is an empirical theory (1987: 170).

Majeed criticizes Wiredu for being rationally misled by the hypothesis of Hans Werner Debrunner, the Swiss-German historian and theologian, that the ṽкра “is sometimes said to be a person’s double, conceived in his material image complete with a head, hands, legs and all” (Wiredu 1987: 161). Majeed thinks it is not sensible to use phrases like my ṽкра’s leg and my ṽкра’s head, or even say that her ṽкра’s chin is like this or that his ṽкра’s hand has done that (2013: 27, 28). Simply put, the ṽкра has no such parts as claimed by Debrunner. Indeed, there are no statements like that in the Akan culture. Majeed rightly suggested that the shape that the medicine man sees may not be the ṽкра’s own shape or perhaps it assumes “the shape of the person it was known to inhabit just for the purposes of easy identification of its bearer” (2013: 28). All these may seem true of how the ṽкра looks like, but the most obvious evidence is the image of the deceased that Akan people assume as the ṽsaman (ghost or ancestor). Alternatively, it may be the image of the ṽкра that the body bears, just like printing a photo from a digital camera. In whichever way, several Akan people will perceive the ṽкра in anthropomorphic images. There are expressions like Wo reku me ‘кра, meaning, “You are killing my ṽкра;” Me kra redi awereho, meaning, “My ‘кра is aggrieving.” Most Akan people use these statements to express diverse emotional experiences in a person’s life. This may lead to the notion of the ṽкра as an entity that has human sentiments and consciousness just as a person may feel in the physical world. ṽкра’s chin or leg, or hand, etc. may be quite strange in the Akan language. However, certain aspects of the ṽкра, as analyzed above, exhibit anthropological properties.

Moreover, the preexistence of the ṽкра with God, where it also received its nkrabea (destiny), makes it capable to negotiate its destiny, as some accounts indicate. It would have to possess consciousness and the capacity to reason for its destiny. Unless the ṽкра is a personality, it cannot reason with God for its destiny. It is therefore not an error to conceive of the ṽкра as possessing anthropological properties, even if such characteristics are absent in the ordinary language. Wiredu calls the ṽкра a living entity (1987: 162). It constitutes the body as a substance, not an astral spirit.17

---

17 Akan people do not think of the presence of the ṽкра as possession or an astral entity. It is just a substance that forms part of the whole body.
There are several characteristics of the nature of ṣkra to contest its pneumatic conception. A spirit has non-spatial constraints, whereas ṣkra has a spatial constraint. The restriction of the ṣkra to giving life to the body does not permit it to act in spiritual directives as a “spirit.” Its separation from the body is death. On the contrary, the ṣkra attains spirituality after death when it has realized its destiny. There is no return to God after that transfiguration. The ṣkra departs with the image of its bearer to become an ancestor (spirit) in a world called Asamando (world of spirits), a replica of the physical world. The spirit does not lose consciousness, since it can now identify other predeceased ancestors, interact with other spiritual beings, and respond to the call of the living when summoned in the pouring of libation. In this state, it becomes acceptable that the ṣkra has attained spirituality because it can travel across space and time.

The following tables give a summary of the nature of the ṣkra and sunsum as understood by Kwesi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye.

Table 3: Summary of the character of the ṣkra according to Wiredu and Gyekye

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Generic</th>
<th>Posthumous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wiredu</strong> That whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual’s destiny from God.</td>
<td>Quasi-physical, Life-giving entity</td>
<td>God</td>
<td>Spirit in Asamando (quasi-physical world)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gyekye</strong> That which constitutes the innermost self, the essence, of the individual person…the individual’s life…the embodiment and transmitter of the individual’s destiny (fate: nkrabea) …a spark of the Supreme Being (Onyame) in man. It is thus described as divine and as having an antemundane existence with the Supreme Being.</td>
<td>Soul</td>
<td>Non-physical, Spiritual</td>
<td>God</td>
<td>Spirit in Asamando (spiritual world)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 There have been some authors who have asserted the return of the ṣkra to God: see for example Helen A. Neville, Brendesha M. Tynes, and Shawn O. Utsey (Eds), *Handbook of African American Psychology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication Inc., 2009, p. 51. This is incorrect and does not correspond to any traditional concept about the death of a person. Such treatment of the ṣkra is a Christianized doctrine and is far removed from Akan anthropology. The ancestors do not live with God; neither do they live with the lesser gods. Their world is different from that of the other spirits according to Akan traditions.
Table 4: Summary of the character of the sunsum according to Wiredu and Gyekye

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Generic</th>
<th>Posthumous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wiredu</strong></td>
<td>That which is responsible for the total effect communicated by an ‘individual’s personality.’</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quasi-material</td>
<td>Through the father</td>
<td>Perishes at death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gyekye</strong></td>
<td>To all unperceivable, mystical beings and forces in Akan ontology, and specifically to refer to the activating principle in the person.</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>Spiritual, has ontic unity with the ɔkra</td>
<td>God</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Together with the ɔkra becomes the ancestor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.5. Conclusion

This chapter has offered an evaluation of the ongoing debate between the philosophy of quasi-physicalism and the pneumatic conception of the ɔkra and sunsum. How relevant is this debate to the present research? The purpose has been to see the various implications for the construction of contextual Akan pneumatology. The critique of quasi-physicalism questions the fundamental basis for contextual Akan pneumatology, namely the ɔkra and sunsum. Is there anything at all spiritual in Akan worldview? The merit in quasi-physicalism relies on its attempt to decolonize Akan concepts and to provide an alternative way of interpreting Akan realities. Gyekye, on the other hand, gave alternative conceptions about what ought to be philosophically expedient in the Akan understanding of the spiritual. In his attempt to defend the pneumatic notion of ɔkra and sunsum, he offered a philosophical framework that is nonindigenous, although it appeals to other philosophical systems. From my analysis of the argument, it is observed that neither quasi-physicalism nor the pneumatic conception adequately conveys the meaning of the Akan doctrine of ɔkra and sunsum. It is the curious perception of their nature and the roles each play in Akan anthropology that give reason to the existence of the argument of quasi-physicalism and the pneumatic conception of Akan realities. The chapter that follows will deal with certain Akan terminologies often confused with or closely related to sunsum. In the course of a comparative analysis, I will articulate my conception of sunsum.
Chapter 8

Contemporary Analysis of Commonly Confused terms with Sunsum

“In Akan thought, for instance, Rattray noted different ideas of the sunsum (‘spirit’) of a person with some of his informants saying that the sunsum and the ūkra (soul) are the same, and others disagreeing. He noted the ‘sometimes contradictory’ nature of ‘all these quotations’ referring to the statements of his informants.”—Kwame Gyekye\(^1\)

8.1. Introduction

The present attempt to develop a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology has been the reason for the historiographical investigation into the nature of the Akan concept of sunsum. So far, I have retraced and analyzed the evolution of the term, from its pneumatological conception to the contemporary argument of quasi-physicalism. The different perspectives scholars draw from the nature of sunsum serve to lay the foundation for a broader framework of understanding. However, there are some other Akan terms that often nuance a comprehensive understanding of sunsum. Most of the nuances, already discussed in the previous chapter, stem from various conceptions about sunsum from both Western and indigenous scholars studying Akan religion. This chapter aims to draw a synthesis from the different discussions in order to examine the relationship between sunsum and other commonly confused terms with it. The purpose is to present the most compelling argument for the distinctiveness of sunsum, with a particular focus on how it informs my research towards the articulation of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology.

8.2. The Relationship Between Sunsum and ūkra

The relationship between sunsum and ūkra has been a problem to scholars. The majority of scholars studying Akan religion understand the two to be distinct aspects of the whole body. Gyekye thinks the relationship between the two constitutes an inseparable unity of ūkra and sunsum, i.e. consisting in a single unity. I have responded to Gyekye in the previous chapter with a critique, arguing this cannot be so. Most scholars envision a distinctiveness of the two, although both form a single essence of the human being. Sunsum is a patrilineal essence. The idea of coming from the

---

\(^1\) Gyekye (1987: 47).
father suggests that it is not just a concept or idea, but something immaterial which forms the basis for the spiritual bond between the father and his offspring. The ɔkra, on the other hand, is a divine essence responsible for life and the bearer of a person’s destiny. Akan people know too well that sunsum and ɔkra are distinct but correlates in constituting each human person. However, the distinction has not always been quite easy for scholars studying Akan religion. The most significant reason for this difficulty has to do with their anthropological conception.

Rattray saw the problem but did not engage it in any sustained manner. He thought it was difficult to distinguish between the two because they sometimes seem synonymous (1955: 154). Dietrich Westermann (1875-1956), a German writer, philologist, and student of Akan religion, assumed sunsum and ɔkra to be one and the same thing. Sam Akesson says, “the distinction between the ‘kra and the sunsum is not quite clear nor is it easy to follow” (1965: 286). He opined the difficulty arises from synonymous usage of the two terms. Nevertheless, he believed a distinction is still possible. Akesson called the ɔkra the life-soul responsible for life in the body, and the sunsum the personality-soul upon which functionality depends. As a functional element, sunsum exists only in the material world. However, he also thought sunsum is a conscious counterpart of the ɔkra in the body (1965: 286). Most philosophers believe consciousness involves thoughts, awareness, and experience. To the Akan, consciousness is a phenomenal experience carried out by the sunsum, the inward energy, or the capacity that affects a person’s spiritual and emotional disposition. Danquah came to the same conclusion, seeing sunsum as “a form of consciousness or embodied one” (1944: 116). Akesson further came to grips with the numinous essence of the ɔkra as the reality which receives worship and offerings, whereas sunsum’s role is to fight the evils that

2 Westermann came to this conclusion after observing a ritual cleansing of the ɔkra in a river, which he called the asumguare, explained by him as “washing of the sum (=sunsum=ɔkra)” (Tehle 1907: 407). Tehle explained that asumguare is a contamination of the Twi phrase asu mu guare, which means “washing in the water.” Tehle gives the root to why some Akan scholars still believe in the ceremonial washing of the sunsum. As it stands now, however, the shreds of evidence do not support that idea. Captain Rattray rectified this error by saying, “an Ashanti would never talk of washing his sunsum” (1955: 154). Rattray was aware of the ritual washing of the ɔkra, and several scholars favor his position.

3 The two terms, kra and sunsum, are capitalized in the original text.

4 This does not suggest a dualistic or tripartite conception of the human being where sunsum may be seen as an indwelling entity to carry out such animation. Those who think this way often encounter the problem of how sunsum, a purely spiritual element, could have any interaction with the nipadua, a purely material component.
attempt to contaminate the ḅкра (1965: 286). This observation rightly agrees with Rattray’s description of sunsum as an advance guard that protects the individual (1955: 154).

There are enough reasons to show that Akan people believe the ḅкра and sunsum are not ontologically identical. Although Gyekye proposes the ontic in unity theory, he does not consider the two to be identical – despite their constitutive spiritual unity. He argues in favor of a nonidentical theory, stating that to characterize the two as “identical would logically mean that whatever can be asserted of one can or must be asserted of the other” (1987: 95). Gyekye is right to see both terms as having their distinctive attributes and predicates that makes them nonidentical.

8.2.1. Characteristics of ḅкра

Gyekye highlights some of the nonidentical attributes or predicates of the two terms with my comments (1987: 95):

1. “Ne ‘kra redi averchoo” (His ‘kra is sad). Never his sunsum is sad. Many Akan use the statement, Wo reku me sunsum, “You’re hurting my sunsum,” to denote emotional anguish. Since the ḅкра is deathless, it is almost a contradiction to say, “Wo rekus me ‘kra” (You are killing my ḅкра) even though the statement is common.
2. “Ne ‘kra teetee” (His ‘kra is worried or disturbed). Alternatively, most Akan will say, Ne ‘kra abotõ, meaning “My ‘kra is downcast.”
3. “Ne ‘kra adwane” (His ‘kra has run away) to denote someone who is scared to death. The departure of the ḅкра signifies death. Hence, the expression is used in the face of danger to one’s life.
4. “Ne ‘kra ye” (His ‘kra is good), referring to a person who is lucky or fortunate. The negative of this statement is ‘His ‘kra is not good.’ If you used sunsum in lieu of ‘kra, and made the statement ‘His sunsum is not good’ (ne sunsum nnye), the meaning would be quite different; it would mean that his sunsum is evil, that is to say, he is an evil spirit, a

5 I am not totally convinced about what Akesson had wanted to say here. Akan religion does not associate evil with the ḅкра. In fact, Akan people believe no one is born evil, neither can the ḅкра become evil. Hence, the ‘kra endowed by Onyame is without evil. Danquah (1968: 87) noted this by saying, “Evil, therefore, exists but only in the sunsum side; the world of the sunsum not the world of ḅкра.” His interpretation follows that sunsum is contaminated because of the existence of evil in the world which, through neglect and submission of the sunsum, perpetuates evil in the individual (Ibid). Evil is an inclination of the sunsum due to environmental influence. The ḅкра is unconscious to evil. In spite of this, I do agree with Akesson that sunsum “tries to conquer the weaknesses to which the Akan is exposed” (1965: 286). Instead of the ḅкра, it is rather the nkrabea (destiny) of the ḅкра that sunsum tries to protect.
witch.” A person’s ‘kra is the bearer of destiny, i.e., the total expression of a person’s wellbeing in life. Prosperity, riches, and everything that progresses an individual’s life is attributed to good fate. So, Akan people often say, ḋkrara ne Nyame, literally, “He bid farewell to his God.” When used figuratively, it means the person received blessings from God. On the contrary, unfortunate circumstances are attributed to the ‘kra. Akan people will say, Wo ‘kra nye a, wonya asafo nsam amanne” – “If your soul is not a lucky one, you fall into the hands of a ‘company’.”

5. “Ne ‘kra afi ne ho” (His ‘kra has withdrawn from his body). This expression means the individual is dead. There is no breathing or functionality of the vital organs.

6. “Ne ‘kra dii n'akyi, anka owui” (But for his ‘kra that followed him, he would have died). Some Akan scholars saw the ‘kra as the double of the individual. My discussion with Meyerowitz in chapter four has given more details on this subject. Akan people have another expression that goes like this, Ne ti ye” (His head is good), meaning the person was fortunate.

7. “Ne ‘kra aniagye” (His ‘kra is happy). In recent times, a statement like Sunsum sore yi Nyame aye (Arise my sunsum to praise God) has become synonymous with Me kra to dwom, or “Sing my ‘kra.” The identical conflict is real and wages on.

There are observations to point out in the above analysis. First, the usage of ḋkrara is more expressive of reflexive sensations or emotions. Note the following expressions, “My ḋkrara is sad or worried,” and “My ḋkrara is happy.” Both involve the awareness of subjective experiences, i.e., conscious feelings. But if the ḋkrara can feel, why do we reject its entitative nature? Or which one experiences emotions: ḋkrara or nipadua (body)?

There is a relational ontology between the ḋkrara and body. Gyekye talks of the relationship as “an indissoluble or indivisible unity, and that… a person is a homogeneous entity” (1987: 99). How then is the concept of a person dualistic according to Gyekye? The case for the duality theory is related to the Akan belief of disembodiment of the ḋkrara and the body at death. Dualists perceive the ḋkrara as a spiritual entity (substance) of the body with corresponding causal influences, i.e. whatever happens to the body reflects in the conditions of the ḋkrara and vice versa (Gyekye 1987:

---

6 Proverb and translation taken from Rattray (1915: 45).
A happy okra is a healthy body, but a sick body makes the okra unhappy. The ritual of soul washing (Kraguare) and destiny (nkrabea) affirm the reality of the causal relationship.

On the contrary, the quasi-physicalist is anti-dualistic. The human being is hylomorphic, meaning, composed of a non-entitative substance (okra) and a material one (nipadua). The human body is, therefore, an embodied life. It also accounts for Safro’s thought that “as our discovery of physical laws proceeds and our scientific knowledge increases, we may come to accept some or all the quasi-physical objects as bona fide physical objects” (1992: 193). To the quasi-physicalist, the reflexive emotions of the okra are dependent on the thoughts and actions of the body, but not vice versa.

Further, the concept of okra is the rationality behind life, livelihood, and death. The okra as the determining factor for life is firmly established; that also makes it an underlining factor in the ethical process of life. There are two Akan terms to define life: the first is nkwa, often translated in English as “life.” Okra is life (nkwa), literally referring to the biological process of existence, i.e., growth, procreation, etc. Its survival of death grounds the concept of ancestorship and immortality. The second word is obra, also translated in English as “life.” It is not easy to offer a straightforward definition of obra. It appears to me as the whole process of a person’s ethical life, and how one lives out one’s existence. It thus includes the person’s choices and activities in life.

The closest concept to obra is nkrabea (destiny), which signifies the individual act towards specific goals in life. Nkrabea finds its course in obra (the ethical life). Both obra and nkrabea are related to the okra in some way. For that reason, Akan people have understood the concept of sunsum acting as an advance guard to protect one’s nkrabea for a commendable ethical life (abrahɔ).

8.2.2. Characteristics of Sunsum

As for the characteristics of the sunsum, Gyekye presents compelling arguments in order to show that it is distinct and never identical with okra (1987: 95, 96). I will present his analysis here with my comments.

1. “ɔwɔ sunsum ‘He has sunsum,’ an expression they use when they want to refer to someone as dignified and as having a commanding presence. Here they never say, ‘He has okra,’ soul, for it is believed that it is the nature of the sunsum (not the okra) that differs from person to person; hence they speak of ‘gentle sunsum,’ ‘forceful sunsum,’ ‘weak or strong
Sunsum,” etc.” Sunsum makes an individual distinct in terms of personality. The Akan phrase, Wo sunsum (Your sunsum) means it is your distinct intrinsic force or identity. The Akan will also say Ne sunsum (His sunsum) to talk about the peculiar character of an individual or a thing. Thus, sunsum is not foreign to the object in which it is identified. Other expressions may include, “The sunsum of the river,” “The sunsum of the tree,” “The sunsum of God,” etc. Busia concludes that sunsum is an individual’s ego, personality, distinctive character, and disposition (Busia 1954: 197).

2. Ne sunsum ye duru (His sunsum is heavy or weighty); this means that the person has a strong personality: The statement shows the dynamic nature of sunsum, unlike the ṭkra. Sunsum can grow from weak to strong or vice versa. It is a constant dynamic force that experiences the intrinsic as well as the external world.

3. Ne sunsum hye me so “His sunsum overshadows mine.” Unless the sunsum is a force, it cannot overshadow a person. It is a person’s sunsum that is always seeking for vengeance. The Akan will never say, Ne ‘kra hye me so (His ‘kra overshadows mine), because the ‘kra is latent and only a life-force.

4. Obi sunsum so kyen obi dee ‘Someone’s sunsum is bigger or greater than another’s.’ “To say ‘someone’s ‘kra is greater than another’s’ would be meaningless.” There is a reason why a person’s sunsum can knock down the sunsum of another. There is also a reason why some people can resist a witchcraft attack, and others cannot. People with weak sunsum are vulnerable to witchcraft attack.

5. Owɔ sunsum pa (He has a good sunsum); that is, he is a generous person. So far, the majority of Akan scholars believe the sunsum is the operational force for morality. It is responsible for suban (character) and personality formation. Human qualities are not dependent on the ṭkra but the sunsum.

The above expressions of sunsum are personality traits of individuals in the material world. Much of the ṭkra expresses reflexive emotions relative to life and death. This is not exactly the case with regard to the sunsum, which is responsible for the distinctive characteristics of the person in the world of experience. Danquah says a person’s sunsum is in fact the matter or the physical basis of reality (1944: 115). It is the basis of the spiritual sphere from where the individual’s distinct features are projected into the world. Sunsum, not the ṭkra, is what is known in life. Persons are known by their distinct features. So, Akan people say, Yenim wo a, na yenim wo, “Once we know
you, you are known.” Social identification is dependent on the individual’s sunsum or personality, not the ṣкра.

The nonidentification of the two terms appears in the definitions of Captain Rattray. He talks of sunsum as “that spiritual element in a man or woman upon which depends not life, i.e. breath, for that is the kra – but that force, personal magnetism, character, personality, power, soul, call it what you will, upon which depend health, wealth, worldly power, success in any venture, in fact, everything that makes life worth living” (1923: 46). He was again convinced of the paternal transmission of the sunsum to the child, and its counterpart with the ṣкра in the body. He further talks of the ṣкра as the stranger from without (divine). He also says it is the ṣкра, rather than the sunsum, that causes the body to breathe (1927: 154). In sleep, breathing continues because the ṣкра does not leave the body as the sunsum does in dreams. In its nightly peregrination, Akan people believe the sunsum can get knocked about by other sunsum, leading the person to fall ill or to die. This is what led Rattray to conclude that “[p]erhaps the sunsum is the more volatile part of the whole ‘kra’” (1927: 154). Captain Rattray explains that oneiromancy, i.e. the reading of omens from dreams, is the natural consequence of the Akan belief in dreams (1959: 192). To the Akan, dreams are as real as the physical world.

We can further underline the fact that the ṣкра, unlike the sunsum, does not attack or seek revenge. It is a general belief among Akan that if a woman is unfaithful to her husband, the ṣкра of the man will inform his ọbosom (ntorɔ), which will then let his sunsum know, and the latter will take revenge on the woman to kill her. The ṣкра cannot seize the woman because it “is not volatile in life, as the sunsum undoubtedly is” (Rattray 1959: 154). The sunsum in my conception is an emanating force from the deities. I will present various arguments in support of this assertion in my discussion below (§8.3).

---

7 The kra is in capital letters in the original text.
8 Rattray recounts incidences where a dreamer may be liable for committing certain offenses when the person’s dream is disclosed. If a person dreams of having sexual relation with a married woman, the dreamer will be fined for committing adultery. It is believed his soul is seeking to desire the soul of that woman. Or as Rattray was also informed, “If you dream that you have had intercourse with a woman with whom you have never had sexual relations, it means that you will never in all your life have sexual intercourse with that woman, because “your soul has already devoured her”” (Rattray 1959: 193).
9 This is not the case for the man who commits adultery because the sunsum of the woman is not strong enough to cease the husband. Akan laws consider adultery a tribal taboo. A man caught in the crime of adultery will be asked to pay adultery damages. But this, of course, will depend on the gravity of the crime. Rattray wrote extensively on the crime of adultery among the Asantes (Rattray 1929: 313-323).
8.2.3. ɔkra and Other Worldly Realities

Akesson concluded that ɔkra is anthropic, i.e. a characteristic of human beings, never to be identified with animals and trees (1965: 287). He relied largely on the ideas of Rattray who had come to a similar conclusion that ɔkra “seems to be used only of human beings,” since Rattray claimed never to have “heard of the ‘kra of an animal” (1959: 153). Asare Opoku shares the same idea (1978: 95). Ephirim-Donkor, on the other hand, shares a contrary view: he thinks ɔkra is the very essence of God, and which is present in human beings and all living things (1998: 62). He sees ɔkra as a life principle for all living things because it takes life to create life, and only God is the giver of life (2016: 105).

I fully share the views of Ephirim-Donkor on the ɔkra of animals, even if it is inferior to that of the human being. There are statements from Akan folklore to support the view. For example, Ghanaian Highlife music legend, Nana Kwame Ampadu, ascribes ɔkra to animals.10 In the lyrics of his song “Anibre Nye” (Covetousness is evil), he says, “Ɛsono ɔxdbo ne ‘kra na ɛsono eyuo de. Ɛsono akokɔ ne ‘kra na ɛsono brekuo dee” “The ‘kra of the bay duiker differs from that of the black duiker. The ‘kra of the chicken differs from that of the coucal bird.”11 Similarly, Amakye Dede, another Ghanaian Highlife legend, in the lyrics of the song, “Sufre Wo Nyame” (Call upon your God), says: “Akokɔnini ‘kra nso, ene obrekuo dee nse,” meaning “The ‘kra of the rooster is unlike the ‘kra of the coucal bird.” The rationale behind these statements is their direct reference to destiny, which varies from one person to another. In a much deeper sense, they present facts concerning what informs the Akan mind about life. As proposed by Ephirim-Donkor, life is dependent upon ɔkra, and since animals have breath like human beings, they should possess ɔkra.

How can human beings share ‘kra with inferior creatures like animals? The answer is

---

10 Nana Kwame Ampadu is one of the pioneer Akan musicians of the traditional Ghana highlife music. His musical career began in the mid 60’s. He remains the most prolific songwriter of all time in Ghana and the diaspora with more than seven hundred songs on albums. In 1973, he was crowned as Nwontofohene “King of Musicians” by the Arts Council of Ghana. Highlife is a musical genre which originated from Ghana and later on spread to the Western Anglophone African countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leon, Nigeria and Gambia. The lyrics of Highlife music are based on the traditional values and philosophy of the culture.

11 Brekuo is a kind of brownish bird, with a grey chest, red eyes, and black tail. I have chosen to call it the coucal although others mistakenly call it wood pidgeon. The name of the bird comes from two Akan words, bre means “tired of too much effort” and guo “fruitless.” Together, brekuo (breguo) means fruitless effort. There is a legend about the bird that makes Akan people follow its cry as Me bre gu ye ya “My fruitless efforts are painful.” The bird reminds Akan people that determination and hard work do not always yield the desired results.
straightforward: ɔkra is not a homogenous life principle for all living things. Since the nkra (destiny) of animals differs widely from human beings, it follows that their ’kra is not the same.

Some people have identified the ɔkra with the blood of the mother. Gyekye has disputed the latter as suppressing the Akan concept of disembodiment of the body and life after death (1987: 99). Gyekye perhaps feared such a theory would materialize the ɔkra, which Akan people firmly hold as spiritual. Danquah had earlier seen life and blood as co-extensive, though he was not very clear whether he ever associated the ’kra with blood. He asserted that the usage of “blood is a metaphor for offspring, because upon it hangs the racial life” (1944: 179). Akan people do not postulate any other life outside the ɔkra, the spark of God. It follows that non-living objects do not have ɔkra, since there is no biological experience of life processes. But we know from the start that natural objects are inspirted with sunsum.

It is worth noting, in my opinion, that if non-living things, e.g. rocks/stones, for instance, cannot experience any biological process of life, although they are inspirted with sunsum, then we can conclude that sunsum is not the spirit of life, neither is it synonymous with the ɔkra.

8.2.4. The Meaning of Sásã, the Revengeful Spirit

Akesson thought animals have sásã (the revengeful or agitated spirit) instead of ɔkra (1965: 287). The assumption is not altogether clear. My analysis in the previous section answered the question of animals having ɔkra as their principle of life. What then is sásã among the Akan?

The basic idea of sásã is the spirit of the deceased that has become an agitated spirit in the limbo (Ephirim-Donkor 2008: 76). The Akan word sa is polysemic and can mean the following: “to dance,” “to gather,” “to be picky,” etc. It is also used to describe a situation in which a person or thing is following or stalking or pursuing. For example, Aden na wo sã me sãa? “Why are you pursuing me?” Or, ɔsa no “He is being followed.”12 In these two instances of the usage of sa, the repetitive form sãsã will give the idea of persistent pursuit. With that in mind, we understand Rattray’s definition of sásã as “the invisible spiritual power of a person or animal, which disturbs the mind of the living, or works a spell or mischief upon them, so that they suffer in various ways… [It] is essentially the bad, revengeful, and hurtful element in a spirit” (1959: 153). People who die in battle, are executed or murdered, are said to hunt their perpetrators by their sásã. According to

12 The root word sa, is given extensive explanation in Christaller (1881: 398-402).
Rattray, persons who are always taking life, such as executioners, hunters, butchers, and, as a later development, sawyers who cut down great forest trees, are vulnerable to säsä influence and attacks (1959: 153).

Akesson further says säsä is that part of the deceased spirit which is conscious of the cause or nature of the person’s death (1965: 288). This observation is true. The säsä, having known the cause of its death, pursues the murderer to cause a state of mental agitation or remorseful feeling until the person confesses, commits suicide, or is killed by the säsä. Hence, Akan people will say, “Ne säsä annya no,” literally (as translated by Akesson), “His revengeful spirit has got him or his Säsä has rendered him weak.” It seems to me that there is no apparent difference between säsä and saman (ghost), except that the former is revengeful and the latter travels to Asamando. If that is the case, then it follows that säsä is the same as the departing okra that has become agitated. The only part of a living thing that can survive death to act in this respect is the okra. Therefore, my conclusion is that säsä is related to the okra, but not to the sunsum. If this is correct, it is as I see it a compelling sign that animals indeed have their own proper life principle (okra).

We can further be sure that säsä is neither exclusive to animals nor human beings. Akan people do not consider all animals as having säsä. There are certain animals known as säsä mmoa “säsä animals.” Rattray enlists the following: “the bongo (otromo); the elephant (esono); the roan (oko); the waterbuck (fusuo); the duiker (otwe); a very small antelope called adowa; the black duiker (ewiyo); the yellow-backed duiker (kwaduo). Of all these säsä animals, the bongo is the most dangerous and most feared” (1959: 183). Säsä can be repelled by following certain spiritual practices such as putting on amulets or bathing säsä duro (säsä antidote).

---

13 The etymology of the word saman is disputed. There are some who take the prefix sa, as explained above, to mean “finish” or “end.” The suffix man (or mang) means “nation” or “community.” Saman then is someone without the nation or out of the nation. Hence, others say w’asa wɔ ‘man mu “He is done or finished with the living.” Akesson (1965: 289, 290) explained the word in this sense: “The Akan word OSAMANG is descriptive of the privileged powers which death grants the ghost-soul of the deceased Akan. The root word SA means “to run after”; the suffix MANG means “the body of inhabitants of a country united under the same government, a nation, tribe, people or state.” The name OSAMANG could be understood as the person from the body of inhabitants who run after the violator of the customs. The prefix “O” is the third person singular in the Akan grammar. The ghost-souls or the spirits of the dead watch the affairs of the state with keen eyes, and it is well known that they do not let a member of a community who may break a taboo go unpunished. Literally speaking, Osamang runs after those who violate the customs laid down by the ancestor.”

14 Several Akan drama and movies showcase this aspect of the Akan culture of säsä and saman. In some instances, the säsä of the murdered has been called saman. The movie industry has become an avenue to showcase most Akan traditions.
8.3. The Relationship between *Sunsum* and *Ntorɔ*

The social anthropologist has little difficulty in studying the *ntorɔ* - thanks to the vast extent of materials existing on the subject today. Rattray had to excavate this information from the memory of the Asantes. He, in particular, thought *ntorɔ* was synonymous with *nton, sunsum,* or *ćbosom* (god) (1959: 318). Later studies, however, suggest that *ntorɔ* is not synonymous with *nton,* or with *sunsum* (Danquah 1968; Busia 1954; Denteh 1967; Gyekye 1987; and others). As for Rattray’s later assumption of the *ćbosom,* there is no doubt as to its affinity with *ntorɔ.* Most Akan scholars accept *ntorɔ* as a tutelary spiritual attribute. My analysis in previous chapters agrees with the others. The relationship between *ntorɔ* and *sunsum* is the focus of this section.

8.3.1 The Meaning of *Ntorɔ*

In this research, we have defined *ntorɔ* as a social biogenetic responsible for paternal group membership, proto-psychological temperaments, and character resemblance (not physical) of the father or his patrilineage. *Ntorɔ* determines the “physiological mysteries of conception” (Rattray 1923: 46). During sexual intercourse, a man transmits his *ntorɔ* through the semen to mingle with the *mogya* of the woman. This biological process may equal what is scientifically known as fertilization in human reproduction. But among native Akan, conception is beyond biological formation. A child is composed of several spiritual elements, namely the *ntorɔ* of the father, the *sunsum* of the father, the *sunsum* of the person after whom a child is named, the *sunsum* of an ancestor from the mother’s lineage, and *sunsum* of tutelary deities related to the child (Denteh 1967: 92).

Every Akan belongs to *ntorɔ* group, in the same way each of them belongs to *abusua.*\(^1\) The father’s lineage determines the *ntorɔ* group membership, whereas the mother’s bloodline determines the *abusua* group membership. Despite these two significant social groupings, Akan

\(^{1}\) Akan marital taboos are construed after the *ntorɔ* ideology. People of the same *ntorɔ* group are not permitted to marry in the same way persons of the same *mogya* or *abusua* cannot marry themselves. This taboo is one of the surviving taboos in modern Akan societies. The twelve charismatic traits of the *ntorɔ* of the Akan with their twelve tutelary deities are: *Bosompra* (Tough/Strong/Firm), *Bosomtwee* (Humane /Empathetic), *Bosompol/Bosomkôteaa* (Proud/Audacious), *Bosomafram* (Liberal/Kind/Empathetic), *Bosommuru* (Respectable/ Distinguished), *Bosomkonsi* (The Virtuous), *Bosomwerôbe* (Eccentric/Jittery), *Bosomayensu* (Truculent), *Bosomsika* (Fastidious), *Bosomkrete* (Chivalrous), *Bosomakim* (Fanatic), *Bosomafi* (Chaste). See also in chapter four. The *Bosommuruntorɔ* is the name of the golden sword held by the Asante king to swear allegiance to the kingdom. It is believed to be the most important of all the *ntorɔ* divisions. In 2002, the late and former United Nations Secretary, Kofi Annan, was conferred with the title of *Bosommu* by Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Supreme King of the Asante kingdom in Ghana, for his distinguished humanitarian service.
people place more importance on the *abusua* group membership than the *ntorɔ*. One reason is the fact that Akan citizenship is by the *abusua*, not *ntorɔ*. Rattray understood the *abusua* differently from the *ntorɔ*, in the sense that it determines the whole succession of property (1923: 37). The idea is conveyed in the proverb, Ṣaba se ẹse nanso ẹdan ne na *abusua*, meaning “A child may look like the father, nevertheless he is dependent upon the mother’s *abusua*.” The male *ntorɔ* is only protective and psychological. The *ntorɔ* of the male child is inherited or transferable at death to the man’s next of kin, mostly the nephew. In contrast, ḋкра and *sunsum* are not transferable. The *ntorɔ* of the female returns to its source (i.e. the river god) at death. How does the tutelary concept of the *ntorɔ* affect gender roles among the Akan?

Akan people consider the essence of the deities to be masculine. This masculine character is the reason why only males are capable of transmitting *ntorɔ*. Ephirim-Donkor sees the masculine essence of the deities to be essentially the attributes retained in terms of the activity of the child in life (2016: 83). He thinks the father is a representative of the *abosom* whose *sunsum* he draws upon to protect his offspring (2016: 82-83). Rattray called the *ntorɔ* the male totemic spirit from a father to his offspring. He also added: “Like all supernatural elements it is powerful” (1956: 8). The *ntorɔ* is powerful because it is part of the essential qualities of the deities whose essence are *sunsum*.

### 8.3.2. The Difference between Ntorɔ and Sunsum

Too often, many people tend to confuse *ntorɔ* with *sunsum*, as if the two were synonymous terms. Rattray wrote that *ntorɔ* “appears to be used at times synonymously with *sunsum*” (1923: 46). The reason for this assumption, in my opinion, might have been the idea that both *ntorɔ* and *sunsum* are derived indirectly from the father. Such confusion is bound to occur, especially when one observes the characteristics of the *ntorɔ* and *sunsum* as personality traits. However, the two are not synonymous, even if they are relative in some respect. In my previous discussion with Busia in chapter four, some of the similarities were analyzed.

---

16 *Sunsum* is not transferable as underlined in my conception. It ceases its operation upon the death of the individual. However, *sunsum* cannot be destroyed. In cases where a child is named after an ancestor, the *sunsum* of that ancestor can come upon the child whereupon the child may exhibit similar character or charismatic traits of that ancestor. This happens because the naming ceremony takes place on the eighth day after the birth of the child when he is still under the protection of the father’s *sunsum*. It is believed that a child masters his own *sunsum* when he has come of age. Here, we have every reason to understand why the operation of *sunsum* is spiritual. Besides this, *sunsum* is not inherited in the same manner as the *ntorɔ* is inherited.
The distinction drawn by Busia follows that “ntorɔ is the generic term of which sunsum is a specific instance” (1954: 197). What does Busia mean by the term “generic?” Does it mean the general kind of common class of species from which emerge other specific characters? Or could it be related to the concept of the abusua where several kinsmen are connected in a natural affinity? More plausibility supports the latter since Busia concluded: “A man’s sunsum is a child of his Ntorɔ; and all who belong to the same Ntorɔ are believed to have similar sunsum. Hence, it can be rightly said that a man transmits his ntorɔ to his children” (1964: 198). The analogy used here is directly pointing to the traditional concept of a father-child relationship; in conclusion, sunsum is the result of the ntorɔ (ɔbosom).

Now, we have a puzzle to solve. There is an identification of the ntorɔ with the sunsum, which shares a measure of ontological relationality with it. To accept that relationship is to admit also that sunsum is the spiritual essence of the ntorɔ (ɔbosom), incarnated in its spiritual dispositions as ego, personality, and distinctive character of an individual in life. The experience of the individual in the world is a direct reflection of the mysteries of the spiritual bond that exists between the father’s family and the pantheon deities. Busia accepted this view: he talked of sunsum as the personal power or cast of countenance from the father (1954: 197). Akan ritualty, indeed, recognizes and affirms these mysteries in diverse religious ceremonies, which in effect become the source of profound practices that the skeptic or the foreigner may see as mere superstition. An example is the ritual of ntorɔ washing, which is a ceremonial bathing in the ntorɔ river or in a basin with water fetched from the river in case the ceremony takes place indoors.17

Given the above explanation of the relationship between ntorɔ and sunsum, we have little doubt to question how the father imparts his sunsum to his offspring. We have one more question left to answer: how does one differentiate the nature of the ntorɔ from that of the sunsum?

17 Some of the rituals include the washing days, i.e., special days reserved for the ntorɔ group. These days are set aside for the pacification of the individual. In most cases, if a person wants to know the ntorɔ to which you belong, the person may ask you, “Wo guare ntorɔ ben;” literally, “Which ntorɔ group do you wash or bath (belong)).” The idea of washing infers to the ceremony of washing during these ceremonial days of the ntorɔ. Rattray observed one of these ceremonies in the following words, “Every Tuesday the King of Ashanti ‘washed’ in his own palace while all the chiefs and populace went to the Suben River. Here the people of lesser importance entered the water and bathed, while for those of more importance water was drawn in brass pans and taken up on the banks. Some water was also drawn from the special spot called kwasu and put in a gold kuduo (called akra yawa, souls’ basin), and this was brought back to the palace and placed in a room known as Bosommurudan (Bosommuru room), sometimes called Akrafieso (Souls’ House) …The ordinary person does not wash every week when his ntorɔ day comes round, but when his abosom (god) tells him that he should, and when, as my informant said, ‘it is thought necessary’” (Rattray 1923: 52, 53).
Scholars of Akan religion have accepted *ntorɔ* as the semen which a man transmits to a woman during sexual intercourse. In *Ashanti*, Captain Rattray writes, “the semen is actually sometimes called *ntoro*” (1923: 37). He repeated this statement, writing that “the male-transmitted *ntoro* (spirit) seems sometimes used in the sense of semen” (1923: 78). Parrinder calls the *ntorɔ* a seminal soul (1951: 20, 58). Some Akan informants in Wasa-Amanfi in the Western region of Ghana told Meyerowitz that *ntorɔ* is related to *wo ho nsu*, ‘the water of yourself,’ i.e. semen (1951: 28). Gyekye came to a similar conclusion, seeing *ntorɔ* as “sperm-transmitted characteristic” by relating it to genetic factors responsible for inherited characteristics (1987: 94). Other scholars agree (Wiredu 1990: 244; Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 82).

The idea of *ntorɔ* as a tutelary spirit stems from its watery nature. Rattray states: “the *ntoro* element in man seems to be often connected with water or liquid, such as saliva, in some form, and from it to have derived its origin” (1923: 53, 54). He further added that “water has a divine origin – it comes from Onyame, the greatest of Gods – the Sky God” (1923: 54). As Akan people associate water with the pantheon deities, so it follows that *ntorɔ* (ɔbosom) is nothing but the semen. Meyerowitz surmised everything in the following words: “Just as a male river fertilizes the female land, so the husband causes his wife to conceive, and therefore river water and semen became equated. The husband has to mould his character after the river sacred to his *ntorɔ*, and he has to adopt the characteristics which the river (or lake) is believed to possess” (1951: 291).

The conclusion we reach from the above analysis is that the semen is the material form of the *ntorɔ* (ɔbosom), from which emanates the *sunsum*, the immaterial form. This conclusion answers the question of the spiritual origins of the *sunsum*, and it explains why the father’s *ntorɔ* is so powerful. The traditional Akan, through their religious expressions, have known the secrets of biological mysteries of life of which today’s advanced science appear to confirm.

To sum up, we have seen that Akan people will not say a man transmits his *sunsum*, but rather that he transmits his *ntorɔ* to his offspring. In this sense, we understand *sunsum* to have its mysterious mode of passage from the father to the child, which from my analysis is associated with the *ntorɔ*.

---

18 The Akan Twi word *ntorɔ* can mean “to lie to someone.” The root *toro* means slippery or slimy. For example, Akan people use the word to describe the slimy nature of okro/okra vegetable. The word is also used to describe a slippery surface. In some instances, the *toro* is used to refer to a sharp object that can no longer cut sharply. For example, *wo be toro sekan no ano*, means “You’ll destroy the cutting edge of the cutlass.” Or, when a charm loses its powerful effect, Akan people will say *aduro no ano atoro*, meaning, “the spell has lost its effectiveness.” It is not a coincidence that semen is associated with *ntorɔ* because of its slimy or slippery nature.
the Ḗbosom (spirit) incarnate, or literally the semen. Minkus was convinced that “the father’s transmission of his sunsum [is] by means of the semen” (1980: 186). Sunsum, therefore, is the force, energy, or the emanating spiritual power that accompanies the ntorɔ. Here, it becomes logical to infer once again that if ntorɔ does not follow the deceased to Asamando, as already established, then the sunsum does not either, since the former is the source of the latter. For any theologization of sunsum to be meaningful, the essential power of sunsum cannot be detached from its source, herein seen as the pantheon deities. This is the reason why my conclusions favor the claim made by Busia that all who belong to the same ntorɔ are believed to have a similar sunsum.

8.4. The Relationship between Sunsum and Suman (charm)

Suman is an Akan term often translated in English as a “charm.” Most English dictionaries define charm as any inspirted object kept or worn to ward off evil and bring good luck. Synonymous words include amulets, talismans, and mascots. Rattray translated sunan as fetish, an English term erstwhile missionaries regularly used in describing Akan religion (Rattray 1923: 90, 91; 1959: 9-24). Recent research into Akan traditional religion has assessed the term “fetish” as inappropriate when describing Akan religion (Idowu 1973; Asare Opoku 1978; Ephirim-Donkor 2016). However, Rattray’s usage of the term sunan is accurate.

According to Rattray, sunan “is an object which is the potential-dwelling place of spirit or spirits of an inferior status...closely associated with the control of the powers of evil or black magic, for personal ends, but not necessarily to assist the owner to work evil since it is used as much for defensive as for offensive purposes” (Rattray 1959: 23). Both Dickson and Danquah came to a similar conclusion, viewing sunan as a repository object of power worn on the body for protection and as a mascot for luck (Danquah 1944: x, 7).

Danquah and others had little to say about this aspect of Akan superstition, when compared to what Rattray, Minkus, and Gyekeye wrote about it. Minkus was right to follow her academic predecessors in viewing sunan as something you hold, giving the idea of “a material object such as a pot, leather pouch, beads, broom, headband, etc. which may be worn on the person or put in the user’s house or, in the case of a bad sunan in the victim’s house” (1981: 188). Asuman (pl) are inspirted objects believed to contain some form of power. Inspirted objects are not in themselves distinct spiritual but votary objects of spiritual beings. In other words, we can adequately characterize asuman as channels of spiritual forces emanating from spiritual agents. There is a
legend that says human beings learned the preparation of *suman* from dwarfs who are said to possess magical powers (Rattray 1923: 23; Minkus 1981: 188).

There is one important question which we must now consider, and which concerns the use of idols to represent the *ɔbosom* in shrines. Should we consider the idols as *suman*? As pointed above, early colonial writers mistakenly classified the *ɔbosom* as fetish, and their priests “fetish priests.” The implication demonized the Akan religion as without any divine revelation. Although Rattray dealt with that erroneous interpretation, its consequences remain in the memory of some Akan who perceive the *ɔbosom* as *suman* and often confuse *ɔbosom* with the idols. However, the *ɔbosom* is a spirit that the Akan experience through idols. The carved objects are never called *asuman* by the Akan. Rattray treats this subject with great caution and precision. In general, Rattray makes the following distinctions between *ɔbosom* and *suman* (1959: 22-23):

1. An *ɔbosom* (shrine of a god) is carried and has its own *ɔkomfoɔ* (priest) who gives oracular utterances. *Suman* have not their *ɔkomfoɔ*, though an *ɔkomfoɔ* may have *suman* of his own.
2. *Suman* may form a part of an *ɔbosom*, but the two are themselves distinct.
3. The main power of the *ɔbosom* comes directly or indirectly from Nyame, the Supreme God, whereas the power in *suman* may come from *sunsum* of plants or trees, and sometimes – directly or indirectly – from fairies, forest monsters, witches, etc.
4. An *ɔbosom* is the god of the many, the family, the clan, or the nation. *Suman* is personal and helps its owner personally.

The differentiation given by Rattray implies that *ɔbosom* and *suman* are not synonymous. Even though Rattray asserts that *suman* may form a part of the *ɔbosom*, the two are not identical. The distinction between them, in my view, is more about their nature rather than in the actual exercise of their power. Gyekye sees the opposite (1987: 74). I will reaffirm further that *ɔbosom* is a spiritual agent, but *suman* is not. Dickson underlined that *asuman* derive their power from the *ɔbosom* (Danquah 1944: x). The superiority of the *ɔbosom* permits the extension of their powers to other elements for mystical activities such as protection and luck for people. *Suman*, on the other hand, is man-made, not a shrine, and derives its source of power from the combined forces (*sunsum*) of nature and spirits of its materials. This is the reason why a traditional priest once told Rattray that Ta Kora, the great *ɔbosom*, needs no help from ordinary *suman* (1923: 182).
It is not a taboo to put on suman among Akan people. So, the one who wears a suman cannot be prejudiced as seeking to harm others, unless in the cases of people with a bad suman (adubɔne) which they normally cast on the path, house, farm or the immediate environs of their victims. However, this latter use of suman seems to be a misuse of its original intent. As Rattray pointed out, suman is for defensive purposes rather than for attacks.

Akan kingship has an office, called Nsumankwaa division, comprising individuals who are in charge of spiritual medicines used for protecting the king. The Nsumankwaahene (the chief of the Nsumankwaa) is in charge of the royal physicians, and he is the chief spiritualist who sits on the left side of the king, forming part of the left wing of the throne.19 His position on the left side of the king is strategic. The position makes him a point of contact before anyone shakes hands with the king, as Akan people shake hands from right to left. The Nsumankwaahene will avert any spiritual attack intended to harm the king. He ensures the protection of the king in all public functions and takes care of his traditional medicines; he is also the custodian of the asuman in the Nsumanfieso (room for keeping the asuman). We can observe how much of sunsum surround the kingship. The idea of suman shows how traditional medicinal experts can manipulate the sunsum of natural objects to their advantage.

There is one significant aspect that needs to be mentioned as it is crucial to understanding the relationship between suman and sunsum, that is, the Golden Stool, the shrine of the sunsum of the Asantes. As explained in previous chapters, the Golden Stool descended from the sky under the auspice of the great traditional priest Ɔkomfo Anɔkye. It is believed to represent the unity and authority of the Asante nation. Anɔkye assured the Asantes of the potency of the Stool to bestow prosperity and to ward off adversity. The fact that the Golden Stool contains the sunsum of Asantes does not make it a suman. That characterization may render it man-made and of little significance. The degree of its intrinsic sunsum makes it supernatural, enabling it to exercise a wide scope of protection over all the Asantes.

19 The political administration of Akan kingship functions like a military regiment because it was originally created for warfare. The divisions include Gyasehene (leader of interior affairs), Adontenhene (Chief commander of the whole army), Twafohene (leader of the advance guard), Benkumhene (leader of the left division), Nifahene (leader of the right division), Kyidomhene (leader of the rear-party division), and Ankobeahene (leader of the body-guard of the Chief) (Rattray 1929: 90). These regimental divisions form the order of seating in all public functions.
The Stool forms the basis of the political unification of the Asante kingdom. Some aspects of the Stool are anthropological; for example, it bears a name following the pattern of Akan “day names.” The Asantes call it *Sika Dwa Kofi*, “The Golden Stool born on Friday” (Kyerematen 1969). To maintain its potency, it receives sacrifices and food offerings after the manner of rituals performed for the *akra* of an individual. Kyerematen notes that there are several *asuman* added to the Golden Stool by the Asante kings. Therefore, we can deduce that *suman* is a wearable object and cannot be identified with the *Sika Dwa Kofi*, which is the shrine of the whole nation.

We may thus conclude that the power of *suman* is derived from the *sunsum* of spiritual entities, which by their essential qualities as spirit-beings extend their potency in material objects to protect beneficiaries in the physical world. *Suman* is another expression of Akan beliefs in the supernatural. In contrast to *akɔm*, where a spiritual deity selects his own agent, *suman* is a general commodity: people benefit from its economy. Whoever wears *suman* believes it can fetch greater luck and protection. This raises the question of how much or which degree of *sunsum* a person needs for protection. Whether a person has a strong or weak *sunsum*, the rationale behind *suman* is a power greater than oneself. The owner of *suman* may be aware or oblivious of its source of power, especially those bought from the marketplace. The spiritual ingredients of *suman* will exert its power as long as its taboos are observed. Minkus found out that not all *suman* might require periodic rituals to keep them. Only few of them may require ritual ceremonies (1981: 188).

As long as a *suman* is properly handled, there is no limit in the execution of its power. On the contrary, a violation of its taboos, or contact with what is inimical, may render a *suman* ineffective, making its activating *sunsum* impotent and exposing the person to attacks (Minkus 1981: 188). Akan people usually say *Aduro n’ano atoro* – “the charm has lost its potency.” A *suman* losing the potency of its *sunsum* is equivalent to a human being who loses his or her life when the *sunsum* is knocked about. It follows that every inspired object is bound to lose its *sunsum* or its power when desecrated by inimical practices, unless the necessary ritual is performed, and in this case the *suman* is no exception. *Sunsum*, defined in this present study as an emanating spiritual force, is indestructible. Although certain taboos may render it weak, or a more powerful *sunsum* may overcome it, only a disconnect with its primary possessor (being a human being or an object) will occur. *Sunsum* will always return to its source. This concept is an underlining principle in Akan cosmology.
8.5. Conclusion

Akan anthropology describes the human being as consisting of both material and immaterial elements. The material is the *nipadua* (body) and it is the subject of perceptible experience by the whole human being. The *nipadua* is physical, sensible, and suffers death and corruption. There are other social biogenetics that form the *nipadua*, namely *mogya* (blood) from the mother, and *ntorɔ* (semen) received from the father during sexual intercourse. The *mogya* forms the basis of the child’s ancestry. It is “a physiological bond to one’s mother and an independent membership into her clan (*abusua*), or maternal lineage” (Helen 2009: 51). The male *ntorɔ*, on the other hand, gives the child character resemblance of the father and the principle of affiliation to the father’s family, which also comes with so much goodwill from members of the father’s lineage. Many Akan people accept the *ntorɔ* to be a tutelary spirit. The two biogenetics, *mogya* and *ntorɔ*, are physical and are responsible for the social affiliation of the child.

The immaterial aspects of the human being are *ɔkra* (life force) and *sunsum*. The *ɔkra* is not synonymous with *sunsum*. *ɔkra* is the life principle. It is divine, has antemundane existence with God, is bearer of destiny, and survives death. The *sunsum*, in my interpretation, is an emanating spiritual force that is responsible for spirituality, i.e. the essential qualities for personality formation, and the principle upon which depend many ventures of wellness in life. *Sunsum* underlies Akan cosmology, serving to describe realities in the spiritual realms.

It is from this background that arose the need for a contextual pneumatology based on *sunsum*. Nonetheless, is *sunsum* the be-all and end-all for the formulation of an Akan pneumatology? Might there be other ways to speak of pneumatology in Akan theology other than *sunsum*? Regarding other ways of speaking of pneumatology in Akan religion, my inquiry proposes to articulate a theological framework for an Akan contextual pneumatology that takes into consideration another term for the spirit, namely *honhom*, as the basis for Akan pneumatology. The purpose is to create a conceptual balance between spiritual forces and the nature of spirit-beings in Akan pneumatology, and for the theological development of a contextual Christian pneumatology, which is the prime focus of the next part of the thesis.
PART FOUR
THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSE ON SUNSUM AND A PROPOSAL TOWARDS A NEW CONTEXTUAL AKAN PNEUMATOLOGY

GYE NYAME
“Except God”
Adinkra symbol of Akan theology signifying the supremacy of God
Chapter 9

Sunsum Pneumatology

“God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is not only a power by which God once upon a time intervened in past worlds and made Godself knowable. God’s Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is also the power and the force by which God intervenes in constantly new ways in the present world and makes Godself knowable to people living in the present and in the future.” ¹ – Michael Welker

9.1. Introduction

The current contextual Akan Christian pneumatology is the work of the Ghanaian theologian Robert Owusu Agyarko. So far, he is the pioneer scholar to contribute a systematic contextualization of the Holy Spirit to Akan studies and research. His background as a Pentecostal, combined with theological scholarship, has made him a passionate and valuable contributor to pneumatological discourses in Africa. He has researched several dimensions of Akan pneumatology, ranging from ecological theology to Christological pneumatology.

Agyarko’s contribution to African pneumatology is a theological reflection on Akan religious ideas. The value of his works, in fact, lies in his positive attitude towards traditional Akan religion and his hermeneutical approach, which is an inculturation methodology, towards the construction of a contextual Christian pneumatology. Agyarko uses Akan religion as a raw material for theological reflection, something from which early missionaries and subsequent theologians have shied away. The late Kwame Bediako championed the need to treat Africa's pre-Christian religion as a hermeneutical principle for Africa's contextual theology to define an African Christian identity.

Bediako thought there are revelations in African traditional religions that speak profoundly of African identity, and therefore he urged African theologians to retrieve them to deal with the question of identity on the continent. The thrust of Bediako’s proposal leads to the creation of a distinctive Christian identity that will depend largely on the right of Africans to own and maintain their identity against any Eurocentric assimilation (Bediako 1992, 1995). Agyarko’s attempt to develop a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology reflects these methodological

insights to recast Africa’s implicit pneumatology into a coherent theological discourse for Christian faith, practice, and learning.

In the next sections, I will review Agyarko’s contextual pneumatology as it is necessary to ensure a better understanding of his Akan pneumatological construction. The appraisal begins by looking at the basis of his contextual understanding of pneumatology. This will comprise the definition and nature of spirits and the spiritual in Akan cosmology, and further, an analysis of his methodology for the construction of a contextual Christian pneumatology for Akan people.

9.2. Sunsum as Onyame Sunsum

The basis of Agyarko’s pneumatology is the Akan concept of sunsum. In the introduction of his paper, “‘Sunsum’ The Spirit of Life: Pneumatology in the Akan West Africa Context,” he writes: “The Akan notion of sunsum may form the basis for contextual pneumatology” which intends to “enable one to speak of the Holy Spirit and its relation both to God and to nature” (Agyarko 2014: 1). Thus, Agyarko takes a positive approach towards Akan religion, and dares to claim that biblical pneumatology can have a contextual reinterpretation to suit the context.

Agyarko treats sunsum as the essence of natural objects which enables the being or object to exercise power and to function in its characteristic manner. To Agyarko, sunsum, “so necessary to existence, is not conceived as an indwelling spirit foreign to the object in which it resides. Rather, sunsum is the very essence of the object; it is its intrinsic activating principle” (Agyarko 2014: 7). Agyarko’s understanding of sunsum as the principle of an intrinsic activation resembles that of Gyekye, who defines the principle of activation as an active force that causes natural objects to exercise activity. Or, as Gyekye puts it, “activity is a property intrinsic to matter, that is, natural objects; it is the essence of natural objects to be active, to possess power” (1987: 75). Thus, to the Akan, natural objects are not just material or inert. They are, rather, inspired. This conception of inspired objects leads Gyekye to characterize the Akan worldview with panpsychism, i.e. everything, being animate or inanimate, is conscious. Unlike Gyekye, Agyarko prefers to describe the Akan worldview with panentheism, i.e., the immanence of God in all-things or what he terms as “a conscious vitality” (Agyarko 2013: 10).

The idea of a panentheistic cosmology is central to Agyarko’s spiritual conception of Akan realities. He categorizes his spiritual understanding into three main aspects: “the Sunsum of Onyame, the sunsum of human beings, and sunsum of non-human nature” (2014: 7). The Sunsum of Onyame (spelled with a capital “s”) or the Spirit of God, is the ultimate source of all
Thus, the Sunsum of Onyame is divine, whereas that of humans and non-human forms embodies sparks of the divine. The distinction Agyarko makes captures Akan’s cosmic perspective and realism of the pervasiveness and interpenetration of sunsum which “expresses how the ‘one’ (Onyame) and the ‘many’ (nature including human beings) are related” (2014: 7). All these justify his conception of sunsum as panentheistic, and further designate the Sunsum of Onyame as distinct yet inseparable from Onyame, an eternal and absolute Being manifesting its nature in individual creatures (Agyarko 2012, 2014). Thus, sunsum becomes the basis of the relationship between creation and the Creator because all things belong to God. In that regard, Agyarko emphasizes the distinct nature of sunsum to come to terms with Minkus’ categories of sunsum of the exclusively spiritual (ye sunsum) comprising God, lesser deities, ancestors, spirits, etc. and the inspired (wo sunsum) comprising human beings and non-human objects. Agyarko does not confuse the two categories.

Against this background, one can understand the pneumatological context that shapes Agyarko’s contextual pneumatology. He comes to the following conclusion:

The concept of sunsum therefore enables one to speak of the Holy Spirit and its relation both to God and to nature. This may also enable one to understand the Holy Spirit as cosmic in nature and as divine in being. Sunsum as an anthropological and also as ecological concept will help our understanding of the Sunsum of Onyame. The reason is that the Akan speculate less about the Sunsum of Onyame than about sunsum in human and nonhuman nature. Nonetheless, the Akan usually infer the nature and operations of the Sunsum of Onyame from sunsum found in nature and, more particularly, the sunsum found in a human person (2014: 7, 8).

The Holy Spirit, in Agyarko’s pneumatology, is Sunsum of Onyame, the spark of creation and life that proceeds from God, yet is a distinct being.

9.3. Sunsum in Agyarko’s Anthropology

The established understanding of the divine nature of sunsum as Onyame Sunsum explains why human beings also have sunsum, a notion that describes the spiritual part of every human being. The Sunsum of Onyame is the locus to trace the extent of God’s sovereignty over the entire creation. Thus, sunsum serves as the ultimate conduit through which the omnipotence and omnipresence of God interpenetrate the creation, and for the creation itself to depend on the Sunsum of God. Agyarko’s anthropology seeks to extract from this divine transcendence to

---

2 Sunsum of Onyame is equal to Onyame Sunsum, the well-known expression modern Akan people use to speak of the divine power or Spirit.
establish the fact that human beings are not in isolation from the dynamic nature of Sunsum of Onyame.

Agyarko understands the Akan concept of the human being to consist of two principal entities or substances, namely: spiritual or non-material, and material. The spiritual consists of ɔkra (the soul or bearer of destiny), sunsum (spirit or personality) and ntorɔ (fatherhood), while the material consists of mogya (blood) from the mother. Here, Agyarko does not list the nipadua (body) as a material component of the human being for unspecified reasons. He refers to ɔkra and sunsum as descending directly from God, whereas ntorɔ is derived from the biological father and mogya from the biological mother. In previous analysis, some scholars have identified both ntorɔ and mogya as biogenetic physical elements making their roles more social than spiritual contrary to Agyarko’s conception of the ntorɔ.

I think Agyarko’s grouping of ɔkra, sunsum, and ntorɔ as spiritual is correct although ntorɔ has a physical presence as the semen that a male transmits during sexual intercourse with a female. For the most part, however, the majority of scholars have linked ntorɔ directly to the pantheon deities (Rattray 1927: 154; 1929: 8; Meyerowitz 1951a: 24, 25; Busia 1954: 196-198; Ephirim-Donkor 2016: 82). Agyarko ascertains this fact with a more vivid explanation: “From the myth of the first ntoro ever bestowed upon the Akan the Bosommuru ntoro – it could be deduced that ntoro, though genetically associated with human fatherhood, is a spiritual entity that originated directly from God” (2014: 9).3 Busia thinks all spiritual power derives indirectly from God (Busia 1954: 198, 100).4

As for the meaning of the sunsum, the characteristics given to it, according to Agyarko, are based on his own “reconstruction and adaptation of traditional Akan thinking on how sunsum may be understood” (2014: 8). Why he does that is his attempt “to lay a foundation to help reinterpret the status and position of sunsum as a dynamic equivalent of the Christian concept

---

3 Bosommuru is a compound of Bosom (god) and Muru (name of a river), together meaning the god of the River Muru. The location of the river is disputed. Rattray, for instance, located it in the Akyim area (1923: 47). Meyerowitz identifies Bura or Muru with the god of the great river in Niger, where she thinks the royal Oyoko clan in the Ashanti region first settled. According Meyerowitz, Danquah thought “the Bosommuru River cannot be found on this earth but it is with Adu Gyamfi, god and king of the nether world.” (1951: 30). Danquah’s account traces the river to Bodwesango, a town in the Asante region during Adu Gyamfi’s lifetime. Danquah’s account has been contested by Meyerowitz as an invention (Meyerowitz 1951: 30).

4 By linking ɔkra, sunsum, and ntorɔ directly with God, Agyarko suppresses the role of the Abosom in the conception of children, a fundamental idea in Akan anthropology. Not only that, but he also seems to take a backseat on the role of the Abosom in Akan religious ideas.
of the Holy Spirit” (2014: 8). There are more characteristics of the sunsum given by Agyarko within the scope of Akan anthropology.

9.3.1. The Meaning of Sunsum in Agyarko’s Anthropology

The basic idea of sunsum in Agyarko’s anthropology is a pneumatic character, i.e. spirit or personality. That means one must see it as an intangible element or the spiritual part of each human being (also in all forms of life). As a personality, it accounts for the character disposition and intelligence of the individual (2014: 8). A person’s individuality is thus established by sunsum, his spiritual disposition. In spite of this, there are variations to this spiritual disposition due to the dynamic nature of sunsum. Agyarko writes: “Sunsum is subject to change, for it is capable of being trained from the state of being ‘light’ (ne sunsum ye hare) to a heavier weight (ne sunsum ye duru: literally, his sunsum is heavy)” (2014: 8). The vice versa is also true as the majority of Akan will say, Ne sunsum so ate, literally, “He is low-spirited.”

There are other characteristics of sunsum that Agyarko affirms, including the nightly peregrination of a person’s sunsum during sleep. Agyarko remarks that the sunsum can take leave of the body while a person is asleep and may not return for some time (2014: 8). It can also be knocked about by evil forces; this happens because the sunsum is the vulnerable part of the human being that is subject to attacks of witchcraft. The pneumatic emphasis of sunsum enables it to survive death. Agyarko agrees with the fact that the final departure of sunsum signifies the death of the person. However, he thinks sunsum does not perish with the dead person, but returns to Onyame (God), its source (2014: 8). I think this latter account is Agyarko’s own reconstruction (if not a Christianized account of Akan realities) and is contestable against the positions of the majority of Akan scholars who unanimously do not relate the departure of sunsum with God.

In summary, Agyarko sees the interrelatedness of ḋкра, sunsum and ntorɔ as inseparable, although each represents a distinct vital force in the human being. They work in harmony and there is no subordination between them. Such non-subordination is expressed in the fact that the “permanent absence of any one of these connotes the death of a person. To the Akan, one is a human being only when one possesses all these three components together with moyga” (Agyarko 2014: 9). The overall study of sunsum by Agyarko leads to the conclusion that unlike ḋкра and ntorɔ, which are identical to human beings, all individual creatures possess sunsum – this makes sunsum a cosmic reality. The cosmic reality of the eternal sunsum and the creation
“suggests not juxtaposition but interpenetration;” this makes “nature as necessarily open to the dimensions of transcendence” (Agyarko 2014: 9).

With this conclusion, Agyarko offers a new pneumatological proposal for African churches and theological schools, herein identified as contextual Akan Christian pneumatology based on sunsum. The identification of sunsum with the essence of God and as the basis of Akan spirituality leads Agyarko to theologize the Holy Spirit as Onyame Sunsum. The question we need to consider is: how does Agyarko arrive at this conclusion? I propose in subsequent sections a review of his methodology for the construction of contextual Akan Christian pneumatology based on sunsum.

9.4. Agyarko’s Methodology Towards Sunsum Kronkron Pneumatology

The basis of Agyarko’s methodology is grounded in the Nicene and Chalcedon Creeds; he argues that African Christianity is largely pro-Nicene/Chalcedon. Although Agyarko points out key theologians such as Piet Schoonenberg, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Ellen Flesseman-van Leer, William Robinson, Wolfhart Pannenberg, James Dunn, and others for rejecting the Chalcedon Christology, he is convinced that the Nicene/Chalcedon confessions permit a responsible engagement of theological reflection on Christology and pneumatology for Africa churches. Therefore, Agyarko argues that “the church in African would gain much by standing with Nicene/Chalcedon which is duly represented in the tradition of mainline Christianity rather than an individual Christian Christological and Pneumatological proposals which are in conflict with the ecumenical councils” (2014: 3). He dismisses any personal proposal that may potentially conflict with these dogmatic creeds, which he touts as firmly rooted in scripture, especially the pneumatological affirmation of the Holy Spirit in the Nicene/Chalcedon Creed.

How biblical is the Nicene/Chalcedon affirmation of biblical pneumatology? This is the question that Agyarko grapples with to strengthen his methodology, particularly the explanation of the ambivalent usage of “God as Holy Spirit, and God the Holy Spirit,” which to him “requires a historical account of the Biblical and patristic developments” to set out a “systematic exposition of pneumatological doctrine” (2014: 3). He makes the two approaches compatible and complementary as he employs the Old Testament pneumatology of “‘the Spirit of God’ or ‘the Spirit of the Lord’” to indicate “a distinction-in-identity that will eventually allow the Christian church, after the coming of Christ and the Pentecostal outpouring of ‘Holy Spirit’, to elaborate its doctrinal in a Trinitarian direction” (Agyarko 2014: 3, 4). The other approach
entails the patristic Trinitarian affirmations of the nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Nicene/Chalcedon/Constantinople councils, which also became the basis of Christology and pneumatology in Africa for the early missionaries. Consequently, “the church in West Africa has subsequently remained largely pro-Nicene/Chalcedonian,” which is why Agyarko interrogates, “would it not be more appropriate, if one wants to engage in responsible theological reflection, to set the Nicene/Chalcedon confessional definition of the person of Christ as the appropriate point of reference for a contextualised Pneumatology?” (2014: 3). Agyarko answers with a firm yes since he thinks that the pneumatology of the Nicene/Chalcedon confessions is firmly rooted in the Scripture. Indeed, this conclusion confirms his dogmatic methodology even if it is against the consideration of widely varying contextual, historical, or situational influences of the Hellenistic culture in patristic traditions.

9.4.1. Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed on the Holy Spirit

The strength of Agyarko’s methodology comes from his analysis of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed in 381. The Nicene Creed in 325 “had been content to confess belief in the Holy Spirit by the simple affirmation ‘and in the Holy Spirit’” (Agyarko 2014: 5). The mention of the Holy Spirit in the Creed was more of an affirmation of a fundamental belief without much theological clarity; this is because the doctrine of the Holy Spirit was less of a concern to the Church fathers than the threats of Arianism concerning the incarnation of Christ. The expansion of the Nicene Creed occurred at the Council of Constantinople with the objective and purpose of renewing the Nicene Creed due to the emergence of further heresies in post-Nicene about the personality of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed added “certain phrases functionally equivalent to defining the deity of the third person of the Trinity in the way that Nicaea had done in respect of the second, the Son” (Agyarko 2014: 5). The Creed reads:

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets.5

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed “is clear that ‘the Holy Spirit’ is a Name, or an element in the Triune Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in which baptisms took place (see Matthew 28:19)” (Agyarko 2014: 5). Beyond that is the ontological union between the Spirit and the

5 “and the Son” a later addition by the Western Catholic Church.
Father: τὸ ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, “Who proceeds from the Father.”

The Spirit is identified with the Father and the Son as a personality by the exclusive attributes of “the Lord” and “giver of life.” The assumption can be made that the Spirit is not created but is one in substance with the Father and the Son. The Nicene phrase ὁμοόσιον τῷ Πατρὶ, “of one essence with the Father” is not used in connection with the Holy Spirit, but as Agyarko suggests, “the implication is that the Paraclete also is ‘consubstantial with the Father’” (2014: 5).

This leads to the next assumption, which is the distinctive nature of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. The Spirit is worshiped and glorified in the same way as the Father and the Son. Agyarko writes: “To worship is to regard as divine, and the only proper recipient of worship is the one true God. Here, then, is a further confession of the Holy Spirit's divine being and personal character” (2014: 5). The hypostatic character of the Spirit makes it capable of receiving worship. The character given to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit unites them in one consubstantial reality, in agreement with Athanasius’ Creed: “all three Persons are coeternal together and coequal, so that in all things, as said before, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshiped.” Hence, Agyarko concludes:

Within mainstream (Trinitarian) Christianity the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the Trinity who make up the single substance of God. As such the Holy Spirit is personal, and as part of the Godhead, he is fully God, co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father and Son of God. He is different from the Father and the Son in that he proceeds from the Father (or from the Father and the Son) as described in the Nicene Creed (2014: 6).

From this background, Agyarko contends that “the concept of spirit as person and active force is encountered in many African societies” (2014: 6). In response, he sees the need to articulate a theological reflection that emerges from a (re)-reading of biblical texts, Christian tradition, as well as from the African cultural context as an essential theological task “in order to develop an indigenous African Christian Pneumatology that will directly relate to Christology and Trinity” (2014: 7). Consequently, his constructive Akan pneumatology has sought “to retrieve and reinterpret concepts in African traditional culture from a Christian perspective” to

---

6 The phrase corresponds to the Christological affirmation of the Son in the Nicene Creed: ἐκ τοῦ Πατρὸς γεννηθέντα, meaning “begotten of the Father.”

7 The “consubstantial” theory of the Holy Spirit was first introduced by Gregory Nazianzus in 380 in defense of the divinity of the Spirit. He claimed the Holy Spirit is God though distinct (Orationes theologicae, 31, 10). Tertullian had earlier associated the Spirit with God, even as same as God (Prax. 4.1, 13.6).

8 Athanasius was an outspoken figure in the debate over the person of Christ against the Arians during the council of Nicene in 325.
theologize the Akan notion of the *sunsum* “as a contribution towards ecumenical discourse on pneumatology” (2014: 7).

**9.5. Sunsum as a Christian Theological Concept**

Agyarko argues in favor of *sunsum* as a Christian theological concept since it is the dynamic equivalent of the biblical notion of πνεῦμα, making the concept of *sunsum* not alien to the Judeo-Christian tradition (2014: 10). However, he does not base his argument on how adequate *sunsum* is semantically to articulate biblical pneumatology. Much of his argument is an ecumenical approach based on the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed’s definition of the Holy Spirit.

Agyarko draws much inspiration from the consubstantial notion of the Holy Spirit as God to lay a Trinitarian foundation for contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. His proposal follows that the “creation as the sparks of God’s *sunsum* highlights the activity of God the Holy Spirit (*Onyame Sunsum*) that is inseparable from God the Father (*Onyame Ntoro*) and the Son (*Onyame Okra*) in creation and redemption” (2014: 12). Therefore, “[b]y way of perichoresis (the essential interrelatedness of okra, sunsum, and ntoro) sunsum has a trinitarian character. By joining the three ‘persons’ in creating, everything becomes interwoven with relationship, interdependencies, and webs of inter-communication” (Agyarko 2014: 12). Thus, Agyarko concludes, *sunsum* is “consubstantial” with the Father (*homoousios to Patri*), and hence, the Holy Spirit should be best known among Akan people as Onyame *Sunsum*. With regards to that conclusion, Agyarko indicates that African religious doctrines shed light or meet with Christian doctrines.

In summary, Agyarko is a precursor of contextual Christian pneumatology in postcolonial theology in West Africa. I find his contextual pneumatology genuinely impressive. He studies and theologizes *sunsum* as a pneumatological concept to define Akan ontology and cosmology and, more importantly, for Christian faith and practices. Agyarko argues that the majority of Akan people believe *sunsum* is a vital force, power, spirit, and signifies purity and everlasting. Everything that exists in its natural state possesses *sunsum*, which enables the object to exercise power. Onyame, the Akan God, is *Sunsum* because Onyame is the highest spirit-being. Onyame transcends time, is all powerful, all-pervading, and all-penetrating, making Onyame the source of life who endows all the creation, including human beings, with an activating principle called *sunsum*. There is no life without *sunsum*. Onyame’s *sunsum* permeates the creation and makes Onyame sensible to human beings. From this background, Agyarko uses the concept of *sunsum*
to suggest solidarity in terms of community of the whole creation – both solidarity between
God and nature and solidarity within nature (Agyarko 2014: 12). The communal ontology
results from the unifying force of *sunsum* which is also analogous to the work of the Holy Spirit
in the world. Therefore, the Akan concept of *sunsum* permits a responsible discussion of
contextual Akan pneumatology where the Holy Spirit is known as *Sunsum* of Onyame.

**9.6. Critique of Sunsum Pneumatology**

The present proposal for a new perspective on a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology
cannot proceed without a critique of the *sunsum* pneumatology. First, the ecumenical
methodology and definition of the Holy Spirit are not enough to build contextual Akan
pneumatology for reasons that it ignores latter confessional views about the Holy Spirit. Even
if one takes, for argument’s sake, the ecumenical interpretation as the basis for *sunsum*
pneumatology, such a conclusion can be fraught with difficulty since it contradicts the Akan
notion of life. Throughout this study, I have categorically associated the principle of life with
the ḣкра, which had an antemundane existence with God and the very essence of God that gives
life to the whole creation. Asare Opoku speaks of the ḣкра as the part of Onyame in every
human being and the spiritual link with Onyame, which also makes a person a living entity
(Asare Opoku 1998: 948). The ḣкра is related to home (breath) and is known metaphorically as
honhom among the majority of Akan scholars. An Akan will worship the ḣкра by giving to it
periodic offerings (*kradware*). The ḣкра becomes a ghost “ancestor,” invoked among the living
in diverse religious rites for assistance. My research argues that the nature of the Holy Spirit
corresponds better to ḣкра than *sunsum* – and I will argue in favor of this later. It is appropriate,
therefore, to designate the Holy Spirit as Onyame ‘Kra or Onyame Honhom, denoting “The
‘Kra of God or The breath of God.”’

The Spirit is God’s breath, yet it is distinct; in the same
breath, the ‘kra is the life support of the body but it is distinct from the body. Nonetheless, the
reason why Agyarko and others identify *sunsum* with the Holy Spirit is that they define *sunsum*
as a spirit and rely on its conceptualization as an activating principle. However, from my
previous analysis, majority of Akan scholars believe that *sunsum* is never designated as the
principle of life as in the case of ḣкра.

Second, the nature of the Holy Spirit, as a personality from the ecumenical creed, makes its
work more specific than being a substance in creation. Agyarko seems to sympathize with the

---

9 Agyarko and others have advanced a Christological notion that is based on ḣкра. They perceive Jesus as Onyame
*Krateasefo*, that is, God’s Living Soul. This is another interpretation of Akan Christology. However, I have a
contrary view, but this is not a subject of discussion here.
assumption that the Holy Spirit is a substance in creation in the same manner as sunsum is active or the principle of activation in natural objects. If so, then why does the Creed promise an outpouring of the Spirit? The famous prophecy of Joel 2:28 – concerning the future fellowship of the Spirit with “all flesh” – signifies that the modus operandi of the Spirit is neither ontological relationality nor substantial. In the Old and New Testament, we find specific activities of the Spirit such as alighting, i.e. a foreign spiritual agent descending on an individual. This experience is also true of the Akan religion in which there are instances of spirit alighting, in most cases upon the Ṣekonfo (traditional priest). It suggests that even in the Akan religion, some aspects of spiritual experiences are specific. In the case of Akan mediumistic experience of the traditional priest, it is not the sunsum of the individual that throws the person into a trance status; instead, it is a foreign sunsum agent – the Abosom (pantheon deities) – that is also called ahonhom (spirits) in Akan Twi language. Therefore, the Akan term honhom, a word used to describe spiritual realities and experiences, will provide further insights into Akan spiritual worldview to appropriately redefine a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology to speak of the Spirit as Honhom Kronkron (Holy Spirit).

Third, given the nature of the spirit from biblical pneumatology as חָר and πνεῦμα, one should question whether sunsum can capture the essence of the spirit as wind, breath, or moving air. The basis for the Sunsum Kronkron pneumatology is the fact that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and that the Spirit is consubstantial with the Father and the Son just as a person derives sunsum from the father, or from God according to Agyarko. However, such an approach is theologically inadequate for theologizing the biblical concept of the Spirit since it relegates to the background the overall understanding of the nature of the Spirit. It should be a theological imperative to give serious considerations to the biblical languages, namely, חָר and πνεῦμα, to theologize the Spirit within the Akan Sitz im Leben if theologians really want to make sense of biblical pneumatology. Hence, I intend to propose a contextual pneumatology that fills this gap between biblical pneumatology and Akan pneumatology.

9.7. In Search of a Contextual Akan Christian Pneumatology

Without a doubt, the notion of the “spirit” and “spirits” is central in Akan culture and religion. The beliefs in God, pantheon deities, ancestors, and other spirits are not just abstract concepts, but reality to the Akan. This is also true of many world societies. The question we face here is how Akan pneumatology will help to contribute to current research in contextual theology for the Church in Akan societies. This process has never been simple. There has been a temptation to narrow down contextual Christian theology to the theologization of the context, instead of
theologization of the gospel to the context. Contextualization is theology seeking interaction. It liberates one to contemplate and debate how much of the Bible can interact with the context, and how much the context can contribute without injury to both the Bible and context. This work requires a sound understanding of the Bible and the context of reception.

9.7.1. In Search of Linguistic Expression

Louw-Nida’s dictionary of the Bible discusses the difficulty in finding in some languages an entirely satisfactory term to speak of the Spirit of God. This difficulty stems from how a spirit or spirits are understood in the various local languages. If one is to use “a term which normally identifies local supernatural beings, there is a tendency to read into the term the meaning of evil or mischievous character” (Louw-Nida 1989: 12.18). Such instances often happen in African churches where specific traditional terms continue to suffer repudiation because of their erstwhile connotation. Among the Akan, examples may include Ṣkomfo (traditional priest), Ṣbosom (pantheon deity), etc. The use of these terms in contextual liturgy will amount to syncretism in some Christian quarters. Part of the problem goes as far as the time of the early missionaries who disregarded and demonized African traditional religions. However, I think this should not be so. African traditional religious concepts should have a transformative effect on reinterpretation of traditional ideas, which are also capable of providing perspectives for the reception and adaptation of Christian doctrines. Such an engagement is, in my opinion, not a mixture of traditional religion with Christianity or supposedly syncretism; rather, it is an application of gospel truths.

Taking into account all these complications, finding the right terms to describe what a spirit means in a given context becomes difficult. Louw-Nida observes:

The solutions to the problem of ‘Spirit’ have been varied. In some languages the term for Spirit is essentially equivalent to ‘the unseen one,’ and therefore the Spirit of God is essentially equivalent to ‘the invisibleness of God.’ In a number of languages the closest equivalent for Spirit is ‘breath,’ and in a number of indigenous religious systems, the ‘breath’ is regarded as having a kind of independent existence. In other languages the term for Spirit is equivalent to what is often translated as ‘the soul,’ that is to say, the immaterial part of a person. There is, of course, always the difficulty of employing a term meaning ‘soul’ or ‘life,’ since it often proves to be impersonal and thus provides no basis

---

10 Louw-Nida further says, “If, however, one uses a term which may identify the spirit of a person, the problems may even be greater, since according to many systems of religious belief, the spirit of an individual does not become active until the individual dies. Therefore, the activity of the Spirit of God would presumably suggest that God himself had died. However, if one uses a term which means ‘heart’ or ‘soul’ (and thus the Spirit of God would be literally equivalent to ‘the heart of God’), there may be complications since this aspect of human personality is often regarded as not being able to act on its own” (Louw-Nida 1989: 12.18).
for speaking of the Spirit of God as being a person or a personal manifestation of God.

This apparent difficulty reveals the importance of taking into consideration the theological significance of the medium of language in any contextualization. The scholars of the Septuagint had to face similar semantic and theological problems within the Hellenistic tradition; this does not exclude the Greco-Roman cultural context from which emerged the New Testament Scriptures. In a similar way today, each cultural context should confront the doctrine of the Spirit with respect to linguistic revision and clarity.

In the next sections, I will discuss the various characteristics of the Spirit from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. The categories will reveal various applications of the terms to specific activities of the Spirit. In that instance, how does Akan pneumatology inform our understanding of the concept of the Spirit from the Bible? How do we contextualize Biblical pneumatology for Akan Christians?

9.8. The Bible and the Concept of Spirit

The theology of the Spirit, or simply the Spirit of God, from Scripture, is discussed widely as a theological concept. The Bible, of course, does not give us clues to any debate over the doctrine of the Spirit since Trinitarian theology emerged in the first centuries of Christian theology. Therefore, our quest to find the Spirit in Scripture immediately faces the challenge of “heterogeneity and the pervasiveness of the occasions on which the Spirit appears” (McIntyre 1997: 29). The direction of our thoughts, hence, should look at the trajectory of the references to the Spirit, bearing in mind the different socio-cultural traditions and particularities of the root usage of the terms for the Spirit in both the Jewish and the Greek traditions of the Scriptures.

A cursory reading of pneumatological themes in Scripture will lead to entirely unexpected conclusions due to the lack of apparent application of biblical terms to the Spirit in Scripture. However, as McIntyre suggests, biblical terms are the beginning of thought in that direction (McIntyre 1997: 30). For this reason, it is my purpose to bring out the various trajectories of the Spirit or the notion of “spirit” from the Bible to seek better theological ground for the development of contextual Akan Christian pneumatology.

9.8.1. The Spirit in the Old Testament

The Old Testament pneumatology is rooted in the Hebrew word בְּרֵיס, meaning “wind” and “spirit.” The word appears 389 times (378 Hebrew, 11 Aramaic) in the Old Testament (Kubat 2016: 290). It conveys, in its most fundamental form, the idea of the expulsion of wind or
breath, the idea of air in motion, or the life-breath of the individual (Ferguson 1996: 16, 17). For the time being, we can readily think of the wind as an act of God, “invisible, immensely powerful and sometimes catastrophic in its effects...[It] is also of mysterious origin, transcendent and quite uncircumscribed in its activity” (Bourke 1959: 538). While on some occasions רווח may denote a gentle breeze (Gen. 3:8), Ferguson implies that “the dominant idea in the Old Testament is that of power” and when רווח is used of God, it emphasizes “his overwhelming energy; indeed one might almost speak about the violence of God. ‘Divine Spirit’ thus denotes ‘the energy of life in God’” (Ferguson 1996: 17). These cosmic realities are used symbolically or metaphorically as illustrations of the divine reality of the Spirit (Pierre Miguel 1998: 5, 6).

רווח is translated as “spirit” in English, and it is the basis of several pneumatological themes around the world. Besides its primary usage as “wind” and “spirit,” Kubat says the Old Testament “reveals different uses of the word in different kinds of texts and at different times.” These may involve “conceptual and linguistic contexts” such as “blowing, breath, meaning, reason, will (bearer of will), the personal pronoun ‘I’, and so forth” (2016: 290). The word as a spirit or Spirit “often connotes the power of God, as well as dynamism and activity in general” (Kubat 2016: 291). It may as well refer to the immaterial faculties of the human being (Gen. 45:27; 1 Sam. 30:12) or of God (Ps. 33:6; Is. 11:4; 40:13). רווח designates the power of God or that which proceeds from God in the history of the world (Maldamé 2009: 55; McIntyre 1997: 34).

In a more general sense, there is a theo-anthropological usage of the term רווח, where the relationship between human beings and God is described in a dynamic relationship (Wolff 1974:32, 39; Kubat 2016: 291). Job 27:3: “…as long as my breath is in me, and the רווח of God is in my nostrils.” Job does not only identify his breath with God but also refers to it as a principle of life. The term רווח in this verse emphasizes vitality, the spark of God, and the source of life and energy, as opposed to deadness. The identification of the word with the nostrils recalls the physical dimension of the breath of life in living organisms, contrary to a nonliving object (Gen. 2:7; Jer. 10:14; 51:17). Kubat makes several allusions to support this fact in the Old Testament. He writes, “God gives ‘the breath of life, to everybody (Num. 16:22; 21:16). A human being’s רווח is her spirit’” (2016: 294). He further notes that רווח is the manifest force of movement identical with inhalation and exhalation and that works within and without a person. In a similar sense, Maldamé identifies רווח with נשימה to suggest that the human being is not an inert organism, but he lives “life,” that is to say, he is in the world to interact with his fellows.
and with his creator. Therefore, Maldamé sees the function of רוח as a vital force of communication between the human being and God, and that which alone survives death (Maldamé 2009: 51, 52).

The Spirit is a person’s life force, created by Yahweh “who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the human spirit within” (Zech. 12:1). רוח, from an anthropological perspective, is a sign of life upon which human life is solely dependent (Job 33: 4; Ps. 104:29-30; Ez. 37:6, 8-10,14). This pneumatic ignition from God to the human being establishes the theo-anthropological notion of the operation of רוח, makes us conclude that life is dependent on an impersonal life-force, herein identified as רוח, and affirms that without it, there is no life: “the dust shall return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). The separation is a disembodiment activity. What is earthly goes to the earth, and what is spiritual goes to God (West 2011).

Besides the theo-anthropological aspect of רוח, Kubat identifies an epistemological dimension of the usage of רוח, where it is linked to wisdom and understanding in the Old Testament. The texts in Neh. 9:20, Num. 27:18 and Dan. 5:11 are examples of how רוח is closely related to the power of cognition. In other instances, רוח is the spirit that enlightens and “enables a person to perceive realities that are beyond the scope of normal human thinking;” thus, רוח becomes “a mediation of God’s revelation” to humankind (Kubat 2016: 298). Examples include Joseph and Daniel, who could interpret dreams by the spirit of God (Gen. 41:38; Dan. 5:12). The gift of prophecy is another avenue through which God activates the mind of the prophet to actualize His will or to reveal the intents of human thoughts. Ez. 11:5 reads, “And the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, “Say, Thus says the Lord: So you think, O house of Israel. For I know the things that come into your mind” (ESV), and Micah 3:8 reads, “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (ESV). The charismatic influence of the Spirit renders a human being powerful. “Without the spirit of God, a human being’s spirit is powerless” (Kubat 2016: 299). Other related allusions include the spirit of creativity, wisdom, and understanding (Ex. 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Is 11:2). The Spirit inspires epistemic principles that mirror the divine presence in a person (Wood 1998: 24).

Another dimension of the use of רוח in the Old Testament is noted by Kubat as the metaphysical-cosmological perspective. The phrase the Spirit of God or Spirit of the Lord often occurs in the Old Testament. Here, Kubat makes a distinction between a Stoic understanding of God from the Jewish theological concept of God. While Stoics maintain a pantheistic conception of God
as a pervasive spirit, Jewish traditions see God as present in the world through His spirit (Is. 42:5; Ps. 139:7-10). The biblical traditions present a panentheistic conception of God. Kubat argues that the pervasiveness of the spirit in the Old Testament is implicit rather than explicit. הרוח is an instrument of God in the created world. Kubat writes:

The spirit is a creative force of God that not only created the world also rules it. God creates the world through the spirit: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath [רווח] of his mouth.” (Ps 33:6) This verse reveals that רוח relates to the “word” as a synonym because both come out of the mouth of God. In this scene, the spirit is the mediating force that makes God present (2016: 301).

רווח makes God immanent in creation. God is not identical with creation as understood in stoicism, but His spirit is active in and out of creation. We can also conclude that רוח, in its panentheistic conception, establishes a relationship between the material and immaterial, i.e. the universe is inspirited. The activity of God’s Spirit in the creation reveals God’s regard for the creation and human beings; more importantly, “order and existence come about as a result of Yahweh’s work through the agency of the rûach” (Hildebrandt 2019: 19).

The last usage of רוח, as mentioned by Kubat, is the theological aspect where רוח is identified as a divine hypostasis in the person of the Holy Spirit. Although there are rare appearances of the phrase Holy Spirit in the Old Testament writings, the few appearances indicate strong support for this conception. Ps. 51:10-12 reads:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

روح appears three times in the text as the modus operandi for David’s restoration to God. David suggests a theological dimension of the theo-anthropological aspect of the spirit for the basis of personality formation, that is, a charisma contrary to his present spiritual lethargy. The permanency of the divine hypostasis of the Holy Spirit is emphasized in the text as parallel to the presence of God. Kubat makes this clear:

The Holy Spirit is parallel to the face of God. These phrases suggest that the Holy Spirit establishes a kind of rapport with God and meditates the presence of God. The Holy Spirit is the one who enables a person’s spirit - that is, a human being - to sustain life in communion with God. It is the force of God by which a person is released from sin and enabled to fulfill the will of God. The Holy Spirit is a guarantor of belonging to the community of God (2016: 304).
Kubat further discusses the Holy Spirit by considering the textual variations between the Septuagint (LXX) and Masoretic Text (MT) in Dan. 5:11,12; 6:3. While the MT uses “excellent Spirit” in Dan. 5:12, the LXX uses “Holy Spirit.” The same translation follows for Dan. 6:3. Kubat thinks that the translation “Holy Spirit” is identical with “excellent Spirit” in both the LXX and MT. In this context, the Holy Spirit is seen as a remarkable spirit of God that stands in a special relationship with Daniel (Kubat 2016: 304).

Kubat touches on a more striking text where the Spirit is seen as a mediating hypostasis in Is 63:10-11:

But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore, he became their enemy; he himself fought against them. Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his Holy Spirit?

As Kubat noted in the text, the Spirit, to some extent, is “personified and represented as a hypostasis,” a spiritual agent “who resides in Israel” (Kubat 2016: 305). We know this because of the anthropological sentiments alluded to the Spirit in this context. The theological usage of הָרוּם makes us understand how God permeates the universe through the mediation of His Holy Spirit.

To sum up, the usage of הָרוּם in the Old Testament is multiform and has several meanings. The various dimensions discussed include the theo-anthropological aspect where הָרוּם is identified with the breath of life, i.e., the breath of humankind. Its usage concerning epistemology is identified with wisdom and understanding. הָרוּם has a metaphysical-cosmological dimension in which the mystic presence of the spirit is emphasized. As a mediating hypostasis, הָרוּם is used to justify the theological characterization of the Spirit of God as the Holy Spirit. These literary and theological motifs of Old Testament writers are going to shape the New Testament pneumatology.


The New Testament Bible teaches about the spirit in a variety of contextual meanings; more importantly, the narratives present the spirit as an active participant in the early Christian community. It is normal to readily think of the spirit as the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. However, the idea of spirit entails other conceptions in the New Testament. In this section, I will conduct a careful examination of the nature of the spirit in light of the New Testament and
how some of the characteristics given to the spirit affected early Christian thoughts on pneumatology.

Πνεῦμα is the Greek word for spirit, and it is the root word underlining the neologism pneumatology, i.e. the study of spirits or spiritual phenomena. Its primary meaning is “wind” or “breath.” In Jn. 3:8, Jesus identifies the work of the Spirit (pneumatos) with the wind (πνεῦμα). He does not seem to assume that the Spirit is identical with the wind; neither are both analogous. The only assumption we can deduce is that the Spirit is an invisible object or entity that manifests its presence like the wind. Few examples include the Spirit that comes upon Mary (Matt. 1:20; Lk. 1:35). It is invisible although it has a decisive impact on her existence and life, which also explains the unique status of the Son (Marguerat 2013: 144). Jesus is driven to the desert by the Spirit (Lk. 4:1). The Spirit speaks to, with, and through people while remaining invisible (Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2; 21:4; 28:25) (Karakolis 2013: 90). Concretely, however, πνεῦμα is used to denote the movement of the wind or air (Heb. 1:7). It is also used to parallel the breath of life in a person’s nostrils (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 11:11). Πνεῦμα is the category that is opposite of the flesh (Clark-Soles 2007: 35).

Another link between the wind and the Spirit is the metaphorical description of the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Luke’s narrative describes the theophanic coming of the Spirit “as of a rushing mighty wind” (2:2). He does not use the term πνεῦμα in this context but another synonymous Greek term, πνοής, which means both breath and wind. The use of the metaphor is Luke’s manner of differentiating between the actual Spirit and the phenomena that declare or symbolize its presence (Karakolis 2013: 90). Similar descriptions of the apparition of the Spirit are mentioned on two occasions in the Gospels. First, both Mathew and Luke record the Spirit descending on Jesus “in bodily form like a dove” (Matt. 3:16; Lk. 3:22 cf. Jn. 1:32). The second occasion occurred on Pentecost when tongues like flames of fire descended upon the heads of the disciples (Acts 2: 3). These visible manifestations are described in metaphors and therefore should not be understood as the actual essence of the Spirit. The nature of the Spirit remains invisible like the wind or air even when it is said the disciples were all filled with the

---

11 For many years Christian theologians thought of pneumatology as the study of the Holy Spirit. Recent scholarship, however, seems to challenge that notion as pneumatology also expresses the notion of spirit and spirits in other faith and belief systems. For that matter, one does not need to limit the study of pneumatology to only the Holy Spirit. For further details read Kärkkäinen & Co. (2013).

12 Jesus conveys the idea of the wind to let Nicodemus understand the supernatural movement of the Spirit, and its power to regenerate newness of life in a person without the person necessarily going through a biological recycle of birth. The analogy of wind and birth are more akin to the process of life that makes the Spirit an enlivening entity.
Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4) like “the air or wind, which can be inhaled and fill the interior of a person in an invisible way” (Karakolis 2013: 90). The semantic notion of wind underlining the idea of spirit is quite substantive, and it provides the basis for grasping the essence of πνεῦμα in the New Testament. The Spirit, as in the wind, “is powerful, it can be felt, and it has an impact upon people’s lives and their way of thinking and acting. On the other hand, it normally cannot be seen but only sensed” (Karakolis 2013: 90).

There is the anthropological dimension where πνεῦμα is seen as the vital principle in the human being. According to Matthew, Jesus yielded up His spirit to signify his final breath or death (27:50). Πνεῦμα is identical with life in human beings, and without it the body is dead (Lk. 8:55; 23:46; Jn. 6:63; 19:30; Acts 7:59; Ja. 2:28). It is used to define the rational and emotional aspect of mankind as opposed to the body (Matt. 26:41; Mk. 14:38; Rom. 8:10; 1 Cor. 2:11; 5:5; 6:17, 20; 7:34; 2 Cor. 7:1; Col. 2:5; 1 Pet. 4:6). The apostle Paul differentiates πνεῦμα from the body and soul (1 Thess. 5:23). The spirit of the human being is a substance rather than an indwelling spirit foreign to the body; it defines the essence of being. “Τὸ πνεῦμα is the rational part of man, the power of perceiving and grasping divine and eternal things, and upon which the Spirit of God exerts its influence” (Mk. 2:8; 8:12; Lk. 1:47; Acts 17:16; Rom. 1:9; 8:16; 1 Cor. 5:4; 16:18; 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:13; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Philem. 1:25; 2 Tim. 4:22). According to the Gospel of Luke, John the Baptist is presented as acting in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk. 1:17). The joy of Mary is presented as a rejoicing of her spirit (Lk. 1:47). John the Baptist’s spirit is presented as being strengthened while he was growing (Lk. 1:80) (Karakolis 2013: 90).

Πνεῦμα is again used to describe an entitative spiritual being, often as a generic term for a spirit. In this context, we are talking about the qualities of a being that is essentially spiritual, “a simple essence, devoid of all or at least all grosser matter, and possessed of the power of knowing, desiring, deciding, and acting” (Thayer 1889: 520). For example, God is πνεῦμα (Jn. 4:24) means that God is essentially spiritual. This definition means He is not subject to material constraints or the confines of what could be considered as physical. Spirits may have anthropomorphic descriptions, but such depictions are only perceptions that belong to human beings. Such anthropomorphism exists as far as spirits are conceived in the memory of human beings, which also tends to evoke a belief in spirits that are higher than human beings but

---

inferior to God. Examples include angels, ghosts, and demons (Matt. 8:16; Mk. 9:20; Lk. 4:33; 11:26; 24:37,39; Heb. 1:14).

Another area of interest concerning the use of πνεῦμα in the New Testament is the πνεῦμα ἅγιον, or “Holy Spirit.” The phrase appears about eighty-nine times in the Greek New Testament Bible. Similar names and motifs include πνεῦμα θεοῦ (Rom. 8:9, 14), πνεῦμα τοῦ ἅγιου τοῦ θεοῦ (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 4: 8), πνεῦμα τοῦ κυρίου (i.e., of God Lk. 4:18), πνεῦμα τοῦ κυρίου (i.e. of Christ 2 Cor. 3:17,18). There are Christological categories of the Holy Spirit to point out: in the incarnation (Lk. 1:35; Matt. 1:18-20), during the baptism of Christ (Matt. 3:16), Jesus being led by the Spirit (Matt. 4:1), Jesus’ messianic announcement of his ministry (Lk. 4:18), and the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ who resurrected him (Rom. 8:9, 11). We can also emphasize its soteriological dimension in the salvation of believers (Eph. 1:13; 4:30). Salvation is materialized in the heart and life of the believer through the mediation of the Holy Spirit.

It is theologically noteworthy and semantically revealing to see the nature of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament narratives as an active divine personality (hypostatic) that is “with” and “within” believers rather than an impersonal force. In his commentary on Jn. 14:16, Andreas Dettwiler perceives the abiding presence of the Spirit among the community of disciples as the most basic goal. He writes: “The fact that this presence is “forever” (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) indicates the qualitative gap between the time of the earthly Jesus and the time qualified by the Spirit-Paraclete, a presence unlimited in time or space” (Dettwiler 2016: 157, 158). Similarly, Zumstein underlines the omnipresent activity of the Spirit as everywhere and for everyone (Zumstein 2007: 73).14 The presence of the Spirit makes Jesus “simultaneously enter in full authenticity into environments that are far removed from each other, and foreign to each other, in time and space” (Welker 1994: 224).

Fotopoulos describes the presence of the Spirit as an active agent within Christians: “the Spirit acting; the Spirit in action; or the Spirit energizing believers to act in various ways” (Fotopoulos 2016: 181). He refers to Paul’s usage of action words to express “the on-going action of the Spirit, as well as the Spirit-inspired action of Christians” (Fotopoulos 2016: 181). Notable Pauline texts, as compiled by Fotopoulos, include: leads (ἄγονται, Rom. 8:14); helps us (συναντιλαμβάνεται, Rom. 8:26); intercedes (ὑπερεντυγχάνει, Rom. 8:26; ἐντυγχάνει ὑπὲρ ἅγιων, Rom. 8:27); searches (ἐραυνά, 1 Cor. 2:10); comprehends (ἐγνώκεν, 1 Cor. 2:11);

14 Also cited by Dettwiler (2016: 158).
speaks (λαλῶν, 1 Cor. 12:3); activates (ἐνεργεῖ, 1 Cor. 12:11); distributes (διαρρέων, 1 Cor. 12:11); gives life (ζωοποιεῖ, 2 Cor. 3:6; “eternal life”, Gal. 6:8); transforms from glory to glory (μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος, 2 Cor. 3:18); communes (κοινωνία, 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1); and manifests itself in a variety of gifts (φανέρωσις, 1 Cor. 12:7) (Fotopoulos 2016: 182, 185).

Significant allusions to the activeness of the Spirit in the New Testament may also include: feelings (Eph. 4:30); He wills (Acts 16:6-12); does miracles (Acts 8:39); can be lied to (Acts 5:3); can be insulted (Heb. 10:29); teaches and directs (Lk. 12:12; Jn. 14:26; Acts 8:29; Acts 13:2); convicts (Jn. 16:8); Holy Spirit as God (Acts 5:3, 4); can be blasphemed (Matt. 12:31; 12:31-32); is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2); and co-equal with the Father and Son (Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14). The Holy Spirit represents a personification of the triune God who participates in the immanence of God in the world.

Although the personality of the Holy Spirit may seem elusive, it is not entirely conclusive until the question of the nature of the Holy Spirit is discussed in the broader context of the New Testament. Is the Holy Spirit an impersonal force?

The Lukan corpus (Luke-Acts) makes a clear distinction between the Holy Spirit and God’s impersonal powers, even though some of the terms Luke uses, such as the most distinctive term that denotes the power of God – δύναμις – may sometimes give “the impression of a synonymic parallelismus membrorum, implying an identical meaning expressed in two different ways” (Karakolis 2016: 99). Luke presents δύναμις as a mystical power from God exerted upon individuals by the Holy Spirit. Examples include the conception of Jesus Christ by Mary. In Luke 1:35, the angel tells Mary: “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power (δύναμις) of the Most High will overshadow you.” Karakolis seems to assume that the Holy Spirit could be “understood as being another word for God’s impersonal power” (2013: 99). John Zizioulas thinks of δύναμις differently as the creation of the Holy Spirit for the community of believers (Zizioulas 2010: 78). The angel’s statement parallels Jesus’ words to the disciples after His resurrection, “But you will receive power (δύναμις) when the Holy Spirit comes on you.” In this context, Karakolis suggests that the “reception of God’s power is not identical with the coming of the Holy Spirit but only the result of its coming” (2013: 100). It is so clear that Luke

---

15 In Acts 5, a mutual conspiracy between Ananias and his wife Sapphira brought about an instant judgment of death upon the couple. Peter reveals the sin as lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). In verse 4, he also states that Ananias lied to God. In verse 9, Peter confronts Sapphira for testing the Holy Spirit. Based on this incidence, Karakolis makes a strong case “to imply that the Holy Spirit is indeed a narrative character, since tempting and lying can only have a narrative character as their object” (2013: 99).
associates the impersonal power with the Holy Spirit, but the two are not identical and neither are they synonymous. Δύναμις appears in the ministry of Jesus Christ as an intrinsic power of the Holy Spirit, ἐν τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ πνεύματος, translated as, “in the power of the Spirit” (Lk. 4:14). The impersonal power is a character trait of the Holy Spirit through which we understand its essential potentiality and the channel of its executive work in the world. Δύναμις is unlike the Holy Spirit. It does not bear the vital properties that characterize the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, such as talking, deciding, convicting, communicating, interacting, prophesying, guiding, etc. The overall character of the Holy Spirit is beyond the category of an impersonal power for reasons that are linked to its hypostatic nature in its identification with the Godhead.

In summary, both חかかる and πνεῦμα present similar ideas to understanding the nature of the Spirit and spirits. Etymologically, both חカラー and πνεῦμα mean wind or spirit. From that background, scholars refer to the metaphorical conception of the spirit as wind or breath as invisible though active in natural objects, just as one cannot see the wind but can only feel it. There is no single and straightforward meaning of the term spirit. The term spirit is elusive, and this is the reason why חカラー and πνεῦμα mostly appear in different categories and metaphors in the Bible. In general terms, the various conceptions of חカラー and πνεῦμα include the anthropological dimension, where חカラー and πνεῦμα are understood as the breath in the human being. The theo-anthropological dimension is understood as the spiritual force or the vital principle in humankind, as in the sense of the breath of life given by God that creates the distinction between the body and the spirit of a person. Their epistemological conception lies in cognitive qualities such as wisdom and understanding. חカラー and πνεῦμα underline the metaphysical-cosmological definition of the immanence of God through which we understand the relationship between God and the material world. The most important usage of חカラー and πנぬמע is the theological conception of God as spirit, and the person of the Holy Spirit.

All these categories reflect the multifaceted understanding of חカラー and πנぬמע in the entire Bible. This background is also true of the English term “spirit.” Hence, the quest for a contextual pneumatology, herein referred to as contextual Akan Christian pneumatology, should seriously consider the medium of expression in the Twi language in order to have a better interaction between the Bible and traditional notions of the spirit.

9.9. Conclusion

Agyarko has proposed and formulated a pneumatological doctrine that makes one speak of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. His proposal articulates a “pneumatological
“ecumenism” whereby God, being the source of all things, interpenetrates and bonds the universe together through His eternal spirit, herein *sunsum* in Akan cosmology. In doing that, he has shown an awareness that the Akan culture and religion can engage Christian thought and practice. This chapter has offered an appraisal of Agyarko’s contextual Akan pneumatology. The purpose has been to express an appreciation for his recent contribution to contextual Akan pneumatology. I have also examined the various aspects of the spirit in the Old and New Testament, which reveal heterogeneous application of the terms to specific activities of the Spirit. The understanding of the Spirit in the Bible is not so much focused on the terms than the possibilities of the theological adequacy of the terms to speak to different activities of the Spirit. However, the use of πνεῦμα in place of הַחוּר in the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament shows how each cultural tradition is capable of converging with the Bible. As the Akan concept of *sunsum* is inadequate for theologizing biblical pneumatology, I have chosen to contribute to the discussion by providing an alternative viewpoint as I seek to articulate my proposal towards the construction of a new contextual Christian pneumatology based on the Akan concept of *honhom*. I am convinced that *honhom* is theologically adequate to speak of the Holy Spirit; more importantly, I believe that it is analogous to the Hebrew הַחוּר and Greek πνεῦμα. In this way, I will provide a broader scope for understanding the activity and being of the Holy Spirit which is known in the Twi language as *Honhom Kronkron*. 
Chapter 10

_Honhom Kronkron:_ A Pneumatological Proposal

“Since Christianity rejects the notion of a special sacred language and instead affirms the Scriptures in whatever language to be the word of God, it is reasonable to expect that the rich linguistic heritage of Africa should provide singular opportunities for developing indigenous Christian theologies.”—Kwame Bediako

10.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is a constructive theological development of a new contextual Akan Christian pneumatology based on the concept of _honhom_ which means air, breath, or spirit. The general idea of _honhom_ among the Akan is multifaceted, and one needs to understand its various aspects or characteristics for a theological discussion. Current literary references to _honhom_ are chiefly found in Twi Christian literature books such as the Twi Bibles, hymn books, and other Christian books. The term appears in several lyrical contents of Ghanaian gospel musicians, and it has also captured the imagination of filmmakers, making _honhom_ a contemporary reality. However, I have not come across any theological work that justifies _honhom_’s pneumatic character as a spirit or spiritual phenomenon. Neither has any research demonstrated that it is theologically incorrect to interpret Akan contextual pneumatology using _honhom_. Therefore, I take it as an appropriate theological task to give it a theological justification.

My proposal draws from the previous discussions on the Akan notion of the “spirit” and the spiritual, by taking into consideration the nature of the Holy Spirit and its theological expressions among the Akan Christians of West Africa. Since the doctrine of the Spirit involves both spirituality and history of humanity, the new proposal will critically recast Akan pneumatology in order to formulate a theological framework that can help articulate Christian thoughts and theological reflections within and specifically for the Akan context. The study

---

1 Bediako 1989: 64.
2 Baffoe Antwi in his doctoral dissertation titled _Creation in the Image of God: Human Uniqueness from the Akan Religious Anthropology to the Renewal of Christian Anthropology_ attempted to justify a _Honhom Kronkron_ pneumatology in some sections of the thesis. His work is plausible even though contextual pneumatology was not the focus in its entirety.
3 Agyarko’s _sunsum_ pneumatology did not deal with the question of _honhom_ and Christian pneumatology. The term does not appear at all in his contextual pneumatology. It seems he does not show interest in the subject.
seeks to offer answers to the following key questions: What is homhon? How does the notion of homhon impact a contextual understanding of the Holy Spirit?

While I embark on this theological study, I would like to clarify whether this pneumatological proposal is parallel to the sunsum pneumatology. It is not my intention to parallel this pneumatological construction with the sunsum pneumatology. Since homhon and sunsum are not synonymous terms, it follows that the two cannot be parallel. Nevertheless, my research does not rally against sunsum pneumatology, for reasons relating to the linguistic complexities existing among the different Akan subgroups, especially between the Twi-speaking and Fante-speaking Akan peoples. Concerning my previous investigation of sunsum, its pneumatic nature has been emphasized as a spiritual force/element rather than as being entitative. What concerns me at this point is proving that homhon is theologically more qualified to define the Holy Spirit, and therefore, should be the basis for a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology.

10.2. The Etymology, Origin, and Meaning of Honhon

The spirit is understood among the majority of the Akan people as homhon. Traditional Akan thinkers use the term homhon to speak of breath, wind (a mild, gentle wind), spirit, life force, and all non-physical realities. However, the meaning of the term has much wider applications. Honhon denotes any meta-empirical being or spiritual state (Platvoet 1982: 73). The plural form of homhon (spirit) is ahonhon (spirits). Other root words include ahum (strong wind) and ahom or home (breath). In this chapter, I propose that homhon should form part of the basis of all Akan pneumatological and theological discourses now and in the future.

10.2.1. Etymology of Honhon

The etymology of the term homhon is a conundrum. A few Akan religious scholars of outstanding memory have argued the etymology of homhon from different viewpoints. The first attempt is found in the writings of the Basel missionary Gustav Arthur Jehle. Although he connects the word homhon with home (breath), Jehle felt the appropriate etymology should be ahun (atmosphere), i.e. homhon as something from the air, something invisible (1907: 415). The connection with the atmosphere also makes it pervasive and invisible like the air in the atmosphere. This etymology relates homhon to something intangible or invisible; whether as atmosphere, air, life force, or breath.

---

4 Gustav Jehle entered the Basel Mission in 1899 and worked on the Gold Coast (Ghana) from 1900 to 1918 (Hauser-Renner 2008: 261).
The second attempt comes from Danquah. We encounter an exhaustive interpretation of *honhom* in Danquah because the concept forms the basis of his pneumatology. The greater part of what we know about *honhom* comes from him. Danquah takes a multifaceted approach to the meaning of *honhom*. He traces the etymology of *honhom* to *ehon*, i.e. the marrow in the bone, or brain, the pith, the essence of mind. He concludes that *honhom* is understood to have derived from the repetition of the word *ehon* of the ehon (*ehon-mu hom*). He explains it as: “the pith of pith, the essence of the essence, the quintessence of the quintessence, the ineffable spiritual principle or soul of ultimate reality” (1968: 171). Danquah provides the most profound understanding of the Akan concept of *honhom* more than anyone else.

### 10.2.2. Origin of Honhom

Gyekye argues that “*honhom* has come to be used interchangeably with *sunsum* (spirit), so that the phrase *honhom bone* has come to mean the same thing as *sunsum bone*, that is, evil spirit” (1987: 88). His observation is right; Akan people use the two terms interchangeably without any nuances in their meaning. Gyekye accuses foreign missionaries of introducing *honhom* due to the radical translation of the Christian Bible into the various Akan languages. This observation was first made by Diedrich Hermann Westermann (1875–1956). He associated *honhom* with breath and further remarked that its transcendental usage in the Bible was “only a deepening, as it were, of the original material” (Jehle 1907: 415). Westermann concludes that this was due to the influence of the Christian translation of the Greek πνεῦμα as *honhom* in the Twi Bible. His observation is correct because *sunsum* was never used in the first and later editions of the Twi Bibles. Both the ַח¬ and πνεῦμα are all translated in the Twi language as *honhom* to mean “spirit.” Consequently, the argument follows that the term *honhom* was a Christian, and hence, recent invention. Why did the early editions of the Akan Twi Bibles, published by the British and Foreign Bible Societies (BFBS) in 1871, use *honhom* instead of *sunsum* for the spirit? Did the foreign missionaries invent the term *honhom*? How do we respond to this question of invention? These questions lead to further analysis of the term *honhom* and its significance to Akan theological discourse.

### 10.2.3. Fundamental Meaning of Honhom

---

*Danquah is right on the word *ehon*, which is the Akan word for the brain. Its connection to the soul or spirit has been sustained by Kwame Gyekye. Gyekye asserts that Akan people believe the soul (*ɔkra*) is lodged somewhere in the head. The Akan expression *Ne ti ye* (His head is good) is synonymous to *Ne *kra ye* (His soul is good). Gyekye concludes that “the soul acts on the brain in a specific locality, but it is itself not actually localized” (Gyekye 1987: 100). Another concept that is closely related to the brain is *tiboa* (conscience). For further reading on this latter concept, see Gyekye 1987: 142-143, 126.*
The oral linguistic, semantic, and grammatical structure of Akan languages were transformed into written or printed texts by early Christian missionaries. Christaller, the key philologist in the development of the Twi grammar, spent more than twenty-five years studying the Twi language and preparing manuscripts and materials collected through contact with natives of various places and cultural groups of the Akan ethnicity. He particularly mentions David Asante – his co-missionary – and other trained indigenous missionaries as contributors and reviewers of his publications (1881: vi). We can trace the meaning of *honhom* back to two of Christaller’s dictionaries. The first was *A Dictionary, English, Tshi (Asante), Akra; Tshi (Chwee) Comprising as Dialects: Akan and Fante; Accra connected with Adangme; Gold Coast, West Africa*, published in 1874. The original version of this dictionary was a compilation of English-Ga vocabularies by the Basel Society missionary Rev. Christian Wilhelm Locher from 1850 to 1869. The earlier Ga vocabularies had been compiled by Rev. Johannes Zimmermann and containing some notes by indigenous Ga catechists. The Twi vocabularies were the contribution of Christaller. The term *honhom* appears three times in this dictionary; in all appearances, it is associated with something intangible or spiritual.

First, the diction on “breath” is translated as *ahome, ahuhuw*, *ahohow*, *honhom, nkwa*, *mfare*, and *mframa* (1874: 37). Second, the word “ghost” is translated as *honhom, sunsum, sasa*, and *osaman* (1874: 112). The third appearance occurs under “soul” and is translated as *ɔkr* and *sunsum (honhom)* (1874: 226). *Honhom* appears in all instances as an ontological description of something intangible or spiritual. *Sunsum* does not appear under the various Akan terms for “breath” as indicated. I see this as a theological deficiency in terms of the term *sunsum* fully defining the theo-anthropological aspect of biblical pneumatology where aspects of קוח and πνεῦμα parallel the breath of living organisms.

---

6 The language of the Ga people of Ghana.
7 See the preface to Christaller’s *A Dictionary, English, Tshi (Asante), Akra; Tshi (Chwee) Comprising as Dialects: Akan and Fante; Accra connected with Adangme; Gold Coast, West Africa* in 1874.
8 From this word also comes *huw* meaning blowing of air from the mouth to quench something, i.e. fire, hot water or food, etc.
9 *Nkwa* literally means “life.”
10 The Akan word for “air” or “wind.”
11 *Honhom* appears on this list as an alternative description of breath rather than a synonym. Akan people do not often use *honhom* in ordinary conversations as another word for breath or breathing. For example, if Akan want to say, “He is breathing heavily,” the proper Twi translation will be “Ne home ɔ kra.” To say, “Ne honhom ɔ kra” will mean his ‘kra or soul is gone to heaven. *Honhom* in connection with breath seems preponderant only when a person is dying or dies.
12 Christaller does not translate “soul” as equivalent to *honhom*. The emphasis here is in reference to soul as an intangible object.
Christaller gives further elaboration on *honhom* in his *A Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Chwee, Twi)* (1881), which was also the standard Twi dictionary for the Basel German Evangelical Mission of West Africa. The diction on *honhom* is rendered as (footnotes are mine):

*honhom*, (pl.) *a*, a spirit; the spirit of man [ah. =osaman a.s. sunsum, ahunmu ade nen13; sunsum na tetefo fre no sa(se)14: ne h. asore no so akye (orebewu nen)15; onipa wu a, ne h. fi no mu ko soro16]. Onyame h., the Spirit of God; Honhom kronkron, the Holy Ghost; honhom ahoto, spiritual joy or happiness; honhom-mu-ade, spiritual things (1881: 189).

Christaller used both *honhom* and *sunsum* for the “spirit of man.” For example, he defines *sunsum* as “the soul or spirit of man” almost like the definition of *honhom* given above (1881: 464).

While it may seem confusing to see both *sunsum* and *honhom* expressing similar ideas, it is also important to grasp what Christaller meant by the phrase “spirit of man” in context. First, he used *sunsum* often in relation to the *ɔkra*, the intrinsic property of life, also referred to by Christaller as the “soul” or spirit of man. This is also true of his use of *honhom* for the *ɔkra*. For example, Christaller assumed that “the ‘kra is considered partly as the soul or spirit of a person (cf. *sunsum*, *honhom*)” (1881: 255). Second, his use of *honhom* and *sunsum*, as the spirit of man, referred to the entitative “spirit,” which Akan people call *Saman* (ghost). Although we find overlaps in his usage of *sunsum* and *honhom*, there is little evidence to assume that Christaller used the two terms synonymously.

10.3. Characteristics of *Honhom*

Characteristically, the concept of *honhom* is a polysemy as it has various related meanings. This section aims to outline some of the characteristics that Akan people use to define the concept of *honhom*.

---

13 The expression *ahunmu ade nen* is a blend of Twi and Fante which means “an invincible thing.” *Saman* (ghost) is an invincible entity. *Honhom* is thought of in Christaller’s interpretation as something invincible or from the atmosphere. For years, this has been the Akan position with respect to spiritual realities and objects. See also Christaller 1881: 197.

14 The expression *sunsuma na tetefo fre no sa (se)*, means “The ancestors used to call *sunsum* (shadow) as *sa* (follow).” The statement seems to give credibility to those who perceive the derivation of *sunsum* from the Akan word for shadow (*sunsuma*), and also to those who think the *saman* is the *sunsum* of the deceased. None of these can fully grasp the meaning of *sunsum*.

15 This expression: *Ne honhom asore no so akye (orebewu nen)* means, “His spirit has withdrawn from him for a long time (he is about to die).”

16 *Onipa wu a, ne honhom fi no mu ko soro*: “When a person dies, his spirit flits from him to heaven;” not heaven per se but *Asamando* (place of abode for the ancestors) as recognized in the Akan religion.
10.3.1. Honhom as Breath or A Mild Wind

_Honhom_ is the Akan term for breath or air. Other alternative terms include _mframa_ (wind) or _ahom_ (breath). Whereas _mframa_ may be best translated as wind, _honhom_ or _ahom_ is used technically in relation to inhalation and exhalation of air. Breath, air, and wind are appropriate English translations of _honhom_ because both express the idea of invincibility and life force. All living creatures breathe air in order to grow and stay healthy. Air is a mysterious force of nature; it is formless, shapeless, and invincible. Air or wind is beyond human control since it is unseen and can only be felt. It is a universal reality which has no specific source or end. Therefore, the Akan concept of _honhom_ brings out the idea of vitality, pervasiveness, and the non-perceivable realities that form part of Akan ontology and cosmology.

Gyekye relates _honhom_ to breath or spirit. The reason, he explains, is that the word seems to have been transformed from the Akan Twi word _home_ or _ahom_, which means “breath” (1987: 88). Ephirim-Donkor comes to a similar conclusion and associates breath (_ahom_) with life, that is, the air that a person breathes in and out as evidence of the life force in the individual. In other words, Ephirim-Donkor sees the _ahom_ (breath) as the ṣ₃kra that a child inhales at birth and gives out at death (2010: 45). Gyekye does not see _honhom_ and ṣ₃kra as synonymous; however, he considers them to be relative. He makes references to the following Akan sayings to buttress his assumption: _Ne honhom ko_, “his breath is gone,” and _Ne ṣ₃kra afi ne ho_, “his ṣ₃kra has withdrawn from his body.” The two expressions suggest that a person is dead. The cessation of breath and the departure of the ṣ₃kra are non-identical to Gyekye. Nevertheless, he sees a spontaneous phenomenon expressing the idea that it is the ṣ₃kra that causes breathing (1987: 88). I will revisit all these assumptions later.

10.3.2. Honhom: The Ultimate Source of Being

Among the Akan, _honhom_ is a universal reality because it is Onyame’s _Honhom_. According to Agyarko, “Onyame stands as a rational, eternal, and absolute Being.” He continues to argue that the Akan people do not regard Onyame as their tribal god. “Rather, _Onyame_ is seen as the Supreme Being whose benevolence extends to all people. The creation of the universe is attributed to _Onyame_ and this Being is regarded as the governing principle of the universe” (Agyarko 2014: 10). Thus, Onyame is a universal reality, “the Honhom of ultimate being…the

---

17 “To breathe” and “breath” have the same word spelling in the Akan language. It is the context that designates its tense. For example, “_Nipa bi ara home_,” meaning “Each person breathes.” A second example: “_Ne home rete_,” literally meaning “He is suffocating” or proverbially means the person is under severe stress.
cause of all being, of all existence and value, Odomankoma Borebore, the interminable Creator” (Danquah 1968: 170). The universal reality of Onyame Honhom is metaphorically represented by honhom (air), which is a universal principle circulating in all aspects of life and a universal experience of life in all living things.

Danquah thinks the concept of honhom is the “roof and root to the entire edifice of the Akan doctrine regarding God” (1968: 110). Onyame as Honhom becomes “the source of reality and the potential entelechy of all being, multiform in function, uniform in nature, infinite and interminable, which was, and ‘went before any one came,’ the timeless, spaceless, all inclusive reality” (1968: 172). God (Honhom) is “the end-cause of all being” (1968: 172). What are the implications of all these pneumatological conceptions of God to Danquah?

In Danquah’s view, life is cyclical, a quest to become part of the ultimate reality, God, who is a direct representation of the Nana (ancestor), who each individual should seek to reach. Akan ancestral cult is constructed on this ideology. The ancestors share in divine attributes of spirituality (honhom), perfection, and possess the qualities of divinity. To achieve ancestorship is the ultimate end of life, the fulfillment of the moral life. These are the motivations for sunsum and ɔkra to achieve honhom, the being that is accountable after death. This is because, as Danquah puts it, life is “one grand continuous effort, one grand desire to get things done, [and] to answer the practical questions of how to live well” (1968: 152). Both sunsum and ɔkra are said to objectify these practical ideals. In practical terms, what matters, according to Danquah, is that the Akan “attains full maturity of completed incarnation, whereby man becomes God’s, is absorbed into the interminable Odomankoma (Creator), and shares in divine immortality” (1968: 152). Thus, life continues in the spiritual.

10.3.3. Honhom as Spirit

Several Akan people regard the essence of spirits to be honhom, i.e. nonphysical and permeating. The Akan proverb, Nipa bonne fo nti na yeto pono mu na enye ɔsaman ho hu nti, literally, “Doors are meant to protect from bad people but not because of the fear of ghosts,” reinforces the nature of spirits as wind or air. In the same manner doors are not meant for ghosts, spirits are not constrained by physical objects because of their permeating nature as honhom. In both of Christaller’s dictionaries of 1874 and 1881, the term “ghost” is translated as honhom. In its plural form, ahonhom tends to describe the myriads of entities whose nature is exclusively spiritual. A fetish priest described the nature of Ṣbosom (a pantheon deity) to Rattray as Onyankopon honhom (God’s spirit) (Rattray 1915: 22). Besides Rattray’s intention to connect
Akan religion to the Supreme God, the relationship between the Ɔbosom and God is an ontological filiation because Akan people regard the Abosom as children of God (Rattray 1923: 145, 146). As Danquah notes, Honhom (God) “is the spirit of ultimate being realizing the conditions of its own existence for its highest or most intelligible expression or actualization” (1944: 171). The underlining theology makes God common to reality. Honhom, the spirit of God, characterizes all entities that share in the divine nature. The pantheon deities and ancestors are all ahonhom (pl.), and their essential characteristics have been noted as sunsum as well. The malevolent spirits are known among Akan people as ahonhom ɔne (evil spirits).

10.3.4. Honhom as the Pervasive Spirit

The Akan designation of God as Honhom (spirit), means God is neither non-composite nor limited by time and space. Because Onyame as Honhom is a universal reality, Onyame’s Honhom extends to the entire creation. Danquah views honhom as the ultimate reality, “the centre of all reality, pervading and informing every part of existence,… an urge or vitality” (1968: 170). It is God’s honhom that gives reality to all forms and matter; hence, matter exists in God. All things created, including the universe itself, are permeated by the honhom of God. Danquah sums up his ideas with the Akan maxim, “Nsem nyinaa ne Nyame,” meaning, “‘All matter is God,’ or of God; all that exists or becomes is God. It is not exclusive, but common, all universally, ultimately, and absolutely, for beyond it there is no matter, neither cause nor end. It is common. All in common is Honhom, or of Honhom, the energy and power of being” (1968: 172). As a consequence, all that becomes a honhom becomes part of God. If honhom is a pervasive spirit and vitality, then it follows that many of life’s realities are dependent upon it and may have a significant role to play in understanding the whole essence of life.

10.3.5. Honhom as Life Substance

Gyekye remarks that what is real in Akan ontology and cosmology is the spiritual. He does not discard the reality of the world of natural phenomena. However, he is convinced that “in ultimate terms the nonperceivable, purely spiritual world is more real, for upon it the perceivable, phenomenal world depends for sustenance” (1987: 69). This description of an

---

18 Witches are not spirits in the proper sense of the word. As already stated, witches are superhumans who exercise spiritual powers.

19 Danquah uses honhom to denote the ultimate essence of essence that contains all reality. The assumption makes the Akan concept of honhom the cause and essence of all reality. The Latin ex nihilo nihil fit, which means “out of nothing, nothing comes,” cannot be contained in the Akan conception of the honhom since all things exist in spirit before being materialized. This explains why honhom captures the fundamental and essential activities of the Hebrew הוהי and the Greek πνεῦμα in the Bible better than sunsum as it will be shown later.
Akan worldview cuts across majority of Africans’ worldviews. The Akan emphasis of honhom as the ultimate source of reality makes honhom the substance of every existence. Like God, it far predates any matter and form; it also far exceeds the beginning of time. It is the honhom that gives reality to all forms and matter, because the matter exists in it. This suggests that everything created, including the universe, is permeated by this informing energy called honhom (Danquah 1968: 171).

A broad range of practical applications can be deduced from all these. The nature of honhom could very well be identified with life or an animating force because it is life itself. Whatever has honhom has life while the vice versa is death. The concept of honhom, as a life substance, explains how God permeates the creation and how every life is united with its source, God. For that matter, the destiny of all life is dependent on the vivification of the honhom.

10.3.6. Honhom: The Life force of the Human Being

Of fundamental importance is how Akan people use honhom to describe the life force in every human being. Akan anthropology postulates that every human being has a life principle from God called ḣkra. Christaller, in his first Asante-Fante dictionary in 1881, links the ḣkra to honhom based on two Akan statements: Ne honhom asore no so akye (His spirit has withdrawn from him for a long time), and Onipa wu a, ne honhom fi ne mu ko soro (When a person dies, his spirit flits from him to heaven) (1881: 189). He gives further similar expressions with alternative explanations: Ne honhom nsene no mu, meaning: “he is beside himself with impatience, ready to leap out of his skin.” Or Ne honhom asore no so, “his soul or spirit has left him.” Christaller observes these expressions in relation to a dying person or when a person has died (1881: 451). He further commented that the ḣkra of a dying person leaves the body gradually before the person’s last breath (1881: 255). The literal statement to describe a dead person is, Ne home ate ko, literally, “He has stopped breathing.” The Akan will not say “His breath left him” because breath does not go anywhere. The equivalent of the Hebrew “breath of life” in Akan is the ḣkra, which is responsible for life in the individual and it is that which takes leave after death.

Danquah associates ḣkra with honhom. I have discussed Danquah’s evolutionary conception of the human being in chapter six. Life begins with the esu (nature), followed by sunsum (personality), and finally ḣkra (soul-mind), the ideal to be lived or experienced to become honhom (spirit).20 In this case, the ḣkra is nothing but a honhom, the spirit of pure ethereality

---

20 Danquah does not see honhom as a “thing,” but as a state of being (1968: 67).
that identifies or links human beings to the Ideal Spirit or Honhom, which is God (1968: 67). There is an ascendancy towards perfection that makes the ṁкра qua Honhom capable of traveling through space after death. In this state, Danquah refers to Honhom as a spiritus realitas (spirit in reality), describing the Akan notion of a transfiguration of the ṁкра to become a spirit. The ṁкра is a fully developed Honhom, the ultimate reality, that shares the same spiritual attributes with God, and the rationale behind the deathless nature of the ṁкра. Danquah observes that unless the ṁкра contains in itself the capacity of a divine nature, it cannot be identified with God (1944: 171). This is the reason why the departed ṁкра, as Honhom, has the potential to return to life to achieve its highest and noblest destiny.

Other scholars like Meyerowitz and Gyekye are skeptical about the identification of ṁкра with Honhom. Meyerowitz sees the ‘kra and Honhom as relative but nonindetical. She identifies Honhom as the “breath of life” in the ṁкра, the eternal soul or life-giving power. She says “Honhom is always coupled with the ṁкра” but the two are not same (1951: 25). The distinction she draws follows that “after death the kra labours up a steep hill in order to reach heaven, there to submit to the judgement of Nyankopon, the Honhom flies back to Nyame in the shape of a bird” (Meyerowitz 1951: 25). In this conception, one is made to believe that judgment in heaven after death is compatible with Akan religion. However, I cannot think of any such doctrine in the Akan religion other than what I know in Christianity and Islam.

Gyekye, like Meyerowitz, does not identify Honhom with ṁкра, and neither does he agree with Meyerowitz’s perception of the former as the equivalence of the “breath of life.” Gyekye thinks

---

21 Danquah and several Akan scholars think the ṁкра returns to God. The idea of a return to God is basically absent in Akan religion. This is a purely Christian doctrine. It does not, however, make void the ability of the ṁкра to return to God because it has obtained spirituality. The point is the majority of Akan people believe that theakra (pl.) travel to Asamando, their final place of abode, from where also libations are poured to invoke their presence among the living.

22 Akan religion has concepts to consider the mysteries of death. One of them is reincarnation – the re-entering of the departed ṁкра into the mundane life. Akan people do not see life as endless cycles of reincarnation. The idea of reincarnation is for special circumstances. Reincarnation is closely related to the Akan concept of nkrabea (destiny). It is a common belief among Akan people that individuals do not chart their own destiny. Destiny is predetermined by God before birth. Legend has it that the departing ṁкра from Nyankopon also took its destiny from Him. Destiny determines the various facets of temporal events and occurrences in the course of the individual’s whole life. The Akan understanding of destiny is positive, good luck, and is determined by the ṁкра. However, destiny is also unconscious, which is why the Akan will inquire about their destiny in situations of vicious cycles of misfortunes in a person’s life. This statement in no way implies that there is an inherent evil associated with nkrabea (destiny). Certainly not. After all, the nkrabea came from Nyankopon, and Akan people do not associate evil with God. Misfortunes are carried out by malevolent forces that have the potential to affect lives with evils such as sicknesses, accidents, bareness, untimely death, and all other ailments suspected to be the working of evil spirits. This is where the Akan concept of reincarnation comes in to particularly stress the importance of destiny. When people die through any of these misfortunes, the ṁкра is reincarnated into the world to achieve its full destiny before it can enter into the spirit world of the ancestors (Asamando).
the phrase, Ne honhom kɔ would best be translated as: “his breath is gone.” He translates honhom as “breath” because he neither accepts the interpretation of the word as “spirit” nor identifies it with the ɔkra as a synonymous term. Gyekye says “the honhom is the tangible manifestation or evidence of the presence of the ɔkra” (1987: 88). His statement creates a dichotomy between honhom and ɔkra, although both terms are closely related. I do not think this should be so. The statement Ne honhom kɔ is synonymous to “His spirit is withdrawn,” where the “spirit” is in reference to the ɔkra. All these agree with the Akan notion of the ɔkra as a foreign entity apart from the body upon which depends life and destiny. Christaller referred to the ɔkra as the honhom (spirit) of a person, and the consequent rationality underlining Danquah’s evolutionary process of life where ɔkra takes leave as honhom. The ɔkra, a spark from God, needs to realize its experience in life in order to express its potentiality, become an ancestor, and earn participation in divine immortality (honhom).

10.3.7. Epistemological Dimension of Honhom

Epistemology is widely recognized as the theory of knowledge. However, both the meaning of and the way epistemology is formulated differ or are determined culturally. Wherever significant cultural differences exist, one should expect corresponding epistemological discrepancies, and this advances the claim which distinguishes Akan’s theory of knowledge from that of the rest of the world (Okrah 2003: 9). In the Akan sense, epistemology finds expression in the mythology, proverbs, idioms, festivals, and ceremonies that are repertoires of their thought process and experience of life. The concept of honhom forms part of the epistemic principles in the phrases of everyday life. For example, honhom bɔne (evil spirit) is a common phrase Akan people use to describe a malignant spirit or witchcraft. Another popular adage is honhom fi (unclean spirit or demon). Honhom appears in two Akan idioms, already mentioned, to express a state of death: Ne honhom kɔ (His spirit is departed), and Honhom nni ne mu (There is no spirit or soul in him). These expressions, as religious as they may be, are also philosophical ideas used to define Akan worldviews.

I will outline further characteristics of honhom in the next section to reveal the differences between honhom and sunsum. Drawing the differences between the two terms is of great concern in this chapter because they will reveal how Akan people use the terms interchangeably to speak of or describe specific experiences.

10.4. The Differences between Sunsum and Honhom
Sunsum and honhom are not always synonymous, even though there is a close relationship between the two. In most cases, it is the context of their usage that determines their meaning. The usage of sunsum has been suggested in my research in two views. First is the inspired (wɔ sunsum), which defines sunsum as a principle of inherent power (force) in natural objects. The second is the exclusively spiritual (ye sunsum), referring to spiritual entities. My research proposes a third view, which is the exclusively anthropological sunsum (wo sunsum). This third view is not so different from the inspired, but for the sake of convenience and in order to differentiate the sunsum of the human being from all other sunsum, I will employ these three aspects of the usage of sunsum in comparison to honhom to draw the differences between the two terms, and to further reveal more characteristics of honhom as shown in the tables below.

Table 5: The differences between wɔ sunsum and honhom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wɔ Sunsum (Inspired)</th>
<th>Honhom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural objects such as trees, stones, rivers, animals, sunan, etc. are not sunsum but inspired (wɔ sunsum). It means they exercise power. The same applies to the Golden Stool of the Asantes, which contains the sunsum of the Asantes.</td>
<td>To say an object has honhom means there is life in it, i.e. the object breathes. Or, it can imply that a foreign spiritual agent has taken residence in the thing. Honhom is all-pervading, constant, uniform, infinite, interminable, and multifunctional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsum is a dynamic force in natural objects.</td>
<td>Honhom is not a dynamic force but a vital force. It possesses its own dynamic force from God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsum is a substance of natural objects whose absence renders the object powerless.</td>
<td>Honhom is the breath of natural objects. When used as an entity, a honhom (spirit) may take temporary residence in an object and leave without any damage to the object, unlike sunsum which may render the object powerless.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: The differences between wo sunsum and honhom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wo Sunsum (Exclusively Anthropological)</th>
<th>Honhom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally, wo sunsum proceeds either from a being or an object, e.g., father, pantheon deity, etc. in the same way one’s body throws a shadow (sunsuma) on the ground.</td>
<td>A man may transmit his sunsum but not his honhom. Wo honhom (Your spirit) is analogous to your ɔkra, which is not transferable, unlike sunsum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Wo sunsum* (Your *sunsum*) is not an entitative (spirit) but a spiritual force. To a Fante, *wo sunsum* is equivalent to one’s *ɔкра*.

*Wo sunsum* is measurable either as weak, light, or strong. There is also the *sunsum pa* (good *sunsum*) and *sunsum bɔne* (evil *sunsum*).

*Wo sunsum* is versatile to education. It can be transformed from bad to good, or weak to strong.

*Wo sunsum* does not go to *Asamando* after death according to my analysis.

*Wo sunsum* is responsible for morality, charisma, personality, etc.

*Wo sunsum* is not related to breath, air, and wind.

Table 7: The differences between ye *sunsum* and honhom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ye Sunsum (Exclusively spiritual)</th>
<th>Honhom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ye sunsum</em> involves God, Asaase Yaa (Earth goddess), <em>Abosom</em>, <em>Nananom</em> (ancestors), etc. They are <em>sunsum</em> because of their dynamic nature as force-beings.</td>
<td>All the entities mentioned are <em>ahonhom</em> because their very nature is spiritual, like the wind or air. The word is applied to their very essence as ethereal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sunsum</em> is not a generic term to describe what is invincible; unless it is specific. It is only used to describe spiritual existents and objects.</td>
<td>Akan people have come to designate all entities in the spiritual realms as <em>ahonhom</em> (spirits). In this case, the term <em>honhom</em> is used synonymously or interchangeably with <em>sunsum</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sunsum</em>, when used for a spirit (especially among Fantes), is a generic expression for a spiritual being.</td>
<td><em>Honhom</em>, when used for a spirit, expresses the state of being that defines an object as spiritual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The nature of ɔkra is not sunsum. To use sunsum to describe the spirituality of the ɔkra will amount to tautology.

Sunsum mu is the Akan expression for the mystical world.23 ɔkra is the honhom of an individual. Honhom is not synonymous with ɔkra; instead, it is a description of it as a foreign spiritual component in the body.

The phrase honhom mu describes the invisible spiritual world.

The comparison reveals the different categories a majority of Akan people ascribe to both sunsum and honhom. It also shows the non-identical nature of the two terms. Their point of convergence explains how at times the two terms can be used synonymously; this is why Gyekye noted the interchangeability of the two terms (1987: 88). The synonymity only occurs in specific instances of their usage. For example, both sunsum mu and honhom mu are synonymous phrases used to describe the spiritual world. Sunsum and honhom often overlap each other to describe a spiritual being without any misunderstanding among Akan people. However, sunsum and honhom diverge on their usage to describe the essence of natural objects. Whereas sunsum describes the essential quality of natural objects, honhom is the vital force of natural objects.

Although both terms have a pneumatological value, I see a much broader polysemy in honhom expressing the biblical conception of חָרָם and πνεῦμα. It has been argued earlier that contextual Christian theology is not about the theologization of cultural concepts since such an attempt will amount to cultural theology. Instead, it is the use of scriptural principles that are informed by the cultural context. As a result, there is the need for a faithful interpretation of the Bible and a whole cultural dimension of its application. In the next section, I intend to offer a theological justification for honhom in the Twi Bible.

10.5. Honhom and the Akan Twi Bible Translation

The first Twi Bible was published by Johann Gottlieb Christaller in 1871.24 A copy of this original work can be found in the archives of the Basel Mission 21 in Switzerland. This illustrious work represents the evolution of the oral Twi language, which later became the standard text for Akan scholarship in written form. If the term honhom is a foreign invention,

---

23 The term “mystical” is used here to express the general Akan notion of sunsum mu as involving mysticism since it involves an interplay of humans, superhumans (witches, medicinal men), and spiritual beings.

24 The translation of the Bible from its original languages into the Twi language of Ghana was spearheaded by Rev. Johann Christaller in collaboration with other local missionaries. Refer to chapter five for more details.
it is none other but Christaller and his co-workers who worked out a translation of the Twi Bible.

To answer the question of invention, Christaller did not invent the word *honhom*; neither did he nor any of his translators temper the originality of the Twi terminologies, since such would constitute sacrilege against the civilization of the Akan people. His task as a philologist was to translate and to transform the Twi language from its oral traditions into a literary form. Nevertheless, Christaller left traces of how some foreign words were adopted into the Twi Bible:

Foreign words adopted in Tshi (about 20 from Ga, Guan, Marewa, nearly 100 from European languages) have been marked as such by indicating the language from which they are taken in brackets. Above 100 more foreign words found in the Tshi Bible are registered in Appendix A.—New words derived from words already existing in the language and introduced by the Basel missionaries, are partly marked by a dagger (†); many such as well as modern terms, used in teaching the various sciences, are not found in this dictionary, because not as yet sufficiently approved. Nearly a hundred of them are contained in the appendix to Mr. Bellon’s Instruction in Arithmetic (1881: ix, x).\(^{25}\)

The appearance of *honhom* in the Twi Bible does not carry any of the annotations mentioned above. There is no evidence or details given anywhere concerning a purposeful coining of the term. If for argument’s sake, the word *honhom* was invented for use in the Bible to complement the original languages, then we ask the question, why should Christaller and his crew do that against the use of *sunsum*? The answer lies in the question of whether *sunsum* is the most adequate theological term to articulate a contextual Christian pneumatology for the Akan people.

Christaller does translate the Holy Spirit as *Honhom Kronkron* instead of *Sunsum Kronkron*. It can be noted further that he does not use *Sunsum Kronkron* as an alternative to *Honhom Kronkron*.\(^{26}\) Writing thirty-six years later, Jehle attempts to solve this dilemma in the following comments:

---

\(^{25}\) Christaller lists the categories of instances where foreign words or terms taken from European languages are used in the Twi Bible language in Appendix A. These categories included: proper names of persons and places, foreign names of personal beings, names for religious objects, names of times, European months, names of some Christian festivals, names of animals, plants and productions of plants, minerals and precious stones, and measures, weights and coins (1881: 633, 634). It is obvious from the quote above that the issue at stake is not about the adoption of foreign languages or modifying indigenous terms or coining some new others to meet a theological agenda, but a question of terminological convenience for foreign names and terms recreated for the Twi languages.\(^{26}\)

\(^{26}\) The Fante New Testament Bible applies *sunsum* to the soul; in the other dialects *ɔкра* and *honhom* are used instead (Jehle 1907: 414).
In the South the people say that the word honhom was formerly used for sunsum; so it would be the more ancient word. But in out-of-the-way places where the people had not been touched by civilization at all; the people used only “sunsum.” The connection of the word with “home” to breathe is apparently right; the natives have the euphemistic expression for death: he has ceased to draw his “kra.” But the popular etymology connects the word with ahung = atmosphere and explains honhom as something from the air, something invisible […]. A very intelligent native told me that honhom was quite different from okra and meant an influence from outside, from an invincible agency. So Christaller was right to take the word for the Divine Spirit (1907: 415).

Though Jehle’s statement is too scanty to unravel the mysteries over the use of honhom in the Twi Bible for the “spirit,” he does offer us a cue to discard the argument of the invention of honhom by former Western missionaries. Honhom is an Akan indigenous term for describing invincible realities, which may also include air, wind, and breath. In today’s application of the term, it will describe all other invincible objects such as radio waves, electromagnetic forces, etc. that are verifiable only through scientific methods.

I respond to the allegation of the invention of honhom as not convincing and an attempt to give credence to the pneumatic conception of sunsum as a spirit, which my research has contested. The use of honhom in the Twi Bible was accurate and theologically agreeable. Christaller’s choice of the word for the spirit, though partly due to the theological implications underlining the original languages of the biblical text (which is nevertheless an influence of the use of honhom), is both traditionally and theologically expedient. I will give more details later. For now, the most critical question to ask is: why are some Akan people more familiar with sunsum, others honhom, and others both? Could both honhom and sunsum form the basis for contextual Akan pneumatology? These questions lead us to the most crucial issue in my research, whereby the nature of sunsum as a “spirit” has been called to question and, in another instance, sunsum becomes the basis of spiritual realities. The confusion arises when one fails to understand the complex social setup within Akan ethnicity.

I mentioned earlier in chapter six that there are two main Akan subgroups, namely, the Twi-speaking Akan, and the Fante-speaking Akan. The two subgroups are known at face value for their linguistic-accent differences, a common differentiating trait among the Akan ethnicity. The Fante dialect, as well as some vocabularies, is slightly different from the other Twi dialects even though they are mutually intelligible. Honhom and sunsum are two terms in Akan literature that often seem interchangeable among Twi-speaking and Fante-speaking people. The reason follows that Fante pneumatology is chiefly based on sunsum. We recall this from my previous discussion of Ephirim-Donkor in chapter six. Fante Bible translators used sunsum to translate
both חור and πνεῦμα throughout the entire text. The term honhom is infrequently used, if not absent at all among Fantes. We find the same trend in the writings of Ephirim-Donkor, who seems to refrain from the word honhom. In his discussion of the essence of the Abosom (pantheon deities) as “air” or “breath,” he used the Fante term ahom for “breath,” which he explains the ethereal evidence of the ɔkra (2016: 64, 65). Ahom (breath) is known among the Twi-speaking Akan as home or honhom. All these suggest how the term honhom is not preeminent among the Fante, even if it once was, according to Jehle. Of significance is how the Fante never use sunsum to translate “air” or “breath.” Meanwhile, both “air” and “breath” are analogous to the essence of the spirit in the Bible and therefore should, as a theological principle, be factored into contextual Christian pneumatology.

In this section, the evidence presented allows us to conclude that both sunsum and honhom form the basis of Akan pneumatology. To neglect this diversity is a disservice to Akan religion, but it is also true that sunsum cuts across almost all Akan societies. It has a significant presence in the writings of Rattray about the Asantes, although the word never appeared in his early 1915 book Ashanti Proverbs. Similar trends exist in other commentaries on Akan religion from the other tribes. The meaning of sunsum contains a universal principle within the Akan ethnicity and provides the basic spiritual framework upon which the inherent qualities of natural objects or the spiritual properties of an agent are measured.

The argument follows that if sunsum forms the basis of Akan pneumatology, why then is the need for a new proposal of an Akan Christian pneumatology based on honhom? My answer remains the same: honhom captures all the essential characteristics of biblical pneumatology – breath, wind, air, spirit, and soul – and should be the basis of contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. The next section shows how honhom is analogous to the biblical concepts of חור and πνεῦμα.

10.6. Theological Justification for Honhom in the Akan Twi Bible

I will now delve into the Bible to analyze some pneumatological texts in light of a contextual reading of the Bible in the Twi language. In doing this, I will proceed with the most considerable caution to focus on a faithful exegesis of the original texts and how they apply to the theological interpretation of honhom. The idea here is to show how honhom can adequately define the meaning of the spirit in the Twi Bible. I will apply the various dimensions of the Spirit from our previous discussions in both the Old and New Testament.

10.6.1. Theo-anthropological Dimension of Honhom
The theo-anthropological dimension of the spirit relates both חור and πνεῦμα to the breath of life, i.e., the breath of human beings from God’s breath. In both the Masoretic and Septuagint traditions, the breath of life in Gen 2:7 is analogous to the spirit in Job 27:3. This is the same for the Twi translation of the texts. Let us analyze the texts below:

**English**: “…and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Gen 2: 7 ESV)

**Twi**: “…na ohuu nkwa home guu ne hwene mu na onipa ye ɔ kra teasefoɔ” (Gen 2:7 Asante)

**English**: “as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3 ESV)

**Twi**: “na m’ahome nyinaa da so wɔ me mu, na Nyankɔpɔn ahome da so wɔ me hwene mu yi” (Hiob 27:3 Asante).

The texts attribute the origin of life solely to an external principle in God. It is the breath of life that quickens the body to be active. Hence, one does not expect to equate the breath of life to mere “air” in a person’s nostrils. It is the חור /πνεῦμα/honhom of God. It is typical of Akan religion that honhom is related to the principle of life (ɔ kra) in an individual. The Jewish principle of life and that of the Akan are related. Life is a divine spark, and death is a reversal of that spark. The absence of the חור/πνεῦμα/honhom (ɔ kra) means death or lifelessness (Jer. 10:14; 51:17).

We are here introduced to why Akan people will say Ne honhom kɔ, “His ‘kra is withdrawn from the body,” or Honhom nni ne mu bio, “No vital breath is in him anymore.” Denteh thinks this “perhaps justifies the use of “Honhom” in the Twi Bible to mean the God-spirit part of Himself, and that in men called the soul. The ‘Okra’ therefore is virtually the ‘Honhom’ personified” (Denteh 1967: 93). A majority of Akan scholars, including Agyarko, believe the ɔ kra, rather than sunsum, is the spark of God in human beings and shares the same qualities with God. It is deathless, and no evil is associated with it. Ephirim-Donkor shares similar thought and says, “God, then, is the first to enter a child (abofra) as Ahom (breath) in order to make it a living being. By the same token, the Ahom is the last essence to depart a living entity to cause a death” (2016: 66). The breath of life is the ɔ kra, the determining principle of life and death in living things.

---

27 The חור/πνεῦμα in Job 27:3 is translated in this context as ahome in the Asante Twi Bible. Christaller used the term abohow, and the modern Akuapim Bible uses the term honhom. All these terms are translated as “breath” (Christaller 1874: 37). The exception is the Fante Bible which uses sunsum in this context.
Matthew 27:50 is another theo-anthropological dimension of the use of πνεῦμα to describe the death of Jesus on the cross. The text says Jesus “yielded up his πνεῦμα,” which means he breathed his last and died. Almost all the Twi Bibles read: “Ogyaa ne honhom mu.” The statement agrees with the Akan euphemistic expression, Ne honhom ḋo, “His ḋra is withdrawn from the body.” The Fante Bible, exceptionally, uses sunsum in place of honhom in Matt. 27:50. To say, “Ogyaa ne sunsum mu” to the Twi-speaking Akan may engender contradiction. It will mean the person is separated from his sunsum, which according to the majority of Akan people does not necessarily define death because, in sleep, it is believed a person’s sunsum can take voyage and return. Ephirim-Donkor frequently translates ḋra as soul; I have not yet come across his translation of sunsum as soul. The complex usage of sunsum among the Fantes justifies why Christaller translated “soul” in his dictionary as both honhom and sunsum (1874: 226).

There is more sustainability of the ḋra as the breath of life. The Twi Bible translates “a living creature” to “ ḋкратεασεφο,” that is, the ḋra incarnate. ḋкратεασεφο is related to life and means “a living being” as opposed to owufo, “the dead.” Agyarko explains the notion of ḋкратεασεφο to denote “that the divine spark (okra) has become a human being (teasefo). Thus, okra as a divine spark has the capacity to become a human being without any confusion with human nature” (Agyarko 2009: 172). The breath of life is the ḋra, the principle of life, which most Akan identify with honhom. The views of Ephirim-Donkor support breath “as an intangible attestation to the presence of the ḋra in the person” (2016: 107).

Further, Eccles. 12:7 illustrates the disembodiment of the human being at death. The Bible reads, “the dust shall return to the earth as it was: and the πνεῦμα/spirit/honom shall return unto God who gave it.” The description is in direct relation to Gen 2:7. The material returns to the material (Earth), and the spiritual returns to the spiritual source, God. Jewish anthropology sees death as a reversal of Gen 2:7. This is also true of the Akan, who see the departure of the ḋra as death. The concept of the return of the πνεῦμα to God can only be identified with the ḋra – not the sunsum that perishes or remains in the family according to my

---

28 Why does Ephirim-Donkor translate sunsum as soul? Because he thinks sunsum survives death and becomes an ancestor to form the basis of ancestor worship (2016: 78). I do not think he uses sunsum in this case in a manner that is synonymous with the ḋra. He considers the survival of the spiritual components of the body at death. He again commented on the Golden Stool as containing the soul of the Asantes (2016: 116). By the term soul, he meant sunsum since it is widely held that the Golden Stool contains the sunsum – rather than the ḋra – of the Asantes.

29 Emphases are mine.
investigation – which a majority of Akan people believe came from God and returns to the spirit world (Asamado).

The theo-anthropological dimension of the spirit in the Bible corresponds well with the concept of ɔkra-honhom analogy among the Akan. By implication, the spirit is a life-giving principle in human beings. It defines humanity’s numinous nature while at the same time accounting for the mysteries of duality of the human being in both biblical and Akan anthropology. It also establishes the interconnectivity with God, underlining the Akan maxim, “All human beings are the children of God.” To call the breath of life “nkwa honhom” or ɔkra of God is not a tautology but a genuine understanding of the contextual application of biblical pneumatology among the Akan people. The breath of life, as the honhom of God, shows why the presence of the Spirit is vital to the existence of life.

10.6.2. The Theological Dimension of the Spirit as Honhom

The Gospel of John offers us one of the most substantial reflections on the Spirit within the New Testament literature. One of its pneumatological affirmations is John 4:23-24, which, in the narrative context of Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman, speaks about true worship in spirit since God himself is Spirit (Dettwiler 2016: 149, 168). Several English Bible translations apply an essentialist definition of God as spirit, i.e., non-material and omnipresent to the text. The question now is whether an essentialist definition of God exists in Akan socio-religious ideas.

Akan traditional theology postulates Onyankopɔn (God) as the highest Spirit-being. In other words, God is not material, and Akan people do not have iconic representations of God as one may find for the pantheon deities. The Akan maxim, “Nobody teaches the child to know God,” makes God a reality. God is self-revealing and accessible just like the air in the atmosphere. God’s invisibility is not remote, but immanent within and without the Akan cosmology. Religious officiants, relics, shrines, and arts are all visible expressions of faith in the reality of the invisible God.

There are further concrete expressions of the essence of God as air (honhom). An Akan maxim says, “If you want to say something to God, say it to the wind.” Gyekye thinks the proverb is an analogy used to express the invisible and all-pervading nature of God. As “the wind is invisible and intangible – yet its effects are seen everywhere – so is Onyame invisible, intangible, and omnipresent” (Gyekye 1987: 70). Nevertheless, he firmly holds that the wind can be felt, unlike God who can neither be seen nor be felt (1987: 70). Ephirim-Donkor holds
a similar idea by relating the essence of God to the wind, “God is mframa (wind) in the sense that one must: ‘converse with the wind when intending to speak to God’” (2010: 28). He again writes, “God is the air, because air is synonymous with God forming the basis for the saying: “To speak with God, converse with the wind” (2016: 108). Does Ephirim-Donkor adhere to an essentialist description of the nature of God? It seems he does. He sees the wind analogy as an “acknowledgment of God’s omnipresence, ubiquity, knowledge, and nature in Akan socio-political and religious life and thought” (2016: 65). His essentialist definition views “the essence of God as air or wind (Mframa)” (2016: 66).

The identification of God with the wind is an essentialist ideology that compares the essence of the omnipresent God with the invisible wind, not that God is the wind. Agyarko sums them all up this way: “God is likened to the wind, which is also invisible and everywhere...Onyame is everywhere and can be called upon anywhere” (2013: 3). Therefore, the Akan understanding of God as invisible is not an abstract notion, but a reality expressed in concrete objects and terms. God is not the mframa (wind) per se, although one may be tempted to draw such a conclusion from a superficial reading of Ephirim-Donkor’s words: “God (Nyame) is Mframa because the Akan equate God with wind (Mframa)” (2016: 65).30

Given the Akan view of the nature of God as wind, it agrees largely with πνεύμα ο θεός in Jn. 4:24. The wind is also honhom in Akan languages. Jesus’ statement underscores the significance of true worship to comprise a true understanding of the essential qualities of God as honhom in contrast to the perception by the Samaritan woman of a visible place of worship dedicated to God. The conversation reveals the transition from a theocentric view of a God who dwells in tents and temples to a spiritual experience of God who is spirit. There is no restriction on God by geography or time. The nature of God is spiritual, and this flows directly through the various thought forms and arts which serve as channels of communication to humankind.31

God is spirit (honhom) and human beings should worship God through God’s honhom in human beings, which is the ṣkra – the essence of God in humankind that also relates human beings to God.

30 Ephirim-Donkor’s statement is misleading in the sense that one is tempted to identify God with the wind instead of taking the statement metaphorically. I misunderstood him in my earlier reading of his book African Personality and Spirituality: The Role of Abosom and Human Essence. God is mframa (wind) is a transliteration of Jn. 4:24, “God is spirit.”

31 Andreas Dettwiler does not see the phrase πνεύμα ο θεός “as an essentialist definition of God in Godself, but God is Spirit (and Truth) insofar as God communicates his creative, live-giving power to humankind through the word and the destiny of Jesus, his ‘unique Son’ – or non-metaphorically speaking, his authentic Revealer” (2016: 168). Thus, Christ, who bounds us to God, is a reflection of the invisible God (Col. 1:15).
10.6.3. The Honhom Kronkron (Holy Spirit)

The book of Acts records the acts of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the early church. Of great significance to Acts is its contribution to the discussion of pneumatology in the New Testament. First, Jesus predicted the coming of the Spirit as a force for spreading the gospel (Acts 1:8). The entire success of the Christ movement depended on the life support of the Spirit. This is the reason why Luke predicates the apostolic mission with the theophanic alighting of the Spirit (Acts 2; cf. Lk. 24:49). The ecstatic experience of prophetic speaking in new tongues attested to the continuity of the prophetic ministry from the Old Testament times. The expression, “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” means no one was left out in the room, making Peter refer to the accomplishment of Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:28, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.”

Luke describes the coming of the Spirit “as of a rushing mighty wind” (2:2). He uses the Greek term *pnoes*, which is also synonymous with the Akan term *honhom* (wind or breath). The wind analogy appears here in connection with the presence of the Spirit. Luke is careful in his description of the event. First, he does not see the wind as being synonymous with the Spirit, although the metaphor carries in itself the essence of the Spirit as invisible. Second, the presence of the Spirit filled the room in the same way air or wind occupies a space (2:2). Third, cloven tongues like fire (burning air) signified the manifestation of the charisma of speaking in other languages (2:3). Fourth, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (2:4). There is no doubt that the Spirit operates as an outside influence; something from without but now within the community of believers as the driving force of the Christian movement.

The metaphor of “rushing wind” that came to fill them with the Holy Spirit (2:4) was an experience of the Spirit as a vital force. The impact of speaking in an unknown tongue shows the effect of the Spirit on people in the same way spirit/breath/honhom impacts the body with life (Ja. 2:26). Moltmann uses terms like “vitalizing energy” and “vibration” in this context to illustrate that there is always an ignition of life in the experience of the Spirit. The experience is like breathing air, God’s continual breathing upon the soul. Acts 2 significantly represents the breathing in of God’s Spirit. It is from this experience that the gifts are also described as *dunamis* or *energeia* (Acts 1:8) according to Moltmann (1992: 161, 195). The entitative nature

32 The expression does not look like spirit possession since utterances were that of the disciples and not a foreign agent (2:4).
33 To Moltmann, this energy emanates from the Holy Spirit, that which is seen as a well of life. It is not synonymous with the Holy Spirit. He rejects subordination of pneumatology to Christology by looking at the Spirit as the source of energy for creation (Brackney 2019: 98). Molly Marshall comes to a similar conclusion to designate the energy of the Spirit as cosmological. In her book, *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* (2003), Marshall argues that pneumatology must embrace all of creation and recognize the Spirit as a symbol of wholeness, relatedness,
of the Spirit is implicit in Acts 2, even though verse 4 shows that a supernatural agent was at work.

Akan theology designates *honhom (ɔkra)* as that which vivifies the body with life. It defines the destiny of individuals and societies, which is vital to allow the power of God to flow freely among them. The *honhom* is singularly an act of God, an essential quality of God that makes the Akan see human beings as children of God. It remains the only spiritual essence of God in human beings that also defines their spiritual part. The *honhom* is the immaterial extension of God, and it comes into origin as life to creation. The Holy Spirit as a vital principle from God is pictured in Luke as the agent of Christ’s conception (Lk. 1:35). Luke does not say Christ was the Holy Spirit incarnate because that will disagree with the larger activity of the Spirit in the Lukan corpus. Paul uses the vitality of the Spirit as a metaphor to remind the Christians in Rome that “the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Rom. 8:15 NIV). The Spirit is an agent of life, God’s breath, which vivifies and unifies all things in God. To call it *Honhom Kronkron* means the Holy Breath or Spirit of God.

10.6.4. The Metaphysical-cosmological Honhom of God

I have noted in previous discussions the connection between *sunsum* and the creation. All the created things are inspired, making the creation powerful. Several conceptions exist hereof which some are discussed in previous chapters. The conclusions were that *sunsum* exists because of the presence of the deities in the Akan universe. *Sunsum* is not the “creative” power or life-giving principle, but the essential innate power exercised by a natural object, including human beings. It can be soundly understood when one thinks of the nonidentical nature of ɔkra and *sunsum* in the human being, where ɔkra is the life-principle and *sunsum* is the personality. The question, then is, what breathes life in the creation? While I have given several theological reasons why *honhom* addresses the anthropological question of life in the human being, I will now argue that the creative power in creation is the breath or *honhom* of God.

The metaphysical-cosmological dimension of ḥḥūr/πνεῦμα makes the “spirit” a creative and vital force from God. The creation names for God among the Akan are Odomankoma, Onyame, and Onyankopon; these names are not detached from the created things. The introduction of God as energy, creativity, and life. This shift sees the activity of the Spirit as universally necessary. Agyarko sees the activity of the Holy Spirit in a similar sense as the Akan *sunsum* which is the central, unifying vitality that enables a being or object to exercise power and to function in its characteristic manner (Agyarko 2014: 7).
the Creator means that creation itself draws life from God. This is true also for the Jewish accounts of creation. There is no life exclusive of God: “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath [regation] of his mouth” (Ps 33:6). To read the last statement in Akan as “sunsum of his mouth” will account for the veriest tautology, since breath is not identical with sunsum as it is with honhom. The text here shows the synonymity between the speech of God and the breath of God already at play in the creation accounts of Gen. 1. Jesus brings a similar picture into view: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (Jn. 6:63). The synonymity of the “word” and “spirit” is what made Kubat conclude that “the spirit is the mediating force that makes God present” (2016: 301). God is the source of vitality in the whole of creation because God is the inexhaustible source of sustenance for the creation.

How does the creative force from God relate to the Akan concept of honhom? For a better understanding of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology, the notion of animism in the Akan traditional religion needs to be revisited. Rattray had come to the conclusion that the concept of sunsum is the basis of the “animistic creed” of the Asantes (1923: 296). In other words, all things are inspirited, making them active and powerful to interact.34 Several Akan scholars have integrated the notion of animism into their overall assessment of Akan religion, even if the term animism does not always or adequately deal with the panentheistic conception of Akan religion.

Granted, however, that the Akan religion is animistic, it will still agree with the Akan notion of honhom better than sunsum. The classical Latin anima or animus (cognate with the Greek ἀνεμος (ánemos) “wind”) means “air in motion, breath of air,” “breath of life; principle of life,” “soul that survives death; soul of the dead body,” etc. These are also true of the Latin spiritus (air or breath) and the Sanskrit aniti (breathes) (Vanhove 2008: 195, 196). All these are palpable characteristics of the Akan concept of honhom, which is related to breath, wind, air, and the ɔkra.

It can, however, be established that the Akan notion of honhom shares the same cosmological understanding with other ancient traditions on the concept of animism. Hence, the vital conception of the Spirit in the Bible as the “breath of God” agrees with the traditional conception of honhom among the Akan. The creation relies on the breath of God or the honhom

34 George P. Hagan explains the idea of “all things have sunsum” as “in conjunction with the belief that in the world there are entities that are both sunsum and also invisible – as well as entities that are not wholly sunsum, but bear sunsum as an aspect of their nature” (Hagan 1999: 43, 44). The explanation is a summary of the exclusively spiritual and inspirited of Minkus’ categories of sunsum (Minkus 1980).
of God for life (Job 12: 10). The basis for any animistic doctrine among the Akan will be better off if the notion of *honhom* is considered based on the explanation given in this section. Whatever has *honhom* is alive, as the opposite will suggest death (Psalm 150: 6). To reject *sunsum* in this respect also agrees with my conclusion that *sunsum* is only an emanating force, a description of force-beings, and perishable.

The conclusion here is not a denial of the presence of *sunsum* in creation. The innate qualities of creation as *sunsum* have been firmly established; contrary to the notion that *sunsum* is the spirit of life. *Sunsum* as a principle of life is contradictory to what life is dependent upon among the Akan. God is the source of life as the study has rightly pointed out to the *ɔkra*, which proceeds from God and is the principle of life in all living things. The *ɔkra* is the *honhom* (breath of life) from God whose presence means life and absence means death. This idea means the whole creation is united with God and testifies of God’s absolute sovereignty on all. The inspirted universe of *sunsum* serves to remind Akan people that the universe is populated with spirit-beings, whose essence and presence are spiritual and fill the universe with power.

10.7. The Implications of *Honhom Kronkron* Pneumatology on Theology

The current proposal of *honhom* as the vital principle or breath of God calls for some theological affirmations. First, God is the sole giver of life and the source of every life principle. Without God, there is no life. The Akan honorific name for God, *Gbode* (the Creator), makes God the most singular and supreme Creator of the universe. This theological affirmation underlies the Akan understanding of the reality of vital force which is perceived in the world as a key characteristic of God’s workmanship. Ultimately, the creation bears the imprint of the Creator because of the vital force that the Akan have come to find as the animating principle from God. If creation will make sense at all, it is because its primary purpose is affirmed in the vital force. Akan people claim this essential quality of life as the *nkra*bea (destiny) of the vital force (*ɔkra*), which gives purpose to the creation and defines the quality of life. Hence, the concept of God is essential to the Akan livelihood in order to identify the whole essence of life. The affirmation of the Holy Spirit (*Honhom Kronkron*) as the breath of God should help Akan Christians to understand this divine vitality that gives to human beings, the Church, and Christian livelihood its rightful essence. The Church is alive through the mediation of the Holy Spirit (*Honhom Kronkron*), the divine vitality, energy, and life principle from God. This understanding shows that the Church has a destiny to be accomplished.
Second, the presence of God’s breath (Onyame honhom) in creation points to the immanent aspect of God. The whole creation is bound up together to God in a community. The immaterial dimension of the universe reveals the relationship between the immanent revelation of God in creation, and creation itself. Akan understanding of the substance of “being” as in a relationship is construed or embedded in the theological interpretation of an inspired universe in which the material and immaterial are a unitary whole. Hence, the conceptual framework of the Spirit of God as a divine vital force unites the spiritual with the physical. Sakupapa comes to the same conclusion by designating vital force as the unifying force where “the whole of reality is understood as inter-related, without any separation between the sacred and the secular” (2012: 426). The Spirit is a unifying force that makes believers see God as active in their lives. In that sense, we can conclude that our shared unity and interconnectedness is a sacred bond that makes all lives – human beings, animals, and plants – to share in equal worth and to be treated in that respect.

Third, a pneumatological proposal based on honhom as breath or vital principle gives us the possibility to see in the universe that which transcends the created order, i.e., both natural and spiritual forces, and which constitutes the most compelling rationale for the worship of one God. That is to say, if all things, including the pantheon gods and the spiritual forces, rely on God’s vitality, then there is none but one Great Spirit who is directly connected to all, and is therefore to be worshiped directly. Rattray, perceiving what Akan religion would one day look like without the intermediaries (pantheon deities), acknowledged the Akan God as “one Great Spirit, Who, being one, nevertheless manifested Himself in everything around them[the Akan], and taught men to hear His voice in the flow of His waters and in the sound of His winds among the trees” (1959: 24). To underscore the essence of the Holy Spirit as honhom signals the awareness that worship experience is to emphasize God as Spirit, and to approach God in that sense. The Holy Spirit, therefore, leads believers into this worship experience (cf. John 4: 24). As the vital principle leads to God, so the Holy Spirit leads humanity to see God.

Fourth, I have likened the Spirit to the work of the ɔkra, the vital principle that vivifies the whole creation. Besides the giving of life and pulsation, the ɔkra vibrates perceptions that are closely linked to the revelation of God and the will of God for each individual. These are summed up in the Akan expression of the predetermined nkrabea (destiny) to be lived in the world. The Akan explain nkrabea as the “message” God gave to the ɔkra at the moment of departure from God to the mundane life to determine the course of the individual’s life on earth (Gyekye 1978: 104, 108). The nkrabea is God’s “will” in the ɔkra for the individual. Danquah
thinks the *nkra*bea, which is the “message,” is the *intelligence* to be lived (1944: 28, 82, 86, 113, 152). That means, all things being equal, each person is born intelligent to achieve the full measure of their predetermined purpose in life. Danquah further explains that *intelligence* makes each person to be “in direct touch with the Source, and only needs, on this earth, an examplar or intermedium who will take him nearer to the Source or make the Source better understood” (1944: 82). A person’s destiny, therefore, depends on the ability to live the *intelligence* (*nkra*bea), which permits a proper cosmological perception and transcendent possibilities in the fulfillment of one’s duty and spiritual evolutions. There is a strong connection between the *nkra*bea and *sunsum*. It is the *sunsum* that prepares the way for destiny to take place by fighting the evils that seek to harm the individual. However, since the *sunsum* is susceptible to evil, it fails most of the time, exposing the individual to danger.\(^{35}\) The Holy Spirit, as Onyame *Honhom*, empowers believers in their quest to return to God by making way for God’s predetermined will (*nkra*bea) to save the world through Christ to be fulfilled. The Spirit’s prophetic impact, endowment of spiritual gifts, and continual fellowship with believers, endows the Church with transcendent responsibilities for the accomplishment of God’s will for the entire world.

Fifth, how does the proposal of *Honhom Kronkron* pneumatology relate to Christology?\(^ {36}\) A number of Christological proposals exist within the Akan context: Ancestral Christology (Pobee 1979; Bediako 1995), divine conqueror Christology (Appiah-Kubi 1977), and *Nyame*sofo*preko* Christology (Agyarko 2009). Ancestral Christology permits Akan people to see Christ in their spiritual and social needs. Divine conqueror Christology presents Christ as the deliverer from the powers of African evil forces. *Nyame*sofo*preko* Christology seeks to respond to the problem of alienation that exists between God and humanity. So, Christ is seen as God’s unique priest who mediates between God and humanity because he is *Nyamekratasefo* (The ɔ*кра* incarnate of God). Each proposal presents Christ in a unique way out of the Akan social and spiritual experience.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that Akan theologians have ignored theologization of the concept of the Abosom as a Christological model. The Abosom are mediating spiritual agents who manage the ecology, including humanity. Their involvement in humanity is both ontological and historical; ontological in the sense that the Abosom transmit or incarnate their essence,

\(^ {35}\) The Akan notion of *sunsum* is like a bodyguard who protects the ɔ*кра* from the evils that seek to harm the individual. However, the *sunsum* is not always reliable as it can be knocked about or can be contaminated with evil (Danquah 1944: 83, 87).

\(^ {36}\) More details can be found in Agyarko (2009).
known to the Akan as *ntorɔ* and *sunsum*, in creating human beings.\(^{37}\) Hence, human beings are by nature Abosom in human flesh (Ephirim-Donkor 2016). Historically, the Abosom have always been part of the Akan through the religious expression of the roles they play as intermediaries between God and the Akan, which has also been the source of moral and ethical expressions. Therefore, the place of the Abosom in human life and wellbeing, as well as the entire creation, seems to have messianic motifs embedded in the immanence and incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Should the Akan see Jesus as the anointed Ṣbosom?\(^{38}\)

The development of a contextual Christology based on the Abosom is not supposed to be a subject of discussion here. Nonetheless, the current proposal for a *honhom* pneumatology agrees with the existing Christologies, namely: ancestral, divine conqueror, and *Nyamekrateasefo* Christologies. All these Christologies help us to understand the different models of Akan Christology which are directly connected to *honhom* pneumatology. *Honhom*, the preexistent breath of God or Ṣkra, creates all things and dwells in all things. Activities like animation and inspiration are all essential roles of *honhom* in Akan worldview. Whatever becomes a human being needs this divine life entity else life is impossible. If we take Ancestral Christology and *Nyamesofopreko* Christology as examples, ancestors exist because they were once human beings or *akrateasefoɔ* (living souls). The survival of Ṣkra after death and its posthumous spirituality as an ancestor makes both Ancestral and *Nyamesofopreko* Christologies pneumatological Christologies. Thus, the vital role of *honhom* in Akan cosmology shapes our view of reality in the relationship between the Spirit and Christology. The Spirit’s creative activity in the birth of Christ and its indwelling presence in Christ affirms how pneumatology is directly related to Christology.

In summary, the New Testament writers have grounded the manifestation of the Spirit in the Christ-event in relation to the movement of the Church as crucial to understanding the person and ministry of Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit, as an agent in the conception and ministry of Jesus Christ, brings to mind how biblical pneumatology legitimates the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Matt 3: 16; Mk. 1:10; Lu. 3:22; 4:18; Acts 10:38). The Holy Spirit brings to our understanding the enlightenment of the teachings of Christ (Jn. 14:26; 16:13, 14). This is an epistemological function of the Spirit in relation to the Church and the world at large. The

---

\(^{37}\) An Akan proverb goes, Ṣbosom a Ṣma mma no, na Ṣfa mma, literally, “The god who gives children, also takes children.”

\(^{38}\) Danquah had already raised a question on such a Christology. He thinks the gods are many and of uneven propensities, hence, a future messiah for the Akan would come as a “Nana or elder, a father ‘Nyame’ of the people” (1944: 8). Danquah’s statement and his exposition on Akan ancestral cult laid the foundation for Ancestral Christology.
notion of *honhom* as the reality of the vital force, through which also all things (visible or invisible) have their reality of being, helps to unravel the mysteries of biblical Christology. The Spirit (*Honhom*) incarnates Christ in the believer as his vital force. As a person’s whole existence and capacities are dependent upon the vital force (*okra*), so the body of Christ, the Church, is alive and active through the *Honhom Kronkron*, who enlives the Church, the body of Christ, by its charismatic force.

10.8. Conclusion

The identification of the spirit with “breath” or “wind” or as “the principle of life” has been the theological justification for *honhom* as the basis for contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. I have shown that the word *sunsum* is not the only term Akan people use to describe spiritual realities. Among other things discussed in this chapter is the nature of the Spirit according to the Bible and how that understanding affects the designation, translation and understanding of the Holy Spirit in Akan languages. Given the various dimensions of the Spirit in both the Old and New Testament, the question of the nature of the Spirit arises for the Akan reading of the Bible. It has become apparent that the nature of *sunsum* is not outrightly a “spirit,” i.e. a spiritual entity. The implications of that undertaking underly the central thesis of my study that has challenged the already established notion of the *sunsum* as a “spirit” instead of an emanating spiritual force. As a spiritual force, it can act in spiritual activities and has the ability to interact with other spiritual beings. All these characteristics and many others define the *sunsum* as a spiritual element. However, the concept of *sunsum* does not suffice for the development of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. The ethereality of the nature of the spirit as air, wind, and principle of life agrees with the Akan notion of *honhom* better than *sunsum*. *Honhom* provides the basis for appropriately redefining the spiritual worldview of Akan people for the development of a contextual Christian theology and practice and, broadly, for academic learning.
ANANSE NTONTAN

“The spider’s web”

Adinkra symbol of wisdom, creativity, craftiness, intelligence, etc. Ananse (spider) is a heroic character in Africans’ folklore whose extraordinary ingenuity is only comparable to God. An Akan maxim attributes Ananse Kokroko (The Great Spider) to God. Ananse stands for wisdom and knowledge as the true definition of heroism.
Chapter 11  

General Summary and Conclusion

Throughout this study, I have reached some specific conclusions on the nature of sunsum and shown the various possibilities of analyzing it. Generally, Akan people believe in an inspired universe in which everything is animated and interpenetrated by an immaterial force or power called sunsum. The overall implication has been that everything in its natural state is inspired to exercise power. Hence, the relationship between nature and the Akan is the most sacred thing there is; it is the source of the Akan’s energy and their link to the supernatural. Scholars of Akan religion grapple with the nature of sunsum – whether it is supposed to be a “spirit” or spiritual force.

Through a historiographical investigation, I identified the different schools of thought within the historical-scholarly discussions regarding the nature of sunsum. Christaller, the chief architect of Twi scholarship, translates sunsum as soul, i.e. the spirit of the human being, and in most part of his publications, especially the Twi translation of the Bible, he uses honhom to translate the divine spirit in the entire Bible. Captain Rattray, by far the most distinguished European anthropologist of Akan religion, translates sunsum as both soul and spirit, giving way to a pneumatic view of sunsum. Danquah, the first indigenous scholar to launch a thorough investigation into Akan religion, rejects the pneumatic view of sunsum by erstwhile foreign writers. He designates sunsum as only a prototype called esu (nature) from God and the basis of personality, not spirit. Meyerowitz regards sunsum as the personal soul, the ego or conscious part of the individual. She likens sunsum to a shadow and concludes that it is the sunsum that becomes an ancestor after death. Busia thought of sunsum as a spiritual gift responsible for personality, personal power, and a spiritual bond between a father and child. The overall understanding of Busia makes sunsum only a personality or charisma. Minkus climaxes the pneumatic construction of sunsum by her two categories of the nature of sunsum: the exclusively spiritual (ye sunsum), and the inspired, i.e. those that have sunsum (wɔ sunsum). Ephirim-Donkor defines sunsum in relation to the Abosom (pantheon deities) whose essence are thought to be sunsum, and the transmission of their sunsum results in creating human beings. Hence, the human being is the Abosom incarnate.

In contemporary Akan philosophy, the approach to the study of sunsum shifts from objectivity to subjective interpretation. Wiredu challenges the pneumatic character of sunsum as not
outrightly spirit, but quasi-material. He does not translate at all _sunsum_ into English, out of fear of contaminating Akan philosophical ideas. His philosophy of quasi-physicalism argues that there is nothing spiritual in Akan religious ideas except what is quasi-physical or quasi-material. Safro accepts Wiredu’s quasi-physicalism. Gyekye and Majeed, on the other hand, oppose the philosophy of quasi-physicalism and argue that it is philosophically indefensible. Their argument favors the pneumatic nature of _sunsum_ as correctly a “spirit.”

Besides the different perspectives each scholar draws from the discussion, I have shown in the study that they do not disagree much on the reality of _sunsum_ as a spiritual essence or substance of natural objects, i.e. all things are inspirited with the potential quality for good or evil. Therefore, the Akan is aware of the spiritual world and how spirits and spiritual forces impinge on the physical.

From that background, the research raised some fundamental questions such as whether _sunsum_ can form the basis of a contextual Akan Christian pneumatology, or the possibility that there are other ways of speaking of contextual Akan pneumatology. How do we speak of the Holy Spirit among the Akan people of West Africa? Throughout the study, I used the term Akan pneumatology to articulate the concept of spirits and the spiritual in Akan cosmology. My research has carried out a critical investigation into the spiritual worldview of the Akan people, particularly on _sunsum_, to understand the notion of the “spirit” and how that understanding affects a contextual application of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. These have been the main theses that have occupied the entire research, and my answer has been that _sunsum_ as an Akan spiritual reality, emanating force responsible for personality development, and an essential quality of objects and “beings,” is correct. With reference to the question whether there is another possibility of speaking about contextual Akan pneumatology, my research has answered this question with a categorical and firm yes.

In the general introduction, I mentioned about the rigorous theological discussions in the study of the concept of _sunsum_. Agyarko’s theological works in Akan pneumatology bring to view the importance of _sunsum_ in the spiritual formation of Akan people. The strength of the _sunsum_ pneumatology lies in its emphasis on God as _Sunsum_ and how the One (Onyame) and the many (all forms of life) are related through God’s _sunsum_. In other words, _sunsum_ is immanent, transcendent, and an archetype of “Godliness” that shapes the ethical and moral life of human beings in relation to God and the rest of creation. Agyarko’s contextualization of the Holy Spirit as Onyame _Sunsum_ affirms the vital role of the Spirit in effecting a regeneration of heart in human beings, and through them, of the entire creation. The theological framework of the
sunsum pneumatology, alongside other theological works in Akan realities, are helping to minimize the continuous pessimistic attitude towards the Akan traditional religion.

My proposal has revolved around the introduction of the Akan concept of honhom, which I have argued in favor of for a responsible discussion of a contextual Akan pneumatology. It has been shown that the function of honhom has a polysemic value in terms of describing what is meta-empirical as well as unseen realities such as breath, wind, air, soul, and spirit. All these characteristics are identical with the biblical רוח and πνεῦμα and are directly linked to how Akan people understand life as a whole. Life is interrelated by a single animating principle, which is Godself, called honhom. Through honhom, God, who is the source of life and creator of all things, becomes immanent within and through creation. My argument has followed that the nature and operation of the Spirit corresponds better to the notion of honhom and, therefore, should be the basis of contextual Akan Christian pneumatology. The new proposal is my contribution to Christian theology in keeping with such areas of importance as Akan spirituality and religious construct.

I will now move to propose some approaches towards the study of contextual Akan Christian pneumatology for the future. This shows that my research is not an end in itself but a means to an end. The entire study has shown that there is a growing interest in African pneumatology. This growing interest is not detached from the way the majority of African people want to live their lives. In the end, contextual pneumatology is a spiritual revival that has a profound impact on questions of identity, i.e. the “being” of the human and its various paradigms of human progress. It seeks to elevate ethical and moral standards for people to live by the spiritual values of the Spirit. This kind of a pneumatological framework requires serious research by and among theologians, and the adoption of right approaches. Methodologies help researchers to review specific procedures, from both present and historical information available and relevant to the research subject. The approaches in the next paragraphs are proposed to recognize the different pathways to the study of contextual pneumatology.

The first is a historiographical approach to contextual pneumatology. A historiographical approach traces the historical development of the construction of Akan spirituality throughout the various phases of Akan scholarship. It investigates ideas that have impacted and shaped the thinking of scholars with the purpose of drawing the best possible perspective from the theories, interpretations, and approaches employed by different Akan scholars. With this approach, two things need to be considered, that is, ‘emic’ and ‘etic’ perspectives. The emic approach takes an objective view from the cultural context, whereas the etic approach is a descriptive view of
the researcher’s own understanding. A historiographical approach should deal with both approaches to clearly spell out an indigenous conception from ideas of the researcher. This in no way means a reduction of any evolution of cultural ideas; instead, it ensures that adaptations and dynamisms are properly construed. In keeping with this, a historiographical approach attempts to assess the various ideological developments in Akan pneumatology and the contradictions existing between the historiographical framework and theoretical ideas. When it comes to the meaning and nature of sunsum and honhom, there are various theories existing, including ideological discrepancies, disguised Christian views, and subjective ideas. Therefore, a historiographical approach will help future researchers to investigate the ideological dynamisms of the historical thinking of scholars, and how that investigation impacts on academic discussions.

The second is the anthropological approach to contextual pneumatology. Anthropological studies on Akan pneumatology were basically the works of Christaller, Rattray, Meyerowitz, Busia, Minkus, and Ephirim-Donkor. Their approach was anthropological due to its focus on sociocultural elements of Akan religion: folklore, rituals, beliefs, taboos, and symbols. Several other scholars have significantly contributed to this area of research. Early anthropologists used an ethnographic approach to conclude that sunsum is the basis of Akan spirituality. A majority of them regarded sunsum as a patrilineal spirit responsible for personality formation and the basis for a person’s spirituality. Further investigation shows that sunsum is indirectly a divine spiritual element manifesting itself through the pantheon deities and finally through the father to his child. That conclusion is not limited to the human being, but to every natural object. The anthropological approach should recognize the pneumatological value of honhom and its adequate definition of the human being. Students of Akan contextual pneumatology should be able to explore and establish that there is apparently no distinction between the spirit of the human being and the divine spirit. As a consequence, they should be able to reconstruct Akan pneumatology from a single object of God’s omnipresence.

The third is a philosophical approach to contextual pneumatology. A philosophical approach deals with questions and logical constructs of conceptualizations. Its purpose is to analyze results of events in a logical and scientific method. Akan philosophers of sunsum use epistemological and critical analyses of available information to explain the spirituality of the human being. Notable scholars in this field include Danquah, Kwasi Wiredu, Kwame Gyekye, Kwame Safro, and Majeed. These philosophers approach Akan studies from an analytical subjectivism perspective. Different opinions exist among the philosophers concerning the
nature of the *sunsum*. For instance, Danquah thinks it is only an experience or personality and not necessarily a spirit. When Danquah said Onyankopon is the *Sunsum* of Odomankoma, he did not mean to say Nyankopon is a spirit or is spiritual but is instead an experience or personality of Odomankoma in the world (1968: 113). Wiredu and Safro think *sunsum* is quasi-material and not pneumatic as it perishes with the deceased. Wiredu is not convinced that a spirit can perish since it is supposed to be immortal. Gyekye and Majeed emphatically regard *sunsum* as a spirit contrary to the philosophy of quasi-physicalism. Gyekye’s understanding of *sunsum* and *okra* turns out to be constitutive of a single entity. The philosophical arguments in the larger context of Akan studies reveal the value the scholars place in search of a better understanding of Akan pneumatology. Future contextual pneumatology should consider all the philosophical assumptions to align (not disregard) them to the research methodology. With the philosophy of quasi-physicalism, a contextual pneumatology based on a philosophical assumption is almost here with us. In other words, theologians should prepare to embrace an open discussion from various interpretations of Akan concepts of the spirit and to engage with them responsibly.

The fourth is a theological approach to contextual pneumatology. There are different theological methods existing simply because different perspectives of faith and religion exist. In general, a theological approach is a scientific study of religion that seeks to understand the ways in which the internal tenets of a particular religion or religions are understood or expressed in a rational way for its adherents. This approach is content based, i.e. internal analyses of information deriving from within the particular religious context. Within the Akan religion, a theological approach has been an ongoing work and this, to a greater extent, underlies the study of Akan pneumatology. For example, Danquah, Busia, and Minkus related *sunsum* indirectly to God. Gyekye defines *sunsum* as mystical, unempirical, and nonphysical. He categorically refers to it as deriving from Onyame with a strong emphasis that *sunsum* is “a universal spirit, manifesting itself differently in the various beings and objects in the natural world” (Gyekye 1987: 69-73). The conception designates *sunsum*, from the onset, as the essence of God manifesting in a panentheistic manner. All these definitions are theological motives of some sort about Akan religion. The theological approach heightens upon the introduction of Agyarko’s *sunsum* pneumatology. Agyarko’s use of an ecumenical approach in dialogue with Akan religion is a significant step towards the outcomes of theological methodologies in the studies of Akan pneumatology. Theological branches such as practical theology, biblical
studies, systematic and ethics, and history of Christianity, and their subdivisions are all capable of theologizing a contextual Akan pneumatology.

The fifth is a scientific approach to contextual pneumatology. Should we envision an empirical approach to the study of Akan pneumatology? My answer to this question is affirmative. With this, I am not referring to the post-modern idea of spiritual but not religious; rather, I am interested in a more progressive view that will allow scientists to discover that the Akan notion of sunsum and honhom are compatible with physical science. Kwame Safro is keen about this when he writes, “the modern quasi-physicalist does not deny that as our discovery of physical laws proceeds and our scientific knowledge increases, we may come to accept some or all the quasi-physical objects as bona fide physical objects” (1992: 193). Quasi-physicalism is a philosophical term that describes a category of objects that lie between the world of natural objects and the realm of the spiritual or immaterial. Quasi-physical objects somehow respond to limited laws of physicalism (Safro 1992: 193). The future proposal of a scientific discovery of quasi-physical objects makes the theory a hypothesis for further investigation. Our current understanding of sunsum as a spiritual force may one day become material; this would be the beginning of the relationship between traditional pneumatology and science. On the contrary, advancement in science should cause Akan scholars to worry about the future of religious spirituality as the world appears to some as moving away from an immaterial cosmology to a totally material one.

Overall, my research has shown that the description of sunsum as the intrinsic power of a being or an object or an emanating spiritual force is compatible with the general understanding of the Akan concept of sunsum. This conclusion does not in any way diminish the various roles sunsum play in Akan culture and religion. The study has also shown that my critique of the pneumatic nature of sunsum is sustainable because sunsum is not adequate to articulate a contextual Christian pneumatology, and by introducing honhom pneumatology, I have shown that sunsum is not the ultimate vehicle (neither is honhom) with which to articulate contextual Akan pneumatology. For the new proposal, I am very much aware that honhom pneumatology is not without some limitations. An example is how the two terms, honhom and sunsum, relate with each other. Is sunsum an aspect of honhom, or vice versa? My research has offered very little details to answer this question. Therefore, future research should raise this and many other questions to deal with it accordingly.
FIGURES

Figure 1. Map showing the Akan ethnic group in the tropical areas of Ghana and the southeast of la Cote d’Ivoire.
**FIGURES**

**Figure 2 Left.** Rev. Johann Gottlieb Christaller (19 November 1827–16 December 1895), the architect of Ghanaian Twi literary scholarship. **Figure 3 Right.** The inside cover of the first Twi Bible translation by Christaller and published by the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1871.

**Figure 4 Below:** Image of the Golden Stool alongside *asuman* (amulets).
# Glossary of Twi terms from the thesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abosom (pl)</td>
<td>Pantheon gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrewa</td>
<td>Old lady (Nana)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abusua</td>
<td>Clan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adinkra</td>
<td>Symbols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adwene</td>
<td>Mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akɔm</td>
<td>Prophecy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asamando</td>
<td>Hades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayie (pl. Abayifoɔ)</td>
<td>Witch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benkum</td>
<td>Left side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esu</td>
<td>Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esum</td>
<td>Darkness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ėboɔ</td>
<td>Stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fante</td>
<td>Fante tribe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honhom</td>
<td>Breath/wind/spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honhom Kronkron</td>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huaba</td>
<td>Semen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyɛbea/hyɛbɛ</td>
<td>Appointed time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmoatia (pl)</td>
<td>Dwarfs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mogya</td>
<td>Blood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpanyinfoɔ (pl)</td>
<td>Elders/Ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nana</td>
<td>Eminent one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nananom (pl)</td>
<td>Elders/Ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nifa</td>
<td>Right side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nkrabea</td>
<td>Destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nsamanfo (pl)</td>
<td>Ghosts/Ancestors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nsem</td>
<td>Words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nsumankwaa</td>
<td>Medicinal Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nsumankwaahene</td>
<td>Chief of Medicines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nton</td>
<td>Totem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ntorɔ</td>
<td>Semen/ Paternal spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odomankoma</td>
<td>God (Creator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onipa (‘Nipa)</td>
<td>Human being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onyame (‘Nyame)</td>
<td>God (generic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onyame sunsum</td>
<td>God’s power/Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onyankopon</td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ŗbosom</td>
<td>Pantheon deity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okomfoɔ (Akomfoɔ)</td>
<td>Traditional priest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ŗкра</td>
<td>Life principle/ Soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ŗkrateasefo</td>
<td>Living soul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saman</td>
<td>Ghost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samanadzie</td>
<td>Ancestral world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sankofa</td>
<td>Go back to take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasabonsam</td>
<td>Forest monster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sāsā</td>
<td>Revengeful spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sika Dwa Kofi</td>
<td>The Golden Stool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suban</td>
<td>Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suman</td>
<td>Charm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsum</td>
<td>Personality, Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsum bone</td>
<td>Evil spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsum Kronkron</td>
<td>Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsum mu</td>
<td>Spiritual/Mystical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunsuma</td>
<td>Shadow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ta Kora</td>
<td>The god Tano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tumi</td>
<td>Power/Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tweduampɔn</td>
<td>Dependable God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twi</td>
<td>An Akan language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wiase</td>
<td>World (under the sun)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


Byrne, Andrew. “Some Ins and Outs of Inculturation.” *Annales Theologici* 4 (1990), 109-149.


Christaller, Johann G. “A collection of 3,600 Tshi Proverbs in Use Among the Africans of the Gold Coast as Speaking the Asante and Fante Language, Collected, together with their Variations, and Alphabetically Arranged,” Basel, 1879.


——. Anyamesem anase Kyerew Kronkron Apam-dedaw ne Apam-foforo nsem wo Twi kasa mu. The Holy Bible translated from the original tongues into the Tshi-Chwee-language, spoken by the tribes of Akuapem, Akem, Asante, Fante, etc., Gold Coast. Basel: B. & F.B.S., 1871.

——. Christian Messenger for Basel German Mission Church on the Gold Coast, W. Africa. (a bimonthly paper) 2, no. 12 (December 1888).


Christaller, Johann G, Asante, David, Opoku, Theophilus. “Anyamesem anase Kyerew Kronkron Apam-dedaw ne Apam-foforo nsem wo Twi kasa mu” (The Holy Bible translated from the original tongues into the Twi language), Basel, 1871.


Kifon, Bongmba Elias (Ed). The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions. MA:


266


268


———. *God’s Unique Priest (Nyamesofopreko): Christology In the Akan Context (Doctoral dissertation)*. University of the Western Cape, South Africa, 2009.


Turkson, Peter, and Frans J. S. Wijsen. *Inculturation: Abide by the Otherness of Africa and the Africans: Papers from a Congress (October 21-22, 1993, Heerlen, the Netherlands) at the Occasion of 100 Years Sma-Presence in the


Filmography

272


_Sunsum Mu Ndwuma (Spiritual works)_ . Dir. Theophilus Amoabeng. United Pictures, 2011. Film.


**Websites**


“Nana Kwaku Bonsam collects his juju from fake pastor.”


Mbiti, John, “The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion.”


Music


Nyame Sunsum Siane Bra (Descend Spirit of God), A popular Akan recreational song

Sunsum Kronkron Bra (Come Holy Spirit) by Eld. Emmanuel Kwasi Mireku, Church of Pentecoste, Koforidua.