

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY,  
KUMASI, GHANA**

**A VISUAL DOCUMENTATION OF SELECTED AKAN MYTHS**

**KNUST**

**By**

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Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree**

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

**(African Art and Culture)**

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work towards the Master of Philosophy in African Art and Culture and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published by another person, nor material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree of the University, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

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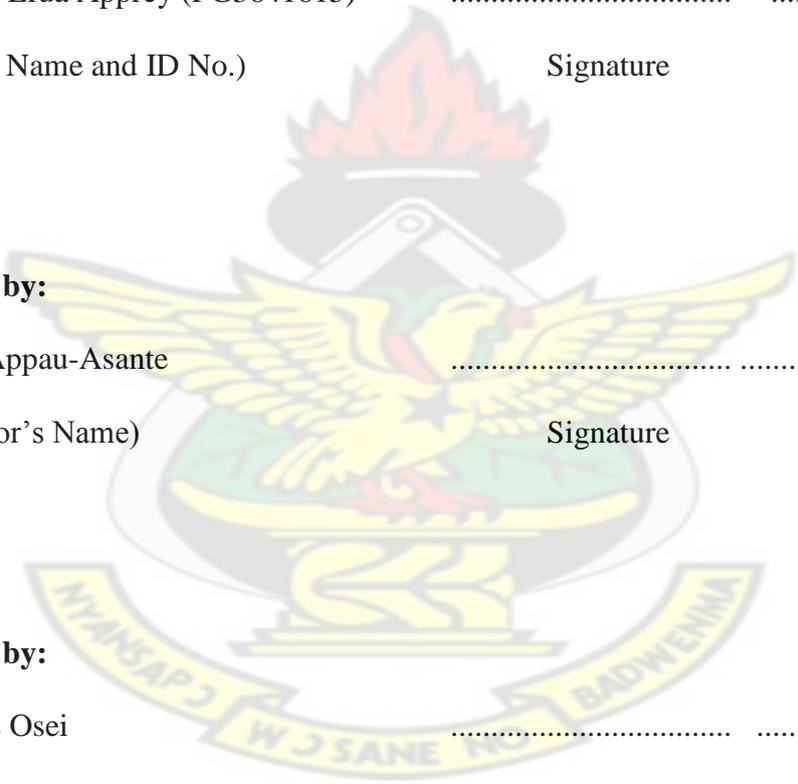
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*Nia ɔnnim no sua, ohu – He who does not know, can know by learning.*

*(Asante proverb)*

Although this is my handiwork, however I say in earnest that “it was by many hands and heads that has brought to fruition this academic vision”. My journey towards an MPhil has being one of sheer discovery and mastery of self; led entirely by Jehovah God through Jesus Christ my Lord, to whom I owe un-payable eternal gratitude.

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## ABSTRACT

Social interactions have given proof to the many assertions and conclusions of both traditionalist, and academics of the receding nature of appreciation for the countless traditional precepts that define the Akan individual, in recent times. The study aims at giving greater insights and clarity to perceptions and attitudes surrounding the phenomenon, most importantly to provide a working document which can be used by cultural educators, researchers and other stakeholders in the field. Topics explored and reviewed includes, the field of mythology, its concept, and significance, also a comparative examination of some key Asante traditional symbols in relation to design thinking for illustrations. These topics were in line with the research objectives of; a) identification and description of myths, b) classification of diverse Akan myths c) creating visual illustrations of selected myths based on themes that emerge from findings. The phenomenological approach to research employed enhanced the depth of data retrieved from respondents as it dictates a flexibility and adaptive nature of the researcher in the exploration of the subject under study. The accessible population included community members and traditional leaders all within notable indigenous communities, made possible and effective through the purposive sampling methods used. The study revealed that Akans are highly spiritual people and this reflects in their mythical beliefs that influence their customs and practices; as it is relevant in some communities today. Five classifications of myths were identified: 1) myths about death and the afterlife, 2) myths about protection and social governance, 3) myths about births and children, 4) myths about gods and tutelary spirits, and 5) myths about creatures and beings. Further studies can be conducted into the individual categories of myths identified in addition to developing abstract visual documentation of the myths discussed in this study.

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

The chapter begins with a background to the study, a statement of the problem and objectives and the research questions. It also highlights the scope of work and the limitations of the study. Other significant areas covered include the importance of study and organization of the chapters.

### 1.2 Background to the Study

Diverse African societies, groups and clans have certain peculiar ideas, customs and beliefs that are unique and differentiates them (Beattie, 1964). Norms, beliefs, traditions have long since been regular actions of the populace of villages, communities and societies in many Ghanaian cultures and beyond (Gyekye, 1995). These have been viewed in the lens of the dynamics of cultures of societies while inspiring and to an extent influencing the politics, religion, art and the general day to day activities of that given society. These equally determine their general outlook and worldview on diverse issues. In contradiction to today's mode and the system of education where instructions are found in books, the indigenous Africans kept their instructions within the many different forms of arts and beliefs (Zinkurative and Colacrai, 1999).

The African is generally spiritual and religious, and thus it permeates all aspects of our culture, such as rites and beliefs which invariably is performed with a religious outlook in one way or the other (Rodney, 1972). As such for the African and the larger community he belongs to, it is a constant immersion in a spiritual participation which starts from birth and continues after death. As explained by Dukor (2015) in 'Philosophical Significance of Myths and Symbols', the secular and the sacred are

indistinguishable within the traditional African community. This, therefore, becomes the wheel by which all aspects of their lives revolve. Through art, religion and customs, the entire community becomes a composite unit (Davidson, 1969). Most of these cultural elements like customs or art were presented in symbolic forms that confront individuals within a community in their daily endeavors. Thus, such knowledge is usually community-based, accessible to all and not just a privileged few. For that reason, the indigenous African becomes a student all his life because he is constantly confronted with various ideas that help him develop the appreciation of culture while gaining understanding of the culture as a whole through its practice, this increases awareness and demonstrates the knowledge of the ethical norms of the given society (Bates, 2000).

The Akan people are a historically important ethnic group of West Africa. With over 20 million members the Akans are one of the biggest ethnic groups in West Africa today (Antubam, 1963). The artistic craftiness of the Akans is seen in diverse ways, from their traditional bronze and gold weights, which were made using the lost wax casting method to the interestingly educative wood carvings of stools and staffs. Their beautiful patterned textiles and above all, their creatively crafted proverbs and sayings filled with both humour and wisdom. These are evident in their proverbs, satirical legends, fables and their mythical beliefs. Their wide-ranging expertise is not only essential to the livelihood of their communities, then, but very necessary now in contemporary times.

It may be undisputed that all persons carry within themselves perceptions, ideas or viewpoint of one thing or the other which becomes to a large extent the bases for the formation of their decision (Wiredu, 2005). These decisions are arrived at consciously or otherwise, yet they end up becoming one's knowledge or concept of whatever they perceived, which consequently forms part of a person's intellect. The case of the

misconstruing and disregard of African philosophy seem to be owing to its unemployment of “scientific” or “technical” application in its formulations as perceived by foreign philosophers. A view shared by some Western academics and philosophers who believe unless principles such as Aristotelian or another form of logic is employed in the reflective activity one cannot be deemed to be philosophizing (Omogbe, 1998). It could be in like manner that some African customs, cultural and traditional practices are very often referred to as signs of backwardness, primitive, barbaric and outmoded (Quan-Baffour, 2008). An assertion explained by Oladipo (2010) as the doing of the contemporary African neglecting our history to be written and misinterpreted by others, ‘when Africans leave off everything that makes them African’s traditions, culture, thought system they become evoluè, an original evolving into a lesser thing’. ‘At the end of it all foreign misconceptions about African is due to the Africans adoption of their cultures ‘in a cheap search for belongingness’ (Sarpong, 2004).

Ethnic groups worldwide have various beliefs concerning different aspects of their lives, of both seen and unseen things, with myths or mythology being a strong component of most beliefs (Apostle, 1981). These mythical stories are the basis for their very existence and make them unique. What they are, where they are now and what they have been before and where they are going (Boaduo, 2011).

Myths are a worldwide phenomenon occurring in most cultures, thus could be grouped as one of the universal elements of a culture. They date back to a time when written literature was nonexistent and was passed down orally from one generation to the other. Myths deal with the basic questions about the origin of the world and human experiences and because of its relatedness to all aspects of life, it helps offer illumination into diverse aspects of a culture. Myths are passed down in the form of sages, legends, folktales, or a

combination of any. Yet, irrespective of its form, a myth can be distinguished by its obvious underlying purpose, a reference to a particular culture and its attempt to explain an otherwise unknown, forgotten or misunderstood phenomenon (Dundes, 1984). The attempt to collate, classify and interpret myths from a particular culture is termed as mythology. Mythology could also be explained as the collection of different kinds of myths (Tyler, 2007). There are many symbols that are depicted in Akan (Asante) kente, proverbs, Adinkra prints that emphasizes myths and symbols, philosophical and psychological narratives of life's practices among the Asante's (Wiredu, 2005).

### **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

Anecdotal evidence and preliminary studies on Akan myths suggest there are varied perceptions about myths within the Akan people, of which some (of these myths) are believed to have negative connotations. The Kumasi Traditional Council comprises towns that speak Twi, which is synonymous with the Akans. Typically, one would expect that a young person from any of the Akan tribes is aware of the myths that have existed since the time of their forefathers to drive home to the current generations of people within this society. In localities such as Bantama, Amakom, Ejisu Besease which are known to be typical Akan towns, have palaces which are headed by chiefs of those areas and hence people in the communities are expected to know the myths that pertain to such communities.

A cursory observation has shown that the lack of documentation on Akan myths is among the key pressing issues for researchers in the field. Consequently, this has rendered Akan myth an area difficult to research due to scarcity of information or otherwise a grey area which is underrepresented. Although the problem has existed over a period, there seem to be little studies which focus on Akan myths intently, and again, it appears that no

official report has been cited as having examined this problem and the extent to which it is likely to affect the future generations who would someday become leaders in the societies, hence, this study.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The fundamental rationale of the research is to provide a working document that could be adopted by cultural educators as well as African art students to facilitate clear and easy understanding of Akan cultural beliefs precisely its mythology. However, for the purpose of this study, three objectives have been formulated as follows:

1. To identify and describe selected myths of the Akan people.
2. To classify Akan myths from the study's findings.
3. To create visual illustrations based on emerging themes from the study.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

This research intends to address three key questions necessary to understand the field being investigated. The questions are:

1. What are some of the myths of Akan people in Ghana?
2. What classifications can be drawn from Akan myths?
3. How might the identified myths be translated into visual illustration?
4. Why are the selected myths relevant in contemporary Akan culture?

#### **1.6 Delimitation**

The study focuses on visual documentation of selected Akan myths within Amakom and Ejisu areas. Participants included key informants from whom narrative regarding the myths of the area is told. The researcher sought information from the Okyeame, the

Linguist of the area. Focus group discussion was also held with the people of *Ejisu Besease* at the chief's palace and Amakom Palace.

### **1.7 Limitations**

The limitations of the study were such that interviewing only four key informants has a level to which the findings of this study could be generalized. However, a study of this nature which makes use of qualitative research design, specifically phenomenology, is hard to make generalization due to its small sample size and hence, this limits the extent to which the findings could be generalized. A longitudinal study may have been better served well instead of a cross-sectional study which seeks to collect data at one point in time.

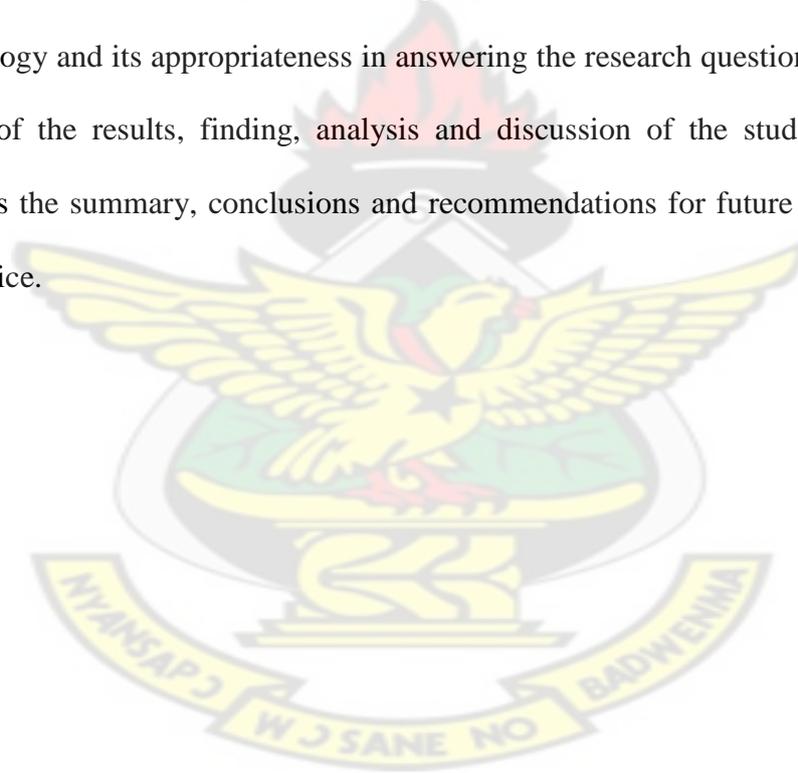
### **1.8 Importance of the Study**

For academia, this is supposed to be a reference point for others to refer to when studying or researching on Akan myths. Second, the illustration offers certain knowledge into Akan symbols and what participants would want to show as a true representation of the myths. The illustrations in section 4.3.1 to 4.3.30 give readers an idea about significant elements in the Akan culture. Academics in the field are likely to benefit from the invaluable insights of this study's findings on a seemingly grey area in the field of African mythology. Individuals and communities who are acquainted with the mythical beliefs of Akans may find this study interesting when completed and this could serve as a point of for generations yet unborn. The Ministry of Tourism as well the National Commission on Chieftaincy and Culture could gain some helpful insights in how these myths have helped maintain the culture of the Akans. As this information appears to be known to only a selected few based on their position in the society. Policymakers

(nationally and internationally) could gain helpful insights into the study by reading future publication arising from the study and making an informed decision on the subject.

### **1.9 Organization of the Chapters**

Chapter One encompasses, the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, delimitations and limitations of the study, importance of study, organization of the chapters and definition of terms. Chapter Two is made up of the review of related literature and how it is related to Akan myths in the selected communities. Chapter Three highlights on the chosen research design and methodology and its appropriateness in answering the research questions. Chapter Four consists of the results, finding, analysis and discussion of the study. Chapter Five comprises the summary, conclusions and recommendations for future research, policy and practice.



## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### 2.1 Overview

This chapter deals with related literature relevant to the study under theories available on the topic. The topics reviewed include the concept of mythology, significance of mythology to African communities, documentation and the significance of visual documentation.

#### 2.2 The Concept of Mythology

Myth as a term is derived from the Greek word *mythos*, meaning 'word' or 'story' (Madu, 1996). Myth has been defined by some researchers in different contexts. A myth is a traditional story which is orally passed on from one generation to the next and believed to be literally true by the culture that produced it, about gods and goddesses, heroes, heroines, and other real and fantastic creatures, taking place in *primaeva*l or remote times (Mercatante, 1988).

Okpewho (1983) describes myths as a set of ideas about man and his environment. Likewise, myths helped to bring a descriptive order into the world of the primitive man and aided in better understanding his environment and its critical elements. Thus myths can be considered as having the power to present a clear outlook of a people to the onlooker or foreigner (Day, 1987).

Myths much like African religion that has no known founders yet has spread and cut deeper than the possible intent of its forerunners (Mbiti, 1991). It is not merely the existence of writing documents that validate a people but the very presence of an identifiable set of systems, rules or practices that remains unfazed by time. So through

the study of languages, legends, stories, myths and proverbs, we get a glimpse of the interrelationships among the different peoples and their worldviews (Kunene, 1980).

Malinowski (1922), further has described “myths in primitive culture as a pragmatic charter for primitive faith and moral wisdom”. According to him, a myth serves as a clear presentation of the outlook of the life of people living in communities as well as objective and permanent philosophy of life. Myths definitely do tell us about certain realities including religious truths, people’s understanding of their environment, their geographical history, medicine and their social and political institutions (Metuh, 1999). Thus myths are used to express the views of the people concerning the existence of man, gods, the universe, their fears and aspirations in life. Again, that myths are stories which are believed to be true and has its origin in the far distant past history of a people. Alagoa (1978), argues that myths are historical information transmitted orally through the process of oral transmission that is peculiar to each village, town and community.

The definition for myth is not only limited to the thoughts and ideas of only researchers. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, myth is a story handed down in oral form from our forefathers which explain reality, concepts and beliefs and further serve as explanations of natural events such as creations, the origin of things and history of a race or a people. This shows that myth is not just a product of human imagination but a direct expression of reality (Inge, 1936).

According to Anyanwu (1987) whose profound statement reads “man cannot live without myths”. In his explanation, he concludes by the idea that man is a myth-making animal because man cannot bear to live with certain questions unanswered that is why he sits down to formulate myths to make those questions answerable. Jaja (1994) has given a right observation by stating that myths are pre-philosophic in nature; that philosophy

started where myths stopped, which presupposes that philosophy has its roots in myths. This presupposes that myths have a part to play in the philosophies generated by men.

Apostle (1981) states that myths are associated with the mysterious and illogical. Myths are seen as vehicles conveying certain facts or truths about man's experiences in his encounter with the created order and its relation to the supernatural world. For Abanuka (1994), myth tells of the superhuman experiences of the community. Myth exposes the fact that man's misfortunes on earth, as well as his hardships, are attributed to disobedience to the divine commands and moral codes of the deities as a point in his life (Sarpong, 1991). The myth is the highest form of cultural ideals and belief, based on the common experiences of people within the community. Mythical beliefs are so intimately bound to indigenous culture, time, and place that its symbols, metaphors are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts which are enhanced by the knowledge of what may be experienced by an individual who fails to adhere to these beliefs (Bascom, 1984).

As argued by Awuah-Nyamekye (2013) in order for myths to be understood it must be examined from perspectives that differentiates it from other tradition oral content such as folktales, legends and fables. Each in its own way is an instrument to help instruct average citizens and mostly the young on the traditions of the society and how they are to behave within that society. Fables just like folktales help to teach us little morals, lessons we learn as children about dealing with other people and how to understand human nature. Only that fables employ animal characters. Such as what we call Anansesem or Ananse stories. On the contrary, legends are often a recount of historical or real-life events couched in a theatrical manner most common of myths within African culture are those dealing with creation. When we speak of creation it is not with the same meaning as that of a scientist who would speak of the first cause of the universe, such as

the 'Big bang theory' which is an effort to explain what happened at the very beginning of our universe.

Comparably different cultures have varied accounts of how the earth and man came about. Mythical tales from the eastern part of Africa may tell about the earth being fashioned out of milk, such as the Fulani creation story or the Myth of Bagre (Senanu, 1995). Some of these recounts leave the assumption that in the African context the earth has always existed with the presence of the Supreme Being who is always not the creator of man. Thus the knowledge of the African perception concerning myths is necessary for discussion of cultural beliefs and practices in ensuring its survival. If an ethnic group retains its formal ethnic identity but loses its core cultural practices or the knowledge, resources, or ability to continue them, then it's at risk of being extinct thereby its actors or people failing to gain any benefits that are embedded in them (Gans, 1997). To abjectly refute any of these assertions and definitions of myths critiqued or reviewed above is to deny to a great extent core elements of being a native of Africa, a Ghanaian and an Akan. It is a personal viewpoint that spirituality which is often the bases and underlining reasons in the practice of myths, is such an intricate part of the African. Its influence, thus, can make the practice of myths a primary element within the culture of a people, as such I share in Bascom's (1984) argument that by virtue of the intricacies of indigenes culture, beliefs are reinforced daily through diverse community activities. As an Akan and a participant observer in some cultural practices, I share the hypothesis that myths are likewise glimpses into the past. A product of certain actual events or phenomenon that occurred; and was later couched into a myth in order to preserve for posterity. As such, myths can give true and right insight of a peoples history, such examples could be cited of the origins of the '*Ahoɔba*' festival of some *Gomoa Mfantsofo*, or the conjuring of the '*Sikadwa Kofi*' on *Fofie* by the most legendary African traditional priest *Okomfo*

*Anokye* whose immovable sword planted centuries ago stands this day in Kumasi (precisely at the Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, Bantama). Yet many have relegated and categorized his very existence among myths. In view of this, I hold to contention assertions of some authors such as Apostle (1999) who considers that myths are basically the indigenes way to comprehend certain difficult to understand aspects of life and that it is illogical in its explanations. That notwithstanding, a conscious critical analysis of all these divergent views makes a clear case of the intrinsic nature in the belief and practice of myths, it openly depicts its pivotal role of reinforcing and sustaining indigenes spiritual knowledge. From these perspectives, I conclude that myths are an intimate element of indigenes culture which emphasizes a peoples spiritual beliefs and exemplifies their outlook towards different aspects of life.

### **2.3 Significance of Myths in African Communities**

“Cultural evolutionists speak as though there were a mythopoeic or myth-making stage of human thought in which primitive peoples have been living for untold ages” (Bidney, 1950). There is a general agreement among ethnologists that myths deal with a supersensuous, preternatural or “supernatural” sphere of reality and refer to some prehistoric time. On this assumption, myths have been defined as “stories of anonymous origin, prevalent among primitive peoples and by them accepted as true, concerning supernatural beings and events, or natural beings and events influenced by supernatural agencies (Gayley, 1911). As an observant participant, having lived within some distinctive Akan communities translates the phenomenon of myth not only as a concept but a pivotal aspect of the indigenous Akans existence. It encapsulates much of their ideals about life and the coexistence of all living things. That is, the concept of unification and correlation of all of nature including man, animals and all others. Likewise, the

natives understanding of myths become significant in providing a structure or order in creating right harmony amongst them. This understanding plays an equal role in sustaining proper social governance in the area of communication and even association as is the case of the '*bosom mba*' (children of the gods) within indigenous communities. These are a group of people who are more or less outcasts within the communities or townships they live as they have been dedicated to the service of the deities in these places and can be identified by their locked hair and bare foot.

### **2.3.1 Understanding the Reality**

Myths play a very important role in the African understanding of reality. Myths provide the necessary analytic and conceptual framework for the understanding of an authentic African philosophy and of self. They provide the solid foundation on which African philosophy hinges (Gyekye, 1995).

They constitute expressions of the inner side of individuals and their relationship with others, nature and with the supernatural. Myths take center stage in providing a channel for philosophical reflections of a people in the past to be preserved and handed down to successive society. If indeed the past is unintelligible and can only be understood in the light of the present, then myths convey meaning only when they establish a coherent relationship between the past and the present. Myths bring to light the past experiences of a people and from there one can better understand their present philosophy (Soyinka, 1976).

Uduigwomen (1995) observed, in African epistemology, myths serve as a means of acquiring and transmitting knowledge about the African. It enables the African to recollect past activities of men and societies which make it possible for the individual or

societies to orientate themselves aimed at understanding bewildering current incidents of the society.

There have been disputes and disagreements as to the role and place of myths in African philosophy (Maritan, 1997). Some anthropologies and philosophers including Alexander Bryan and Max Black have argued that myths cannot be regarded as philosophy because they obviously fall short of empirical verifiability and logical consistency, but Horton (1987) de-bunked this and admitted myths and rituals into the general corpus of experience which is capable of exhibiting a logical and consistent structure.

Similarly, if African philosophy is a reflection on African experience and myths are stabilizing factors to African experience; it then follows that African philosophy is a critical reflection on myths as stabilizing factors. Thus the critical analysis and the “awareness of the relevance of myths proverbs, folklore and other traditional oral content would go a long way in inculcating in Africans the habit of critical reflections on issues bordering on life” (Jaja, 1994).

### **2.3.2 Communication and Moral Education of the Society**

Myths are the essential and ready tools for thinking and communicating in African philosophy (Gyekye, 1997). Through their meaningful and communicative features, myths exhibit and enhance the coherence, stability and continuity of the society. They play the role of literature and fill the void created by lack of literature on past history and supplement the oral culture of African experience (Jaja, 1995).

Myths connect the past with the present. The vestiges of what truth is in African epistemology are traceable to mythological depositories and other conventional values. Some myths are authoritative and appear to have a compelling force of obedience on the

people. There are many such myths among the peoples of Ghana, these myths that bare grave and dangerous consequences. This sets the agenda for community members in shaping their conducts and behaviours. Sarpong (1991) gives an example, the Asante myth about maternal mortality which states that any sexually unfaithful wife will have a painful labour, and may consequently die at childbirth. As hilarious as it may seem, some women actually accuse themselves of adultery so as to have a painless labour and avoid possible death. Such myths nonetheless have the power to ward off any thoughts of unfaithfulness on the part of wives.

Consequently, myths play an important role in the moral education of the society. Its influence in setting the moral standard of the immediate society is further horned by its almost inseparable relation to the religion of the indigenous African society; a people notoriously religious (Ekeke, 2011). Leonard (1966 p. 29) puts it simply as “the religion of these natives [Africans] is their existence and their existence is their religion. It supplies the principle on which their law is dispensed and morality adjudicated. The entire organization of their common life is so interwoven with it that they cannot get away from it. Like the Hindus, they eat religiously, drink religiously and sing religiously”.

African vision of the universe is entrenched in various creation myths. They thus explain how and why the different natural phenomena came into existence, the forces behind their perfect working and the relationship that existed and still exists between man God and the universe, all these are elements of religion. Though one needs to be mindful and clear in the usage of words like God in reference to the Africans belief in a Supreme supernatural element (Howard, 1996). This assertion goes to substantiate the Asantes belief in tutelary spirits that are embodied in nature. Myths surrounding these co-Gods

informs their characters towards such individuals in the community like the chief or traditional priest who is thought of as wielding such supernatural abilities as being bestowed on by these gods such as the *Tano* river that is said to give power to *Atano* shrine also known as *Taakora* which is believed to have been discovered around the year 1700, and had assisted the Asante kings to victory during their numerous wars like that of Asantes versus *Gyaman* wars headed by King Osei Bonsu (Amoatin 2014). For the African the reality of God and his or her imminence is incontestable.

African myths explain in the context of African cultures, great human concerns and realities such as death, creation, the evolution of living things, man's relationship with other living creatures and another such phenomenon like reincarnation. However, the purpose of a myth is far more than being explanatory. It has many values in the African societal setting, it acts as a socializing agent that is used to nourish and buttress the traditions of the ancestors (Wiredu, 1992). Myths are also educative in that they teach people especially the younger ones the meaning of the universe and man's place in it. They place the world before us as an object of indifferent investigation, a world to be known not just as an abstracted object but as a holistic real entity of a universal knowledge that arises from man's effective engagement with the world and myths help explain the great human concepts of his time (Ya-Mona, 1985).

#### **2.4 Classification of Myths**

Myths exist in different forms since they are known as stories just the same as folktales among other traditional stories. As Anane (2000 p.233) qualifies myths as '*anansesem* or *nsem-huhuo*'. For Boas (1944), "it is fairly clear," he states, "that stories are unhesitatingly classed as myth if they account for the origin of the world and if they may be said to have happened in a mythical period, different from the one in which we live

now”. Tylor (1871) considers that the most important characteristic of mythological concepts are stories involving personified animals and creatures though sometimes regarded as folk tales as the natives themselves do not take such stories seriously and recount them merely for entertainment unlike the purposive satire or euphemism that it may be.

Tales dealing with the personification of natural phenomena, such as the sun and moon, are, on the other hand, evaluated by Boas as myths (Bidney, 1950). A better understanding can be drawn from two such indigenous traditional stories couched in poetry. The first is the Yoruba Salute to the Elephant which clearly was an appellation to a living man personified as the animal elephant. The second is titled *Sundjata*, an extract from one of the epics of old Mali, the 13<sup>th</sup>-century kingdom of West Africa from where comes some famous myths as that of the sorcerer *Susu Sumanguru Baamangana* also known as *Soumoaro Kante* (Senanu, 1995).

As the name implies myths also deals with the supernatural and as such some myths explain the various mysterious ideas and beliefs held by these indigenous communities such as that of the Asante people who have many ‘*biribi a ekyere adwene*’ (Anane, 200). Sarpong (1971) a notable scholar on the Akan peoples explains in his book *Sacred Stools of the Akans* the Akan myth about the afterlife saying “chiefs at the *Asamando* must be worshipped far more than the ordinary human-spirits there because they are still considered to be ruling”. A problem arises, however, when one attempts to distinguish between myths and folk tales since the same tales or plots appear in both.

Similarly, there are recounts of such Asante folktales with various myths or mystical beliefs which offers an explanation and understanding of the traditional elements and customs. These include the myths associated with water bodies and the superlative

reverence given to chiefs owing to beliefs in the supernatural authority given them by the gods and ancestors. The story is told of how the Antoahene, Nana Poku Agyeman I came to own the gold signet of a bird. The tale tells of how he was renamed Opoku Ware Katakylie after his show of bravery and battle and subsequent return to Asantehene presenting him the heads of two chiefs. He was given a state sword with the symbol of '*adwentakyi anomaa weremfo*'. This prestige he shares with his superiors the Amakomhene whose sword is known to be related to the river *Mframaha* which is recounted to have been used by Nana Adu Twum an ancestor who was said to have authority and guardianship over the water body. Hence until his daily portion of water has been fetched, no one can use the stream. Anyone caught by the stream will be fined or punished '*nsama*' (Oppong, 2005).

Generally, myths are classified according to the stories they contain. Myths contain three kinds of stories namely:

1. stories of origin
2. explanatory stories
3. didactic stories

Each story is meant to explain a particular phenomenon. Myth is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery but living chronicles in the minds of Africans. Africans use myths to explain how things came to be through the efforts of a supernatural being. It is concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do (Jaja, 2013).

## **2.5 The Akans**

The Akans belong to the *Kwa* group of languages found in West Africa. It is the indigenous language with the largest number of speakers in Ghana. About 49.1% of the national population of Ghana is Akan, based on the 2000 Ghana National Census. Akan has the largest percentages of both Legislative Instrument 1 and Legislative Instrument 2 speakers. According to Gedzi (2014), the Akan comprise sub-ethnic groups such as Akwamu, Guan, Fante, Denkyra, Bono, Akyem, Kwahu, Sefwi, Wassa, Akwapim, Assin and Asante. Geographically, Akans occupy the western, central and Ashanti regions and parts of the Brong-Ahafo, Eastern regions of Ghana and the eastern part of the Ivory Coast. There is a consensus that Akan groups, migrated from ancient Mesopotamia to sub-Saharan Africa (Gedzi,2014). Each ethnic group is autonomous but linked by similar culture and the Twi language.

### **2.5.1 The Akans in Ghana**

The Akan as a word is considered from two perspectives namely; linguistic Akan and ethnographic Akan. The ethnographic “Akan” refers to all ethnic groups that share some cultural traits with the Akan people and speak the Akan language as their second language. They include Nzemas, Ahantas, Sefwis and Aowins who are non-native speakers of the Akan language (Abakah, 2003).

The linguistic “Akan” refers to the people called Akans who speak various dialects of the Akan language as their native language. All the languages spoken by the ethnographic Akans are genetically related to the Akan language (Abakah, 2003 and Boadi, 2005).

The Akans are the largest ethnic group in Ghana; according to the 2000 national population census, 49.1% of the Ghanaian population are Akans and about 44% of the population speak Akan as non-native speakers (Abakah, 2003 and Boadi, 2005).

Ghana is made up of many tribes, notably the Akan, the Ewe and Guan. The Akan, who is the subject of discussion in this thesis, is the largest ethnic group. Akans occupy about six out of the ten regions of Ghana namely: Ashanti, Eastern, Central, Western, Brong-Ahafo, and some part of the Volta Regions (Meyerowitz, 1974). This ethnic group consists of tribes such as Agona, Ahafo, Ahanta, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Aowin, Asante, Assin, Fante, and Kwahu (Boamah, 2015). The 2010 population census reports that the Akan constitutes about 53% of the total population of 24,658,823. They are mainly found in the southern and middle part of Ghana. The traditional occupation of the Akan is farming and fishing. However, as a result of movement of people from one region to another in search for jobs, some Akans may be found in the northern regions of Ghana engaged in different occupations other than farming and fishing (Omenyo, 2001). Traditionally, the Akan are matrilineal, that is, they inherit from the mother side. The implication of the matrilineal inheritance is that nephews inherit the properties of their uncles (mother's brothers) after their death. However, with the passing into law the Interstate Succession Law, PNDC Law 111, this system of inheritance is practised only within the customary laws of Ghana and therefore non-applicable in the event an individual dies without a will.

## **2.6 The Concept of Culture**

Sociologists like Njoku (1998) define culture as the complex whole of man's acquisitions of knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, customs, technology, values which are transmitted from generation to generation (Uzo, 2012). As a concept Amayo (2012) agree with Anyanwu (1987) that, when viewed from a broad perspective, culture could be "perceived as a way of life, which encompasses all human efforts, achievements and attitudes. It manifests in religion, language, philosophy, music, dance, drama,

architecture, political organization, technology, education, values, knowledge system, social system, judicial or legal organization, and morality. Culture, therefore, constitutes what Nwala (1985) observes as “what is natural” in the understanding of the tradition of a people.

In a similar view, Oni (2009) and Ogechukwu (2014) all contend that the concept of culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create. Adeleke (2003) argues that virtually all these varied definitions of culture would seem to anchor on the anthropological definition given by (Tylor, 1871). According to him, culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, law, art, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. A personally held opinion is that, culture is the embodiment of the various core elements within a given society that functions both as a wheel and a balance in measuring the extent to which the society effects these various core elements such as its religion and governance.

In Ghana, the National Policy on Culture (2004) defines culture as the totality of the way of life evolved by people of Ghana through experience and reflection in their attempt to fashion a harmonious co-existence with our environment. This explains that culture is dynamic and gives order and meaning to the social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious practices of people. It also declares that Ghanaian culture also gives its distinct identity as a people. Ghana culture manifests in the nation’s ideals and ideas, beliefs and values; folklore, environment, science and technology; and in the forms of political, social, legal and economic institutions. It also manifests in the aesthetic quality and humanistic dimension of literature, music, drama, architecture, carvings, paintings and other art forms. From the aforementioned definitions it is clear that culture is a very broad

concept that generally encompasses basically every aspect of human life which thus gives a group of people their peculiar identity.

It is a personal opinion that the influence of culture in determining the identity and personality of an individual is almost intrinsic and becomes second nature as the years unfold. It is as though one was born with the tacit knowledge to behave this way or that way. Being an Akan and having lived all the years within them, it has become a conviction that culture is that aspect of a people that remains for many years. Culture is not a phase or a societal craze that fades within a limited time. Culture is validated as the years unfold, it is definite, practical and unadulterated in its ability to show that peoples differ. Evidently, as a member of the Akan ethnic group, one needs only share an encounter of five minutes or less to see the impact of culture at play. The mere utterance of names will give ample information to probe further. A learned stranger who may perhaps be an Ewe will know that the singular name Efuwa means the bearer is an Mfantse (Akan) female born on Friday. A further introduction of “Adadziwa Mansa Ababio from the Twidan clan” will be more than ample information about family and ancestry. With Adadziwa meaning the female version of Dadzi which goes with the appellation osibo as every Akan name bears an appellation such as Adaakwa with the appellation Yaidom. Mansa tells the stranger that the bearer is the third of three successive daughters and lastly Ababio indicates the name has been borne by another before and was renamed as an honour to the previous bearer as is the Akan custom. Lastly, *Twidan* is a totemic indemnity of every Akan with each of the seven (7) clans having its own animal symbol. One inherits this from the father, the symbol for *Twidan* is the tiger. One cannot harm or kill their totem.

### **2.6.1 The Basic Elements of the Akan Culture**

In line with the nature of the topic being discussed in this thesis, it is important to define Akan cultural elements. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines an element as 'a necessary or typical part of something'. It can be stated that Akan cultural elements are the various and necessary components or values which make Akan culture what it is. These components will among other things include the religious life of the Akan, their belief systems bothering on divine realities and the Akan's relationship with that reality. Their belief in the tutelary spirits and ancestors, their art and crafts, their songs and poems, morals and ethics, rites of passage, systems of government and administration, their relationship to one another, the Akan concept of life in general and their responses to the environment and so on.

These beliefs impact and even sometimes dictate the way of living, what they do or must not do. The stipulated definition of culture adopted for this project and from which cultural elements were discussed was given by Sir Edward B. Tylor in 1891 as follows: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society." In this definition, Taylor highlights the complexity of culture and the fact that specific cultural values are acquired within a particular society. Although this definition was given over a hundred and twenty years ago, it seems to have had an enduring character. For Sarpong (1971), agrees totally with Taylor (1891), "Akan people of Ghana are predominantly known to be a very culturally conscious group of people with the Asantes being chief among them". Culture is a dynamic phenomenon and it is established by the Akan concept of Sankofa, which establishes the link between our past and the present looking at the positives (Culture Policy of Ghana, 2004).

Akan culture is one of the purest West African cultures that still exist today.

Some of their most important mythological stories are called *Anansesem* literally meaning 'the spider story' but can in a figurative sense also mean "traveller's tales". These "spider stories" are sometimes also referred to as *nyankomsem*; 'words of a sky god' (Leach & Fried, 1972).

The stories generally, but not always, revolve around Kwaku Ananse, a trickster spirit, often depicted as a spider, human, or a combination thereof.

Some elements of Akan Culture are:

- *Kente*
- *Adinkra*
- *Sankofa*
- Akan gold weights;
- Akan names;
- Akan Chieftaincy;
- Akan Calendar;
- Akan religion
- Abusua (Mogya) - What an Akan inherits from his mother;
- *Ntorɔ* - What an Akan gets from their father but, one does not belong to their Ntoro instead, they belong to their Abusua;
- *Sunsum* - What an Akan develops from their interaction with the world (Sarpong,2002).
- Kra - What an Akan gets from Onyame (God) (Sarpong,2002).

*'Sankofa'* literally means returning for what you left or forgot; one of its symbols is represented by a bird with its head tucked between its feathers backwards (Ansa, 1995). Although Akans have some patrilineal aspects with respect to their culture, they hold on fervently towards the matrilineal system of their culture. Unlike other native groupings such as the Ewes or the Guan people who practice the patrilineal system and are also known to have powerful magical systems. Comparably to the other indigenous African cultural beliefs in elements of the universe and in connection with their matrilineal inclinations; the Akans are drawn likewise towards the earth and water nature entities (Mulumba, 1997). Some of these entities include the belief in *mmoatia* or dwarfs who are within the forests and the *abosom* or gods of the rivers and lake. These beings are communicated with through their human mediums who may be called *obosomfoɔ*, *ɔkomfoɔ*, *dunsifoɔ* or the *sumankwafɔɔ* who are the spiritual heads within the Asante kingdom even till date (Amponsah, 1975).

As Lukwata (2003) puts it this way, ancestors continually influence the lives of the living members or their kinship unit as they are believed to be the protectors of the land and other natural resources from which they survive. Amazingly, although African history or culture is unwritten most indigenous professionals were keenly knowledgeable, such professionals like farmers who knew about magic, about the names of entities of the forest, about the spirits that live in trees, the various animals and about the rituals that protect, heal and maintain the ecosystem. Such that a farmer or hunter will not shoot a pregnant animal but rather one whose death is honourable or accepted. Like the native Indian people, Akan farmer will have to carry out the necessary rituals in events such as that (Boaheng, 2000). As Amoako –Atta (1995) contends that it is even a good thing that Akan traditional religion is not relegated to books, that is sometimes a sign of a system either in decline or under threat or it is rather a system that grows together with

its people. Akan traditional systems are alive, it is only that there are some aspects of our culture shrouded in secrecy and can only be revealed to initiates of cults and such groups.

## **2.7 Sociology of the Akan People**

The Akan society has been known to be an oral society and their social norms and values were based on oral traditions. They are very religious and they believe in God, supernatural beings and ancestors (Gyekye, 1996). Akans put a high premium on politeness and etiquette in social interactions (Ntow, 2014). There is respect for status, age, chieftaincy and traditional political systems. The Akans practice the matrilineal type of inheritance (Boadi, 2005).

According to Ranehem (2014) among the Akans, societies are technically called clans or *nton* which cuts through to the many Akan people scattered across West Africa. There are eight great Akan families that share common customs, traditions, beliefs and ancestors (Appiah-Adjei, 2014). The Ancestors which they call *Nananom* who are regarded as senior family members that are no longer living, remain active, supporting the well-being of the family by advising, guiding and protecting their spiritual charges, customs and traditions through their spokespersons (Kwadwo, 2002).

The Akan's universe is spiritual in which the Supreme Being is the Creator, the source of all life and the Absolute Reality. They believe that between God who is also referred as Nana Nyame and humanity are many supernatural powers and beings, masculine and feminine; spirits, angels, magical forces and witches who play significant roles in the thought and actions of the people and account for many strange happenings in the world (Asouzu, 1997). The Ahenfie or palace which is like the headquarters of that particular chiefdom, town or traditional area. This is the abode of the *Ohene* and *Ohemaa*. It mostly

also inhabits the *abosomfie* that is the divinities house, presided by the *Okomfo* who is believed to be the liaison between the Spirits and the living. Within the palaces are the *Abrafo* who are referred to as executioners who mostly perform the role of the domestic security (Agyekum, 2011). The *Akyerema*, the talking drum and its drummers are also found within the *Ahenfie* with other segmented music groups found within the town who are gifted to play and understand the sacred or historic languages of the people conveyed only through music. Lastly is the ‘linguist’ who performs the role of the spokesperson, interpreter and administrator to the chief.

As explained by Bruatigam and Osei (1979) *Odunsini* who is a spiritualists and traditional healers specialized in the use of shrubs, herbs and other plant-based medicines to cure all kinds of ailments. On the other hand, the *Okomfo* with similar healing abilities sees to performing the ancient rites and customs and is in charge of the sacrificial offerings and the sacred implements used during the ceremonies and ritual practices such as libation performance. Petitions are made while pouring alcoholic drink to the ‘Great Spirit’ and Ancestors, for their assistance with all aspects of their human affairs. Performing libation is an integral part of the life of the Akans even today. As seen in our domestic setups where drops of water are poured (before drank), to Schnapp pouring at marriage ceremonies, durbars and festivals. As Sarpong (1971) wrote, indigenous Akans performed rituals and libations in different instances of their lives including climbing a sacred tree, for both the tree and the climber to ensure protection and ward off any danger that may be. Likewise, craftsmen in most Akan societies were encouraged to offer up tokens of gratitude to the trees they cut or the wood they would carve with as the tools were believed to possess vindictive spirits (Busia, 1951).

The Akans are highly conscious of their cultural values. Values are basically emotionally charged beliefs about what is desirable, right or appropriate (Howard, 1996). In addition, Schwartz (1992) considers that values are goals that serve as guiding principles of an individual, group or society. Within the Akan society are set values that serve as a measure of what is acceptable and can be appreciated as a norm. These include the respect of elders who are called *mpayinfo* believed to be guardians, ancestors who have immense wisdom gathered through the years. For this reason, they are highly revered. As the African adage goes, “what an elder can see lying on his stomach, the young cannot see standing on the tallest tree” this adage is often used to advise the young to adhere to the words of the elderly as they have lived longer hence acquired experience in dealings of life, the adage teaches about the value respect. Reverence reinforces the unity and respect that helps to maintain families as this is an integral part of the Akan society.

## **2.8 Documentation**

Documentation in academic context can be termed as the putting together of relevant information for easy accessibility. This includes any communicable material such as letters text, video, audio or a combination of these, used to explain some attributes of an object, system or procedure (Atlantic, 2017). Anthropologist and ethnologist are basically interested in documentation that emphasizes the everyday life of ordinary groups and people. As such, these information aids researchers comprehend how these people function within any period of their history. It, therefore, becomes a medium used by researchers in their quest for the historical truth and reconstruction of the original context.

Bradford (1953) defines it as the “process of collecting and categorising all the records of new observations and making them available to the discoverer or the inventor”. Hanod (1977) reasons that documentation as: “The act of collecting, classifying and making readily accessible the record of all kinds of intellectual activity”. The recording can be done mentally and reproduced orally (as happens in many indigenous societies), on paper, films, tapes, fabrics, on walls or even the skin of human beings. Such a record can be relied upon as the basis, proof or support of a research or search being undertaken. Documentation is a scholarly activity which in the modern times requires a very good training.

Documentation goes beyond the written information that includes any means by which useful information can be organized and easily accessed. In the indigenous society, where knowledge was not the prerogative of a privileged few, not much effort was exerted into their documentation because they were freely given out to the younger generation through storytelling, oral tradition, songs and folklore as well as proverbs and wise sayings, myths, legends, songs, dance, the various rituals and appellation.

The proper documentation of knowledge is very important to the cohesion and perpetuation of the society. Bradford (1953 p. 40) affirms that “without documentation, the recorded observations (*in this case the indigenous knowledge*) are merely scattered separately and are of little use, which gets buried in a great mass of scientific literature, like needles in a haystack.” It would perhaps be wrong to say that the indigenous African society did not document its culture.

Documentation has been a trusted approach to capturing the life and culture of a people, it has developed into a need for anthropologists everywhere. Its chief limitation only being the ethical questions and considerations with respect to the groups of people in

question which is largely dependent on the medium or form of documentation (Sparrman, 2002).

## **2.9 Significance of Visual Documentation**

We all subconsciously or mentally have a sort of pictorial biography Johannesson (1997) containing, for example, one's first remembered picture, product labels, logos, collector cards, works of art, kitsch, photography, and wedding pictures. A pictorial biography could be said to be an individual's life's story documented in the form of pictures comprising pictures from various life phases, starting with childhood (Sparrman, 2010). In the abundance of pictures one would find, including moving ones which could be termed as video biographies that are also categorized into events and periods, a subsection of a visual biography.

Thus, images captured mentally ensures it is safe, fervent and usable at any given time and as such, tangible forms may give an increasing benefit comparatively to the former. These can be shared by multiple individuals or any other larger group. Tangible form refers to videotapes, audio cassettes, compact disk and books.

It is a factual phenomenon that African culture has become more or less oral and as such values and any other principles upheld may be long forgotten through the years. Gyekye (2003) states that within African traditional society's wisdom, like knowledge is understood as having two angles, both practical and theoretical. The theoretical aspect must have a direct relation to dealing and solving the practical problems in the life of the people. Whereas African practical knowledge can be seen from many of its performed arts and signs, the application of both is passed on orally from one generation to the other. Yet African theoretical wisdom is captured in different forms such as myths, adages and

proverbs. Some of these proverbs and adages can be known through its visual presentation as the symbol of *unity obi nka obi* which is represented by the tongue and the teeth. A proof to the assertion that African society's intellectual activities of its sages or thinkers are of course theoretical, even though the basis of their wisdom is in human experience (Dzobo, 2009).

According to Addo (2001) visual literacy for communication like 'tribal' marks, emblems of clans and the Adinkra symbols in the Akan culture also transmit special sacred messages aside playing significant roles as forms of identification. Many of these symbols such as the symbol of unity in diversity, democracy and unity of purpose, *Funtumfunefu ne denkyemfunafu, won afuru bɔmu nso wodidi a na wɔrefom ɛfiri ɛ aduane ne de ye di mene no twitwi*. Literally translated as, two crocodiles sharing one stomach yet constantly fighting over food because the taste of food is experienced in a rush. As every Akan proverb, its meaning is implied and derived rather than literally understood. The proverb is a caution against greed and self-centeredness in the pursuit of a collective vision, instead, it enjoins individuals to use one's differences for collective success. This is represented by two crocodiles joined together at the waist diagonally.

Such visual symbols provide benefits, gives motivation, increases creativity, one's mental aptitude and aesthetic appreciation (Fang, 1996). There is an added advantage to visual communication when compared to only verbal communication. Visual communication provides a more reliable, identifiable and visually appealing form of keeping and transmitting information (Rojas, 2016).

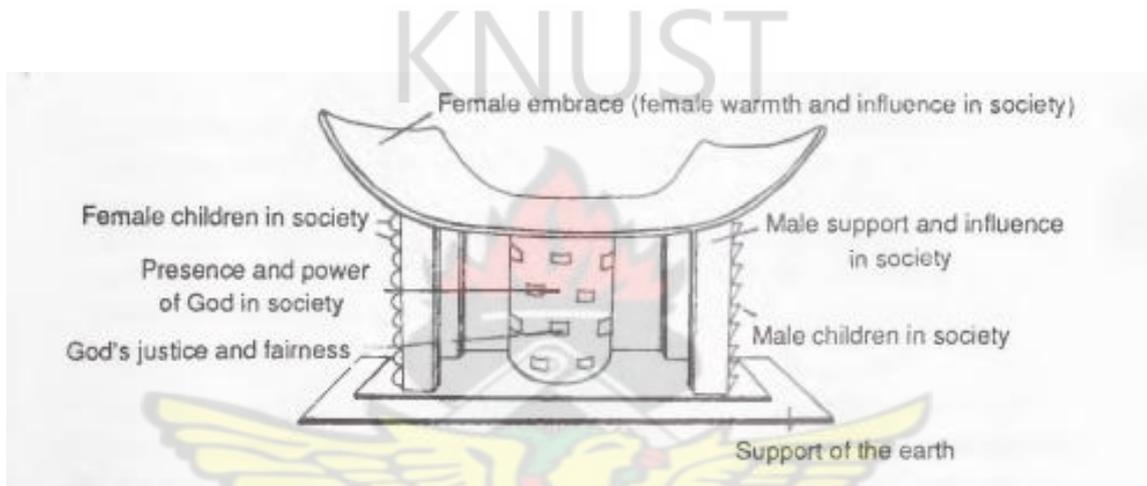
Furthermore, are different perspectives to visual culture and understanding of technologies and its effects on peoples' subjectivities which is often embedded in their particular social and cultural contexts (Crary 1990 et.al). It is for this reason that such

ethical, cultural perspectives will be applied in the documentation of the different myths of the Akans as it can be categorized as part of their visual biographies, an integral part of their intangible culture.

## **2.10 Design Thinking in Symbolism**

Design thinking is a creatively used practical method in producing constructive results. It involves the evolution of the initial problem and seeks to find alternative parts in order to redefine the initial problem (Linke, 2016). In Mckims (1974) “*Experiences in Visual Thinking*”, he expatiates the process of design thinking as a science. As exemplified in the study between architects and scientists, the latter combined several techniques and combinations and substituting them until an acceptable solution was discovered. Scientists, however, applied different techniques quickly in a series of design combinations to many in numerous quick successions in the objective to discover the combination. One thing was clear, an initial idea was put into consideration, knowledge gathered was communicated in an easier to grasp manner. In design thinking, such as is applied in this study, one adopted a problem-solving layout while the other a solution focus one. As such it suggests that there’s a science to the process of design thinking as the scientists solved by analysis, while architectural designers on the other hand through synthesis. Traditionally design thinking seems to coherently and fluidly use the two key tenants of philosophy namely analysis and synthesis to construct its basic forms and art. Whereas analysis deals with the breakdown of a substantial whole into fragments and easily appreciated components, synthesis seeks to form together and combine fragmented elements or components into a more compact and coherent form. The close application of this duo principle results in such an intriguing visual representation which is common and known to the Akans. This is evidently reflected in such traditional items such as

fabric designs and stools locally called *asese dwa* which stems from the tree *osese* commonly used in the carving of the stools (Sarpong, 2009). Each component of the stool (as shown in Figure 2.1) represents the main idea that is known to foster a perfect society (Amenuke, 1993). It is easy to create new motives and layout when design connotations can be easily grasped. Though the stool is basically composed of three parts that are the base, the middle portion and the top. the patterns on its sides and mid portions determine what kind of stool it is and who can sit on it.



**Figure 2.1: Symbols and meanings on stools**

Thus meanings and differentiation of stools by importance can be arrived at with the standard stool as the guide such as, *Mframadan dwa*, *Nyansapow dwa*, *Kontonkori*, *Esono dwa* (Figure 2.2) and the *Obi te obi so dwa* (Figure 2.3). The observer will realize that some aspects of the design or symbols of the standard *asesedwa* runs through all these stools thus giving its meanings and interpretations.

The use of symbolic identification cuts through all peoples of the Akan tribe and is evidenced in its dance, language and especially how we employ that to serve God (Sarpong, 1992). A symbol is an outward sign of an item or entity. It indicates and represents an idea or it helps individuals better communicate and go beyond what is

obvious. As Campbell (2007), states a symbol is like an agent, an energy that evokes and directs. There are different aspects to a symbol, there is the sense of the symbol which differs from the image of the symbol. Like some Akan visual elements such as stools, the sense of the symbol projects the idea of authority and power while its images can evoke intrigue and interest thus both can functions simultaneously on different levels. Akans have diverse ways of representing their ideas and use certain special figures, marks and other forms of identification to convey different messages.



**Figure 2.2: Esonodwa**

**Figure 2.3: Obi-Te-Obi-So-Dwa**

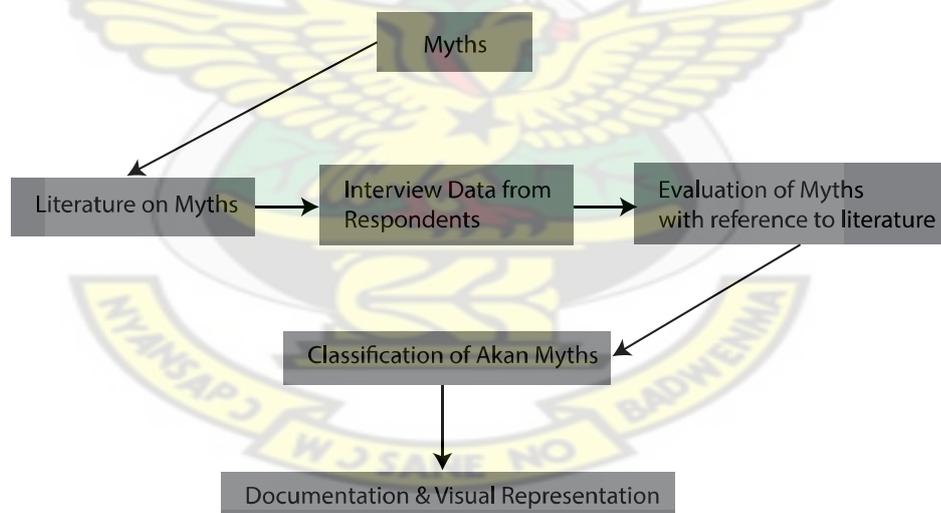
### **2.11 Conceptual Framework**

In the quest to answer the research questions and to ensure a scientific approach to steer and manoeuvre the outcome of the research, a conceptual framework has being adopted focused on, and the search for the understanding of myths. By this, the researcher delved into the various concepts of myths primarily within the context of Akans.

Numerous literature on myths were examined. The researcher explored from various sources in order to understand in reasonable entirety the subject of myths as assessed by academics and other key informants within the field of study.

In light of this, the researcher utilized the data retrieved from the interviews. The respondents were purposively selected from indigenes, academia and theology. Furthermore, the researcher critically examined and evaluated the interview data juxtaposing it to the findings from literature. As such, there were a number of myths discovered, this the researcher classified among five headings: myths about death and afterlife, myths about gods and tutelary spirits, myths about creatures, myths about birth and children and finally myths for protection and social governance.

Lastly, the researcher looked closely at the subject of documentation and its relevance to the total outcome of the work while equally relating it to better the pivot of the work: visual representation. The visual illustrations were developed based on the identified myths of the Asante group of the Akans. Figure 2.4 shows the conceptual framework of the study.



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework for visual documentation of Akan myths**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter discusses the research design, discussing the qualitative and the phenomenological types of research. It further takes a look at the population of study, target, accessible population of study with reference to sampling, data collection instruments, its procedures analysis plan and concludes with a discussion of how data gathered was analyzed.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

The qualitative research methodology served as the main method of gathering data. The researcher used phenomenological research of qualitative research to collect and analyse data for this study in particular. Barry (1999) alludes to Maykul and Morehouse's (1994) premise that the data of qualitative inquiry is most often people's words and actions, thus requires methods that allow the researcher to capture languages and behaviour. In view of this, the researcher made use of literature from experts in the field on the subject under investigation.

#### **3.3 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research can be explained as the study of contextual principles such as the roles of the participants around a set of situational events that guide in the interpretation of a particular discourse (Ting-Tooney, 1984). Qualitative research also delves into the study and discussion of texts and dialogues. This method of research seeks to analyse unstructured data gathered from diverse sources such as interviews, emails, transcripts, notes, feedback forms, photos and videos. It is a non-numerical data in nature.

Zimmerman (1997) emphasizes that qualitative research seeks to reveal the intention for which actions or outcomes come about. Researchers using this method investigate meanings of symbols and processes in relation to real life occurrences. In order to accomplish this, the researcher uses at least two or more of these to conduct the study: direct observation, open-ended surveys, focus group discussions, participatory observations, content analysis and ethnographic observation (Lewis-Beck, 2004). Most importantly qualitative research aims to find the order or structure within a group of participants, it is for this reason that it could be characterized as ethnomethodology or field research which could be likened to ethnography as it pertains to anthropology (Trochim, 2006). Similarly, qualitative methods generate data from human groups and settings. The Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2007) sums up ethnography as the scientific study of the human social phenomenon, interaction or communities. This research focuses as much on aesthetics as socio-cultural aspects of the Akan society as relates to the subject of myth. It is for this reason that the researcher makes an ethnographic enquiry into a cultural background of the target group in order to understand and gain much understanding of the community and its beliefs.

The goal of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of a social or human problem from multiple perspectives. Qualitative research method will be used in order to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviours, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture or lifestyles as attached to myths and symbols and how these values really contribute to the livelihood of the Asante people. Descriptive and arts-based method of qualitative method will be selected to provide a systematic approach in generating illustrations.

Qualitative research answers questions about the complex nature of phenomena, often with the purpose of describing and creating understanding from the participant point of view (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). Willie (1978) also asserts that, in qualitative studies, the logic of inference is often indirectly observed, resulting in new insight and reclassification, rather than strict numerical comparison and classification. Qualitative research was selected because it gives the researcher a systematic process of describing, analyzing and interpreting the myths that were gathered, allowing the researcher the flexibility to probe initial participant responses and also provided information about the human side of an issue – such as the behaviours, beliefs, opinions of the indigenes. Qualitative used, help to explore avenues of creating ideas from verbal situations that have not been fully studied.

### **3.4 Phenomenological research**

The term ‘phenomenological research’ has been explained by Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 165) in the following paragraph:

Focuses on the need to understand how humans view themselves and the world around them. The researcher is considered inseparable from assumptions and preconceptions about the phenomenon of study. Instead of bracketing and setting aside such biases, an attempt is made to explain them and to integrate them into the research findings. The research methodology, informed by what is often called ‘interpretive phenomenology’, seeks to reveal and convey deep insight and understanding of the concealed meanings of everyday life experiences.

Another view of phenomenological research is expressed by Denscombe (2014) as an alternative to positivism due to the fact that it mainly deals with the perception or meanings of a people, their attitudes and beliefs and their feelings and emotions.

In fact, Robson and McCartan (2016) classify phenomenological research as a flexible design and as such, the purpose of flexible designs usually is clear at the start of the study and since it is a work in progress, it could adapt as the work unfolds, unlike fixed design where the design remains unchanged. Simply put, phenomenology deals with exploring the meaning of lived experience and this study sought to explore the lives of four key informants in the field. These informants were known for their expertise in the field and as such were often consulted on issues all salient issues including indigenous culture, practices myths and the visual interpretations of these beliefs.

### **3.5 Population for the Study**

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), population is a group of people a researcher makes inferences to in a research and as such this research makes reference to informants (traditional authority, academics, religious leaders and community members) living within the Akan ethnic group. Agyedu (2011) also refers to population as a complete set of individuals, objects or even phenomenon or events that have common or similar characteristics to the interest of the researcher.

#### **3.5.1 Target Population**

In this study, the researcher targeted informants who per their standing and backgrounds are knowledgeable about myths from an Asante speaking Twi community within the Ashanti region of Ghana. Although there are four dialects of the Akan language namely Asante Twi, Fante Twi, Akyem Twi, and Akuapem Twi that are written and formally

recognized and studied in the Ghanaian school's curriculum. The researcher recruited specific (Asante Twi) speaking communities that are believed to still maintain some valuable aspects of their indigenous culture. These communities are *Manhyia*, *Aawomaso*, *Ejisu Besease*, *Asotwe*, *Aprede*, *Fayiase*, *Amakom* all in and around Kumasi. The target population included sixteen (16) traditional authority members including chiefs and linguists, five (5) theologians, three (3) educationists and twenty-five (25) community members.

### **3.5.2 Accessible Population**

The accessible population is the quantity or size or a portion of an entire aggregation of items which are capable of being reached for the research purposes. The Asante speaking Twi communities of Ejisu Beasease, Asotwe and Amakom were selected as the accessible population. The selection was based on the fact that the Asante population is larger and their myths run through the other three groups. Among the targeted population, the researcher was able to conduct a focus group discussion with eleven (11) community members within Ejisu Besease, an educationist in Asotwe, a theologian from Apre and two chiefs linguists from Amakom and Ejisu Besease respectively. In sum, the researcher conducted interviews and discussions with 14 respondents.

### **3.6 Sampling Techniques**

According to Polit et al. (2001) a sample is “a proportion of a population”. Also, Mugo (2002) has argued that a sample is a selection of respondents within a larger population for a study. Creswell (2014) opines that the ideal number of respondents to offer a significant and complete data is 16. This number itself is not an exhaustive number could only serve as a guide while working on any research project which is aligned with a

qualitative approach. On the other hand, Robson and McCartan (2016) have observed that exigencies of carrying out real-world research might suffer from getting a representative sample to fulfil the needs of the study. When this happens, they suggest that it leads to a low response rate, but the key difference is between those who responded and those who did not.

This study adopted a purposive sampling technique since respondents ought to have a common characteristic which makes them eligible to participate in the study. A purposive sample, in the view of Matthews and Ross (2010), refers to “a sample of selected cases that will best enable the researcher to explore the research questions in depth.”

### **3.7 Data Collection Instrument**

Data was collected for the work through observation of existing works of art such as photographs, sketches, drawing and illustrations of existing and non-existing records anecdotal records. Interview was used in collecting data from members of traditional authority Ejisu Besease, Amakom as well as from other resource persons such as the theologian and educationist.

#### **3.7.1 Primary data**

The primary data were collected through interactions with key informants on the subject under investigation. The data comprised of semi-structured interviews with the informants derived from the research questions and the objectives of the study.

### **3.7.2 Secondary Data**

The secondary data comprise of the entire literary materials sought, cited and used from books from both public and personal libraries even of some informants, internet, journals, published and unpublished thesis as well as others that were related to the work.

### **3.7.3 Administration of Instruments**

The researcher prepared two interview guides and an observation checklist to collect data. The interview guides were directed to three different groups, namely the chiefs, traditional authority members, community members, educationists and theologians at the selected study sites likewise the observation checklists.

## **3.8 Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher prepared the data collection instrument which was subsequently reviewed by a colleague. The reviewed questions were then sent to the supervisor for approval. The instrument was an interview guide which emerged from the research questions and objectives. These questions answered, made it possible for what was set as the research objectives in Chapter One would have been achieved. The researcher then booked an appointment with the key informants. The actual data collection period took place for five days, specifically May 14-19, 2017.

The researcher adopted a semi-structured interview guide to steer the direction of the interview sessions. This ensured that follow up questions were asked and made the respondents be at ease during the interview period. The attire of the researcher during the period was presentable and one that would not have made the respondents feel uneasy to be interviewed.

The interviews were conducted mainly in Twi and English. Those who spoke in Twi worked as linguists to a chief within one of the palaces under the jurisdiction of the Kumasi Traditional Council. All interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed into English with the help of a translator. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. The interview sessions were closed on a thank you note and the researcher assured the respondents that confidentiality and anonymity in addition to other ethical issues will be adhered to strictly.

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### **3.9 Data Analysis Plan**

Since this study was purely a qualitative research or made use of a flexible design, the researcher thought of using Miles and Huberman (1994) thematic analysis, where themes emerge after it has gone through a rigorous process of making meaning from the transcribed data. This led to the classification of various themes into myths and was subsequently discussed in Chapter Four.

### **3.10 Reliability and Validity of Data**

Creswell (2005) as cited by Ellis and Levy (2008) have opinionated that since the viability of a problem cannot be established through a single source, the researcher needs to piece together the scattered fragments of information gathered from diverse sources. Holding on to this assertion, conclusions or results arrived at a research may be considered more credible if data gained from multiple sources but equally corresponds evidently to each other.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Overview

This chapter provides readers with the presentation and discussion of findings of the study. Since the beginning of this study, the researcher has been concerned about investigation some myths believed by the Asante people of the Akan ethnic group in Ghana. Answers to the research questions are presented here based on data collected from key informants in the field.

In order to ensure clarity of work, the research focused on three research questions:

1. What are some of the myths of the Asante people in Ghana?
2. Which classification can be drawn from the Asante myths?
3. How will the identified myths be translated into symbols?

#### 4.2 Some identified myths among the Asantes

The traditional Akan have numerous mythical beliefs which inform various actions, including the performance of their customs and day to day traditional activities. These beliefs define their stance, approach and outlook on a myriad of issues. It equally preempts their responses and reactions to many of the day to day occurrences within their basic family unit and the whole communities.

It is important to note that the Akan language due to its distinctive, dramatic nature must be carefully studied in order not to interpret wrongly. It is worth mentioning that the Akan language is mainly spoken in '*kasa kwoa*' that is, figurative speech; hence, the words used must not be taken literally or at face value. The selected myths have been classified and grouped as this will allow for easy identification, understanding and appreciation. The researcher found that many of the myths are unknown due to their

antiquity and that in fact some communities still adhered to many till this day. In as much as time has helped erode the previous fear and dread associated with many, some people still continue to believe in these myths.

These are the identified myths according to findings from the field.

1. Owuo
2. Asamando
3. Nsamantua
4. Nananom bammɔ
5. Afɔrebo
6. Dabɔne
7. Empepem/mpentuo
8. Mmusuo
9. Adwareɛ kyi ndwom
10. Yemmpira anadwo
11. Yemfa nkosua nhyɛ abɔfra
12. Yennyā waduro ne womma nsi abɔnten mma adeɛ nkye so
13. Awomewuo
14. Duabɔ
15. Yemmo hwirema anadwo
16. Sasabonsam
17. Bayifoɔ
18. Mmoatia
19. Ahomakyem/Ahomatia
20. Apaeɛ
21. Nsu bosom

22. Nnua bosom
23. Yenny aduane nsi abonten mma adee nkye so
24. Kɔsamma
25. Kwasiawuo
26. Oman bosom
27. Bosom
28. Mpapaemu

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### **4.3 Classification of Myths**

This section provides readers with the various classification of myths believed by the Akan (Asante) in Ghana. Infact this classicafication may not be able to include all the myths that the Asantes believe in, however, this is what the researcher was able to glean from the data collected and also with the help of literature in the field. They are classified into myths about death and the afterlife, myths about protection and social governance, myths about births and children, myths about gods and tutlery spirits and myths about creatures.

#### **4.3.1 Myths about Death and After-life**

The myths about death are the first major theme to be examined in this study. The myths under this classification are one that characterizes the Akans of Ghana, specifically Asante Twi speaking groups since data collected was from this group of Akans. To begin the discussion of these myths, the researcher discusses in depth according to findings from the field.

## 1. *Owuo*

'Owuo' simply means death, sometimes referred to as *Agya owuo*. To them, it is a living element that hovers round man and bids him home when the time is due. The referral to death as *Agya* meaning father is an example of some personification used sometimes in the recount of their myths (Tylor, 1871). Here its usage is somewhat ambiguous in nature thus it can be better understood within the context in which it is said as it seems as satiric in nature. The Akans reaction towards this phenomenon is most intriguing to the observer who may have little or no idea that to the Akan death is but a journey. A transition from one state of being to the other. It is not to say that the Akan trivializes death, as there could be nothing further from the truth than that. For the visitor to any Akan community who is a witness at such a time would know that there is not even a speck of triviality in the mourning affairs of the Akan, especially if the deceased happened to be a person of high repute or of royalty. As such funerals were conducted according to the status of the deceased.

## 2. *Nkwaseawuo*

This is to say that the Akans attitudes towards death differ from one instance to the other as well as person to person. As is most evident the myth is a fusion of two Asante Twi words, *kwasia* meaning foolish and *owuo* meaning death. According to Respondent 2, "death is meant to be an honourable occurrence which is expected to happen to every man". Yet not all forms of death are considered honourable, deaths resulting from a curse, disease, murder and other deaths resulting from such calamities are all classified under dishonourable deaths. *Kwasia wuo* is to die due to one's own foolishness. There's a humorous saying that "*ɔkwasea na ɔkɔto mmɔna de ne ti kɔ gye*" meaning it is the fool who goes to rape knowing he will die for it. According to Respondent 1, "no sense in dying by raping one woman while there will be multitudes of women crying at your

burial”. It is then that you will know, you have indeed been a fool by not taking your time to choose from all the lot of women. For such reasons rape cases were nearly nonexistent, the girl child was protected by not just her brothers but other community members.

### **3. *Mpaapaemu***

Translated as the parting of ways. Owing to the Asante myths about death being a transition and a journey, there are some customary practices done to ensure a safe and peaceful journey. Family members are expected to duly bid farewell and part ways with their dead relative before burial. According to Respondent 2, “as there is the belief and acceptance of ghosts, the dead is cautioned not to make any such appearances to the living relatives so as to cause fear or harm”. He added that it is done before the placing of the corpse in the earth. It is often led by an elderly female relative, who “reintroduces” the deceased children to him or her saying “these were your children (mentioning each by name) they are no longer yours so do not interfere in their lives anymore. Protect and bless them”.

### **4. *Asamando***

The mythical phenomenon of *asamando*, the land of the dead. The core word here is *asaman* meaning ghosts. As was established that there is a land where all dead people reside therefore the act of dying is nothing but a physical departure from the land of the living into another realm. A highly spiritual realm where the dead can even gain certain abilities that were absent while alive. These spirits can walk amidst the living unseen but for the spiritually sensitive individuals like the traditional priest.

## 5. *Nsamanto*

The belief in *samanto* the ability of the dead (ancestors) to summon the living into *asamando* the land of the dead. It is believed that one acquires some supernatural abilities once dead hence the dead interfere in the life of the living. The Asantes hold on to the myth and even today some families still consult to find a way of empowering their dead to take revenge for any wrongful act or any believed injustice done to their living relatives. This is what we mean when we say '*ye ko abisa*' meaning the act of going to enquire from an oracle.

Especially in situations where the dead makes an accusation against the living before the 'tribunal'. The living will then have to be summoned through his or her spirit, thus may result in a coma which is locally referred to as '*wa to mum*' literally meaning he has gone dumb or secondly one's death can be caused. Individuals found to be innocent of the charges brought against them will be returned to life if in a coma. The researcher was confidently told by Respondent 1 of some community members that "came to life days after lying in a coma and other who woke up just before they were buried, these individuals recounted their experiences". This myth is closely linked to the ability of dead ancestors to protect the family and avenge deaths.

## 6. *Nsamankom*

"The spirit of the dead consumes or takes over the body of a guilty person and forces them to confess any kind of atrocity done to the deceased, it could as well rest upon an innocent person to confess who the murderer is". This puts the dead spirit at peace as it is believed a person (spirit) becomes restless if their death is not accounted for. The indigenous Akan also used this as a way to protect families from suffering various misfortunes or bad luck caused by restless unappeased negative spirits.

### 4.3.2 Myths for Protection and Social Governance

Another major theme is referred to as ‘myths for protection and social governance’. It was found out that myths within communities were an equal avenue of protection for inhabitants from any possible danger of any kind. These dangers can come in either a physical form such as sickness or spiritual as may be caused by either witches or the gods. Hence in the day to day activities of man, protection is considered a vital component of life. Moreover, “these myths help shape the attitudes and character exhibited within a given community, some social values, morality and instructions are couched in myths in order that they may be adhered to” as purported by Respondent 2. Though some were discovered not to have as grievous implication as purported by its proponents. He said “perhaps if those laws or commands were spoken idly without any spiritual implications people would not have taken it as seriously as it should be. So even though everyone thinks it is not entirely true, following it thoroughly does not result in any harm. I believe that’s what has kept us”. Gyekye (1998) otherwise, thinks morality and rules of social conducts will arise once there are relations and social interaction, that despite the notoriety of the African, one should not be tempted to assume or think the Africans moral ideas of good or bad is only owing to the dictates of some supernatural agents.

#### 1. *Empepem/mpentuo*

*“Wo to mpempem a, woto kuro” !*

The chronology of this myth as told by Respondent 1 is “to averse calamities such as diseases, curse or any other physical or spiritual mishaps that may occur within a community or township”. □ *Pempem* is a kind of a barrier, a culmination of heaps of rubbish collected from after “thorough cleansing” of the land. This creates a somewhat resemblance to a short wall at the outskirts and frontage of the towns which equally

serves as a place to dispose of trash. It is for this reason that they say 'wo to mpempem a, wo to kuro' meaning the site of this wall is an indication of a township ahead. Thus, strangers and travellers alike use this as a form of direction. The act of the cleansing is referred to as *mpemtuo* or *mpempem*. In the event of the coming of any such calamity, the *bosom* or *Nkomhyeni* will declare a set date for the *mpemtuo* in consultation with the chiefs and elders of the land. The success of this act rests fully on the shoulders of the Queen mother of the community who bears the responsibility of gathering only the women within the community or township to sweep thoroughly and create a border at the outskirts of town with the heaps of gathered filth. This is seen as a barricade and a fortification, thus any approaching disease or misfortune will end at the barrier.

## 2. *Afɔrebɔ*

### *Afɔre bɔ twa mmusuo*

The above phrase means 'sacrifices avert calamity'. To offer sacrifices of whatever form or reason is one of the key attributes of the indigenous Akan. 'It is typically done for two main reasons, to pacify or to show gratitude'. Either way, the Akans are strong of the belief that the refusal to pacifying either (God) god or man for any wrongful act done intentionally or ignorantly, one will face grave consequences. Equally not to show gratitude to man or god is grievous. As Sarpong (1974) considers, it is a frequent and humbling sight to see a number of relatives and friends pay homage and greetings to individuals and families who joined them in their grief; in this instance, the sacrifice is termed as '*naasee*' or thanksgiving. The actors in this instance go home peacefully with the notion that they have paid their dues and debts to their benefactors. But the most prominent forms of sacrifices for both pacifying and thanksgiving is offered to gods who often require it.

As is exemplified by Brew (1990) in the poem *A Plea for Mercy* “we have come to your shrine to worship, we the sons of the land. The naked cowherd has brought the cows safely home”. Here a herdsman gives thanks to his god for bringing him safely home from his sojourns. As explained by Respondent 3, “this scenario is a typical sight at shrines of various deities when the blacksmith or the farmer returns home. A most crucial time to give sacrifices or *afɔre* is when such taboos like murder is committed or an unmarried couple are found in the act of sex especially in the bush or an unmarried girl found pregnant. The land must immediately be pacified as they believe it has been defiled”. As witnessed by Rattray (1923) items such as sheep, hens, eggs and others are requested for the sacrifice in appeasing the spirit of the land.

### 3. “*Adwareε kyiri nnwomto*”

Singing whilst taking a bath will result in one’s mother’s death. As explained by Respondent 3, “night within the indigenous community was thought of as an ample time not only for rest but also for ‘spirits to roam’ while mortals slept”. The Anecdote was given that, “once a woman was singing while washing, she heard a lone voice re-echo her songs. She woke up with blisters on her lips, a known indication of an encounter with a ghost”. Though he further explained that as the years passed, other reasons were given as interpretations of this myth. The myth concerning singing in the shower was told also by Respondent 1 but in contradiction, he explained that “it is not to cause fear, but in fact to make sure people do not die as a result of consuming any harmful substances from the soap. As the soaps used long ago had cocoa husks, palm kernel oil and soda as its components”. The researcher was educated about the chemical nature of substances used in making soaps as such, the threat of one’s mother’s death is to protect that individual. A mother is often dear to her children.

**4. *Yennya aduane nsi abɔnten mma adeɛ nkye so /yennya aduane afikyire anadwo***

The inference to the above myth, Respondent 1 said “foods left outside the house overnight will become poisonous as they will become feasts for spirits, these spirits usually roam at night and perceive every food left outside the house as offerings. Anyone who eats such food can become terribly ill or die”. This mythical belief could be substantiated by an act very typical to the Akans that is, the throwing of morsels of food on the ground for the spirits or ancestors. Sometimes these foods are left overnight. Likewise, the bowls meant to contain foods for the gods left overnight. These can be seen across the yard at the ‘Yaa Asantewaa shrine’ within Ejisu Besease an indigenous Akan community?

**5. *Yemmɔ hwerɛma anadwo***

Whistles at night will be responded by spirits. This myth much like the above according to Respondent 2 gives much consideration to the subject of night and thus not appropriate for such noises to be heard. “It is believed that noise making at night is a disturbance to the deities that roam around the towns or communities”. Respondent 1 continued that “though these spirits are known to protect yet they can be malevolent”.

**6. *Yennya waduro ne wɔmma afikyire anadwo***

Leaving mortar overnight will result in family disgrace. Respondent 3 gave submissions as to how best to understand that “the nature of the Akan is such that one must be aware of their various perceptions and attitudes towards their traditional elements”. To the Asante the *waduro* (mortar) and *wɔmma* (pestle) which are the machines in making their much travelled and respected delicacy *fufu* is a symbol of family and communal ties. It is therefore appalling to see these objects left in the open at the mercy of the weather and in the full glare of neighbours.

### **7. *Yemfa nkosua nhye abɔfra/akɔdaa***

This myth holds the premise that ‘offering too many eggs to one’s child makes him a thief. This myth as told by Respondent 1 was reiterated by Respondent 2 who educated the researcher that “Asantes consider eggs to signify more than what it merely is, as a source of food’. It is a major component of various rituals as performed in their daily customs and practices. It was explained that the eggs are proverbial in its makeup”. Respondent 1 added, “It is delicate yet has the ability to be hardened or take up different shapes even when destroyed, again it is considered as a source of life as it could have been a chick”. This is an opinion shared by Gyekye (1998) in his description of power as an egg, delicate and needing careful attention in order not to be destroyed. Again Sarpong (1977) explains that young girls who have been ushered into womanhood through the nobility rites are given eggs eat in a ceremony called *anoka*. Eggs are said to also be an ingredient in the solution used for the cleansing of stools of past chiefs before an *adae* festival, this is comparatively in agreements to records of Rattray (1927) as he further recounts the giving of eggs to ‘victorious mothers’. As such considering the sacred nature and consideration given to this food, one cannot merely give it to a child without reason or cause, much less discriminately as this may develop his or her cravings for a food not easily available. Upon careful consideration, such an act is likely to lead an ignorant or as it may be the case, stubborn child, into theft. This too could likely result in a curse.

### **8. *Duabɔ/nnome***

It simply means to curse, the verb form of the noun *dua* which is curse. As it connotes these have evil implications. According to Respondent 1, to curse or to be cursed is one of the easiest occurrences within Akan traditions. He explained curses are often a result of disagreement or a dissatisfaction on the part of either party in any given situation. He further stated that in the day to day activities, there are interactions, agreements and

contracts between parties to do one thing or the other. In such an instance that one party feels betrayed, he or she could invoke a curse on the other simply by an utterance. Though such utterances are often accompanied by the pouring of hard liquor over an egg while whispering the name of the intended victim, it was worth noting however that this was not accepted as the best form of redress but often the last resort. Grieved community members had the opportunity to seek redress from the chiefs by the offended issuing a complaint, *nsama*. In crucial cases the perpetrator of whatever offence is told to *ka ntam* meaning ‘to swear’ a more dire form of *nsi di* which is ‘to vow’. He or she swears to be guiltless of the allegations levelled against him or her. The swearing rids the chiefs, plaintiff and community members of any evil that may happen if the accused is indeed guilty. To curse is to invoke the gods to vengeance while to swear is to put the matters before the gods to judge. This explanation was further exemplified by Rattray (1923) as he witnessed a swearing ceremony “*se Fagyase aware me yi, se nye die obeka akyere me na me ka, na se me de odo, me di otan, me de ka nkontomposem biara a, abosom yi n’kum me*”.

#### **9. *Nananom bambɔ***

“With regards to ancestral worship, it is believed that our forebearers serve as a source of protection for their living relatives. Thus ancestral worship is very evident in indigenous communities (Ranehem, 2014). Respondent 1 explained that “ancestors or *nananom* are mentioned during the performance of libation after acknowledging the gods because of their importance. Not anyone can become an ancestor, mostly they are brave warriors, past chiefs and heads of clan”. A case agreed by Lukwata (2003) who thinks although ancestors continually influence the lives of living relatives he contradicts that ancestors are protectors of the land and other natural resources from which they survive. Respondent 1 added “we respect our ancestors because of their contributions to our

communities. Most of them helped to form our towns and clans, it was because of them that we became a people in Akan society. That is why we pay homage to them”. As recorded by Rattray (1923) at an *Adea* festival “*Me nananomnsamanfo, enne ye Awukudaε, mo megye εto nni, na mo ma kuro yi nye yiye, na mo mma mma, ne nnipa a yewo kuro yi mu nyinaa nya sika*”.

### **10. Dabone**

“*Wo pue da bone a wo hu wakiyiwa deε*” meaning the man (or woman) who goes contrary to the observance of the sacred day will definitely see what he hates. There are days set aside within many Akan communities to stay away from the farm, the sea or some other frequently done activities. The purpose is to revere certain those days in dedication to the god(s) of the township. These days we set aside so we rest and give the gods some space to work as well. Respondent 1 recounted an incident of a man who having considered the myth to be of no substance or consequence “just as many other people have attempted and hopelessly regretted having defied this principle”.

Then after them comes the smaller elements like trees, ponds and creatures. “We believe every tree has a spirit, that is why we perform libation to trees before falling them and we plant a new tree in place of the one that fell. Likewise, we believe since water has life-giving qualities, spirits reside in them and we, therefore, revere them as such. It is our belief that when we pray to them, they can respond and do our bidding. That is why we forbid fighting and such by the waterfronts as this way attract the rebuke of the gods” as told by Respondent 3.

### 4.3.3 Myths about Birth and Children

To understand the myths surrounding birth, one has to note the seriousness with which the Akan particularly Asante's approach issues of childbirth especially childlessness. According to Sarpong (1999), "in matrilineal Asante where the survival of the matrilineage depends upon its female members, a barren woman is a shame and despair. Her state is held to be an implicit betrayal of her people and she feels it as such". For this reason, even children can chastise her to bear children of her own should she be bold enough to send them on many errands.

Children are a source of pride especially the male child who is sometimes respected as much as grown men. "To better understand this, one has to be abreast with their perception of man and his seven stages of life and contribution to his people. Focusing on few these stages of life, from birth he is an *abɔfra yabɔ no afra abodeɛ* meaning he has been created and interwoven with nature, it is for this reason that a child is considered a spirit. From six to thirteen years old is referred to him as '*akodaa*' because he is capable of walking and doing menial work for the family. As such, he becomes everybody's slave daily '*akoadaa*'. As he gets older he becomes an *abrantiɛ, wo bra noa onti* meaning stubborn and rebellious to rules. The girl becomes *abayiwa*, one who has discovered her life pot *obra ayiwa* and her source of survival for which reason she can elope and have a life of her own possibly becoming a *kyirebra* meaning one who did not go through female nubility rites, an occurrence often resulting in lack of marriage as no family would want to be associated with them (Sarpong, 1977). Indeed, it is an abomination punishable by banishment together with the lover especially in the case of pregnant girls. As such the Akan society relies primarily on its young to survive within their cultural and traditional restrictions. For this reason, issues with childbearing and childlessness crucial as both male and females suffer dearly should they remain barren in life, their corpses are not

spared. Persons who remained childless till death had thorn called ‘lick me with death’ pieced into the soles of their corpses as they are addressed “*wonwo ba, mma saa bio*” meaning you have not borne children, do not return same again (Rattray, 1927).

### **1. *Awomewu***

This is a twofold as there are closely linked yet considered differently. First, it is the belief that mothers or community members who continuously lose their young children must not show much sorrow at their loss as is believed that any such excessive display of pain at their passing especially in the typical traditional format which is very dramatic and even entertaining. “The story is told of a woman whose very dramatic wailing became so attractive that the spirits conspired to kill many more of her children in order for her wailings to continue. “But were fortunately overheard by a hunter who later cautioned the woman of the consequences of her action”. While this may be so, we also know there may be other causes of such confuse death which may be due to one vice or taboo committed by either parent and as such pacification must be performed in order for the calamity of childbirth to cease”.

### **2. *Kosama***

*Kosama* are believed to be evil spirits who are sometimes in league with death to bring distress to a woman which is why they are often scared, mutilated and deposited in the forest without a funeral in order that they will desist from their evil ways if being born repeatedly.

### **3. *Yemmfa kosua nnhye abofra***

This myth holds the premise that ‘offering too many eggs to one’s child makes him a thief. The researcher was educated that “Asantes consider eggs to signify more than what it merely is, as a source of food’. It is a major component of various rituals as are

performed in their day customs and practices. “After a successful birth, a mother could be offered eggs with congratulatory messages. Eggs are considered as symbols of fertility, life and yield, so can be given whenever there is such a reason like on ones day of birth”. It was explained that the eggs are proverbial in its makeup. Respondent 1 added, “It is delicate yet has the ability to be hardened or take up different shapes even when destroyed, again it is considered as a source of life as it could have been a chick”. This is an opinion shared by Gyekye (1998) in his description of power as an egg, delicate and needing careful attention in order not to be destroyed. Again Sarpong (1977) explains that young girls who have been ushered into womanhood through the nubility or puberty rites are given eggs to eat in a ceremony called *anoka*.

Eggs are also said to be an ingredient in the solution used in the cleansing of stools of past chiefs before an *adae* festival, this is comparatively in agreements to records of Rattray (1927) as he further recounts the giving of eggs to ‘victorious mothers’. Respondent 2 further added,

as such considering the sacred nature and importance accorded to this food, one cannot merely give it to a child without reason or cause, much less discriminately as this may develop his or her cravings for a food not easily available. Upon careful consideration, such an act is likely to lead an ignorant or stubborn child into theft. This too likely to result in a curse.

#### **4.3.4 Myths about gods and Tutelary Spirits**

As evidenced throughout the research findings, the traditional Akan is a highly spiritual individual and therefore perceives all nature through that dimension. Myths about gods, mysterious creatures or beings, spirits that inhabits inhibition nature. These spirits can be

offended and are often appeased with various offerings. In agreement, Mulumba (1997) considers that the Akans are drawn likewise towards the earth and water nature entities. As noted by Respondent 1 “We consider something godly when it has the ability to provide and protect. The sun and moon, the earth and all major water bodies especially are considered as god. That is the reasons why we often personify those things. Such as the names of *Nana Nyame* the Almighty, *Amowi* meaning the giver of sun and *Kokuroko*, the indestructible as compared with the animal elephant. And we consider the earth as female by saying *Asaase Yaa* and all the water bodies have a name and are either considered male and female based”.

We believe *Nyame* distributed his power to all his creations, into elements like trees, ponds, stones and creatures. All these creations are believed to possess some supernatural abilities like trees have a spirit, that is why we perform libation to trees before falling them and we plant a new tree in place of the one that fell. Respondent 1 concluded “likewise, we believe since water has life-giving qualities, spirits reside in them and we, therefore, revere them as such. So we believe when we pray to them, they can respond and do our bidding. That is why we forbid fighting and such by the waterfronts as this way attract the rebuke of the gods”. As for that, it is very relative to the individual beliefs. Man can decide to make anything a god then worship it by pouring drinks and praying to. But we believe in the creator of this universe.

### **1. *Oman /kuro bosom***

As explained by Respondent 2, every *oman* or *kuro* meaning nation or township respectively (a cluster of few small communities) has a protective or guardian spirits as well as gods, their numbers are dependent on the size of the people. As such it is commonplace to hear the phrase “*Oman bosom nyen di no ya*’ literally meaning the god

of the town is not to be taken for granted as it is under his watch that you sleep”. Anecdotal evidence shows that Yaa Asantewaa’s bravery to fight the British in 1900 was under the inspiration and empowerment of the god of Ejisu Besease, the shrine which still stands today is under the influence of the god *Tano*. Within every indigenous community or township, a solitary area is created in veneration to a god. This serves as a point of location where libations are performed and sacrifices made. All Akan communities had a particular god to whom they entrust both physical and spiritual protection. They, therefore, must give reverence and pay allegiance to them, only.

## **2. *Nsuo bosom***

*Nsuo* literally meaning ‘water’. It is believed that *nsuo biara ye bosom* which means ‘every water body is a spirit or a god’ that can materialize as a physical being. The researcher was educated that these spirits can possess humans and consequently make them priests or priestesses of the shrines that are often built for them. “I recall as a youth, we all knew that any farming activity must be at least 50 yards interval from the bank of the riverside so as to give some room to the river god should they decide to walk past to relax or choose its initiates”, an anecdote as told by Respondent 1. It is on record that the present priestess of the *Subri* deity that takes its powers from the River *Subri* with its source at Asante Effiduase, Nana Tiwaa was born in 1978 with an object in hand which was later discovered to be from the river after numerous consultations (Akoto-Amoatin, 2015).

## **3. *Nnua bosom***

*Nnua bi tumi ye bosom* which literally means ‘every tree can be a god’. This is seen at times when trees are being felled and then those felling it begin to experience some difficulties in the cutting down of those trees. When it happens that way, they must

perform rituals to allow the tree to be cut down without any further problems happening to those who are cutting down the trees. The Akans belief in nature's powers is also why it is only some trees such as *ɔsese* and *Nyamedua* that are used in carving stools, under these trees libation is performed before it is cut down and used. Prominent traditional drums are made only with specific trees. By this, the drums become sacred as well and are used only on special occasions like 'fofie' and 'akwasidae'. In fact, the chief of Kwaman for his sacrifice asked that his name is on the talking drum forever, so it is till this day.

#### **4.3.5 Myths about Creatures and Beings**

“Myths about mysterious creatures, beings and spirits that inhabit nature. These also live among humans unseen except for peoples whose eyes are open”. We also believe that there are other creatures that exist alongside man and even sometimes relates with him and speaks through different mediums, these may seem unbelievable to the stranger yet have been proven throughout our lifetimes”. To this statement, Apostle (1981) considers that myths are related to the mysterious and illogical and contain facts or truths about man's experiences in his encounter with the created order and its relation to the supernatural world. The researcher was educated about these supernatural beings and encounters as Abanuka (1994) concurs that myth tells of the superhuman experiences of the community. “These creatures are often known to live in the deepest parts of the forest with the very wildest of animal, they are often mentioned in our folktales and fables”. For this Ranehem (2014) is of the view that such can be misunderstood though important as mythological stories are sometimes called *anansesem* literally meaning 'the spider story' though some of these maybe historical in nature. *Nyankonsem* are sometimes referred to as *nyankomsem* or 'words of a sky god'. “Some of these entities include

*mmoatia* or dwarfs who are within the forests and are believed to have strange supernatural abilities. Other such creatures that appear at different times of the day. Respondent 1 named some of these as witches, wood and sky creatures who all possess witchcraft substance that are meant for good or harm”. They can communicate through human mediums such as the *odunsifo* who are knowledgeable in herbs and leaves, *abosomfo* these are the traditional priest who sometimes works using the supernatural abilities of these creatures and the *sumankwafo* who are the spiritual embodiment of the Asante kingdom till date

### **1. Aboatia/Mmoatia**

*Mmoatia befa nipa* meaning dwarfs come for man is a phrase commonly heard, this refers to the mythical creature’s *mmoatia* or dwarfs. Dwarfs are considered to be mischievous entities who have some human physical characteristics such as head though far larger in size and feet but with front facing backwards. It is believed that they sometimes carry humans from the bush to their dwelling places either to teach them about their customs, give them healing abilities or to make a jest of him. They also show them many spiritual things otherwise hidden from humans such as the potency of particular leaves in curing diseases. These individuals can be returned within days or weeks back to their various villages.

### **2. Bayifo**

Witches are creatures believed to be vile in nature, having the ability to materialize in different forms. It is said that they take on the appearances of dead people just to haunt or taunt their relatives. They are known to have the ability to appear in peoples dreams, especially at night as their abilities are at its heights then. Though they have shapeshifting

abilities, they are known to possess such descriptions as flying, sparks of fire in a dark area or a flame inside a brass pan.

### **3. *Ahomakyem /Ahomatia***

These are threadlike stalk extensions that descend from mighty trees like Odum and its like. They are said to be possessed by wood spirits and can sense when one intends to harm as such, they will turn into snakes to scare of bite you away. Their presence is known to protect some trees from being fallen as they can possess it making it their permanent abode. They can equally relocate and grow elsewhere.

### **4. *Samantan***

These are wood spirits believed to be ghost-like beings who look like children. They are known to be very cunning and witty but will often lure unsuspecting farmers or hunters to their death. By using their seeming innocence to take advantage of them sometimes with the pretexts of being lost in the forest.

#### **4.4 Illustrations of myths based on emerging themes**

The third research question focuses on how the identified myths were translated into symbols. This section made use of illustrations that capture the essence of the identified myths. Twenty-eight myths were translated into symbols in order to answer the third research question: *“how will the identified myths be translated into symbols?”*

#### 4.4.1 *Owuo* (death)

The journey into the afterlife. The transition from the physical realm into the state of the spirits. The choice of a skull as its representation stems from the symbol being used universally to represent danger, harm or death. A half skull was chosen to create a slight distinction and for aesthetics. Shown in Figure 4.1 is a symbol to represent death.



**Figure 4.1: *Owuo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.2 *Asamando* (a place for the dead)

*Asamando* is the abode for the dead and can be referred to as Hades in the Christian literature. The place considered as the destination for the after-life. The final location of all journeying through death. The hut here is representing an abode or place of residence. The skeletal figures, one seated with the other holding an umbrella over its head. This concept was drawn from the Akan myth that royals and everyone alike continues to play their various roles even in the after-life. The looming skull represents death. See Figure 4.2 for the symbol for *Asamando*. Comparatively this Akan belief in Kings maintaining

their position together with its privileges after death in the life hereafter is similar to Egyptian mythology about their Pharaohs whose corpses are bejeweled and buried in luxurious Pyramids filled with treasures.



**Figure 4.2: Asamando/Asamaado**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.3 Nsamantoa**

This is a myth about the dead summoning the living into their realm mostly to adjudicate one form of justice or the other. This illustration takes extracts from *asamaado*. The skeletal figure represents the living who is being summoned. Other items are the cutlass and the pipe. These are symbols of oath and peace respectively.

The Akan (Asante) is known to use the cutlass in the process of *ntam ka* or the swearing of oaths in such cases like theft, family disputes and accusations of witchcraft. It can also be used in the instances of individuals ascending into various offices. In the case of chiefs, the sword is used which remains the symbol of authority.

The choice of a pipe is derived from the widely known metaphorical phrase ‘to smoke the peace pipe’ as the ‘accused’ can be found innocent and thus forgiven or appeased.



**Figure 4.3: Nsamantua**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.4 Saman-ghosts**

These are the spirit of the dead or ghosts that manifest sometimes in reality. They are sometimes believed to possess certain supernatural powers and are believed to be malevolent often only concerned with vengeance or causing fright. No information was gathered concerning their description for illustration.

#### **4.4.5 Nananom bammɔ**

The myth of ancestral protection. The Akans concept that dead family or relatives are constantly guarding the lives of their relations. Here the skeletal element representing appears with two shields in its centre. The circular arrangement of the skulls is owing to the knowledge of the infinite nature of spirits. The shield is a symbol of security and protection as is seen in most palaces.



**Figure 4.3: *Nananom bammɔ***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.6 Afɔrebo**

It means a sacrificial lamb. Lambs are known to be meek and submissive, unlike the goat. A goat is believed to be stubborn and willful making it an unsuitable animal for sacrifices. The choice stemmed out of the Akan phrase *odwan gyimifo*, though this sounds derogatory as it means ‘stupid sheep’. The Asantes equally uses this statement to express a very lowly or submissive peace loving person.



**Figure 4.4: *Afɔrebo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.7 Dabone

Every ‘*da bone*’ is an abominable day for any form of hard labour. Community members stay away and do not participate in any vigorous activity especially individual trade. As such in a fishing community, neither fisherman nor fishmonger is likely to be seen by the sea or lake on such days. Likewise, in farming communities. A man is seen here resting under a coconut tree with a canoe ashore.

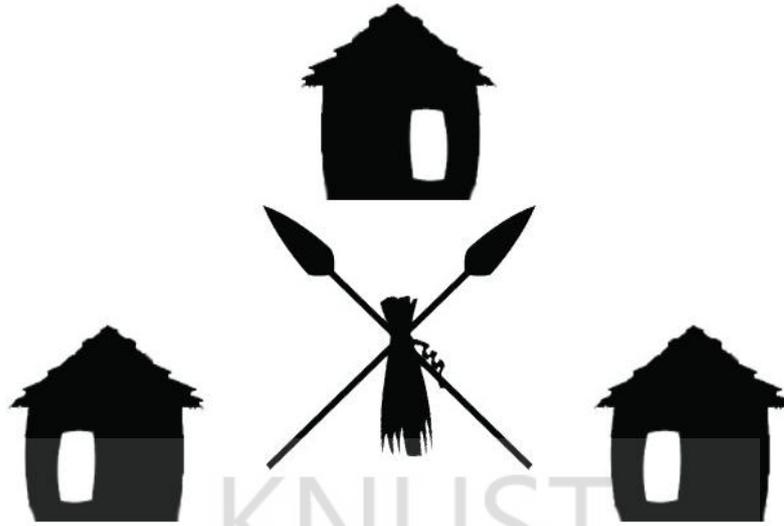


**Figure 4.5: *Dabone***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.8 *Empereṃ/mpentuo*

The act of sweeping away calamities and barricading community or township to protect it from diseases. Each hut symbolizes a household with the collective huts representing a community. The shields are symbols of security and protection while the broom represents the act of sweeping away calamities.



**Figure 4.6: *Empepem / mpentuo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.9 Musuo -taboo**

To the Akan, it is a taboo to observe another's personal acts which are considered private. In that same respect, it is not permissible to defecate close to a hut, as such men and women have their separate areas to do such acts. In the image above, a woman is seen defecating under a hut with a man walking past.



**Figure 4.7: *Mmusuo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.10 Adwareε kyɪ ndwom toɔ

It is forbidden to sing while bathing as this could cause the death of one's mother. It is a form of protection against attracting a bad spirit with your singing or consuming the soap which is harmful. See figure 4.9 for this symbol.



**Figure 4.8: Adwareε kyɪ ndwom toɔ**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.11 Yεmmpra anadwo

The night is dedicated to the spirits and as such requires a great minimum of silence and quiet. The crescent moon an undeniable element associated with the night is seen above an image of a woman sweeping. The illustration is intended to convey a simple clear and easy to interpretation to the reader.



**Figure 4.9: *Yen pra anadwo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.12 *Yemfa nkosua nhye abofra***

The Akan myth of theft as connected to the excessive eating of eggs is one that is implemented even before a child is born. A pregnant mother is told right from conception to desist from eating too many eggs as the child will become a thief. As such this becomes applicable all through their lives. The symbol depicts a pregnant woman holding an egg to her mouth with a child behind her, seemingly stealing an egg.



**Figure 4.10: *Yemfa nkosua nhye akora***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.13 Yɛnnya waduro ne womma nsi abɔnten mma adeɛ nkye so

Waduro ne nwoma ɛda abɔnte ne abusua ahwisia na ɛnam.

The mortar and pestle are the two chief objects in the production of the famous Akan meal *fufuo*, very notable to the Asantes. It is equally a symbol of the family as these objects are seen in every indigenous household. It is, for this reason, leaving them outside overnight, a time perceived to be for the spirits or gods is considered an abomination, is a sign of total disrespect and abandonment of family values.

The image below is a hut symbolizing household, a mortar and a reclining pestle. Above the hut is the image of a full moon representing the night?



Figure 4.11: *Yɛnnya waduro ne womma nsi abɔnten mma adeɛ nkye so*

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.14 Womewu/Awomewuo

The illustration below in Figure 4.13 is the representation for the myth about the repetitive death of children by one woman. The image is of a woman sitting on a stool in a state of distress as she wails looking on at the child on her lap. Such a corpse is immediately put into a basket and thrown into the bushes without a funeral but a small family gathering. The woman is portrayed to be visibly distressed for easy understanding. As in contradiction to the myth which best described with the phrase '*yensu wo me wu*' meaning we do not cry over the death of children.



**Figure 4.12: Awomewuo**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.15 *Kosama*

The myth of *kosama* is about the cycle of birth , death and rebirth of the same child to the same mother. These children are said to be dubious or cunning and often offer themselves to be born just to ridicule or distress a woman. They are believed to have supernatural powers hence their ability to be reborn again.

*Kosama* children are given scarifications and marks on various parts of their body often their back or face. This is to deter them from attempting to die or to be reborn if the marks were given to the corpse.



**Figure 4.13: *Kosama***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.16 *Kwasiawuo*

For one to die a foolish death, that is, *nkwasia wuo*, he or she must have died tragically through means that could be attributed to their own senselessness. Such deaths are not honoured with a proper funeral, in like manner such individuals cannot be considered as ancestors, to the Akan their names are not worth mentioning, thoughtless of naming a child after them. In such an instance like an individual stabbing another because of a

misunderstanding or ensuing arguments. In the illustration above a man is seen running wielding a knife with two others standing over a motionless person.

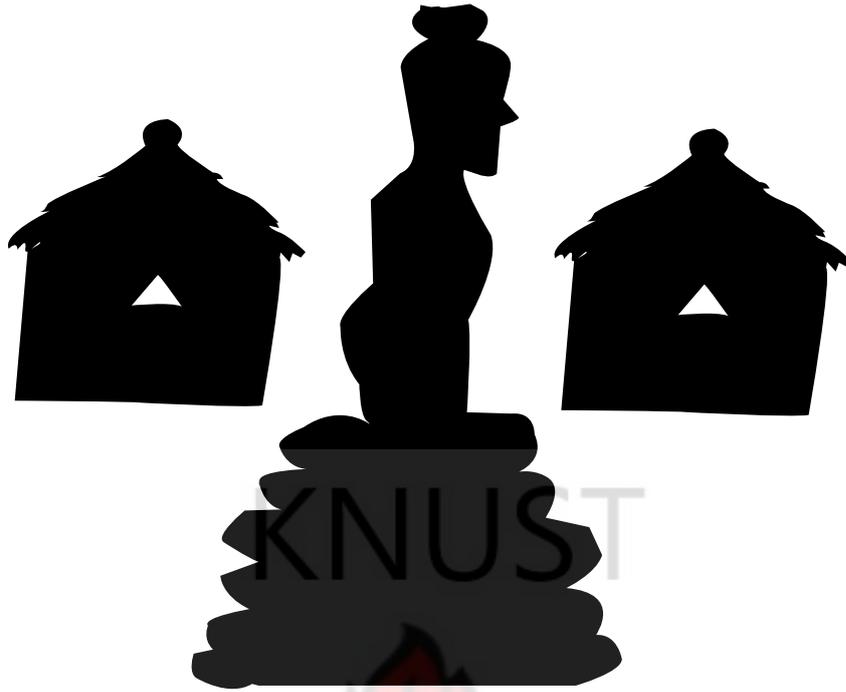


**Figure 4.14: *Kwasia wuo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.17 Oman bosom**

The image below is a description of the myth about the god of the town. Within every Akan community or township, a shrine or a commonplace mostly at the centre or junction is allotted to this god. This place is where sacrifices are made and libations poured. The hut here symbolizes the community while the looming image, intentionally made larger, is the god that ‘covers’ the community with his protection.



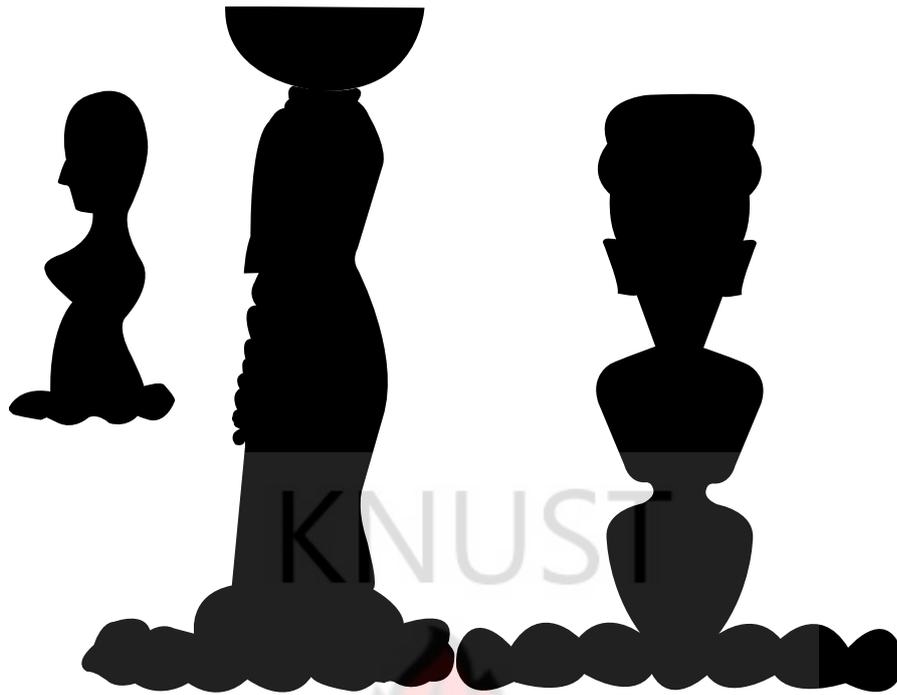
**Figure 4.15: *Oman bosom***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.18 Bosom (gods)**

These are the minor deities and tutelary spirits that have supernatural abilities given to them by the Supreme God, *Nyankopon* to protect, heal and sustain humanity.

The illustrations below depict both male and female gods. The illustration of the image with the pan on the head symbolizes a water deity.



**Figure 4.16: *Bosom***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.19 Ahohom (spirit)**

These are supernatural beings that live with men unseen. They assist as well as cause harm to individuals and community alike. Due to their supernatural abilities, they are able to change to various forms, from creatures to humans. The researcher was unable to obtain any information as to their appearance or any form of depiction of these ‘spirits’ for illustration.

#### **4.4.20 *Duabo***

This is the act of evoking curses of one calamity or the other on one's enemies. It is known to be more potent when it is done in the name of a god though one's own words are still believed to be potent. The symbol below consists of two of the main objects used for *duabo*. The egg symbolizing life and the liquor denotes sacrifice.



**Figure 4.17: Duabo**

Source: (Researcher,2018)

#### **4.4.21 Yennya aduane nsi abonten mma adee nkye so**

The myth illustrated above entreats all and sundry not to eat foods left outside the house overnight as it is believed that good and bad spirits roam about households at night. For this reason, they may likely touch or even ‘eat’ some, thereby rendering that food poisonous.

In the image above, the hut symbolizing household is seen with a bowl outside under the crescent moon symbolizing night.

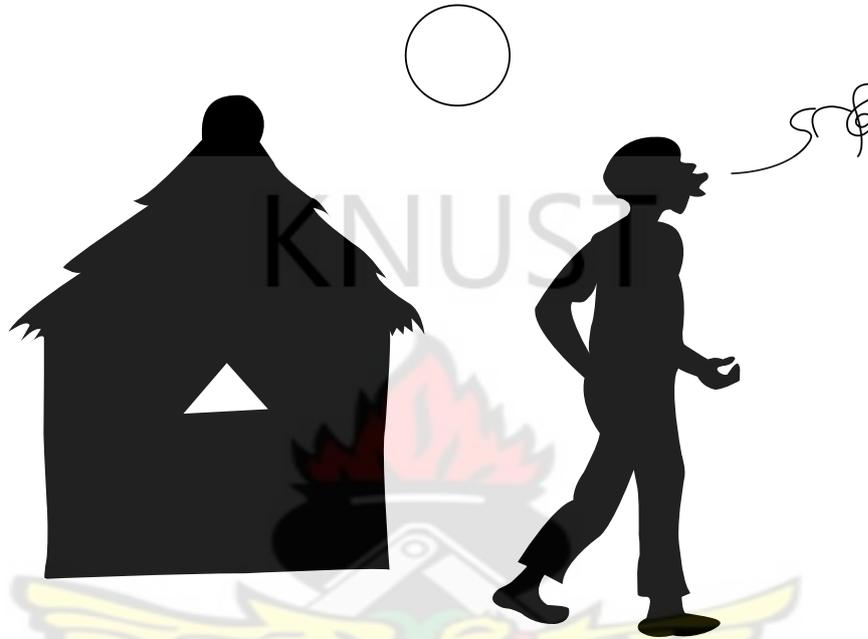


**Figure 4.18: Yennya aduane nsi abonten mma adee nkye so**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.22 Yemmɔ hwirɛma anadwo

Whistling at night is believed to attract spirits who are sometimes noted to be evil. In this illustration a man is seen whistling, behind him is a hut representing a household, with the moon above.



**Figure 4.19: Yemmɔ hwerɛma anadwo**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.23 Sasabonsam

The myth surrounding *sasabonsam* is that of a frightful, hairy, stinky lanky creature who is known to haunt and trouble people while they sleep. He usually lives in the forest. *Sasabonsam* is a very popular figure in Asante's folktales called *Anansesem*.

See Figure 4.21 below to see the visual representation of *Sasabonsam*.



**Figure 4.20: Sasabonsam**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.24 *Bayifoɔ***

This myth is of another creature who is believed to operate primarily at night. The witch is a notable figure in Asante's folklore. Witches are said to have supernatural abilities that are often used for evil, against strangers and family alike.

The illustration below exhibits one of their notable traits, flying. One other characteristic of the *bayifoɔ* are flames of fire. Here, depicted as flying at night.



**Figure 4.21: *Bayifo***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.25 Aboatia/Mmoatia**

Dwarfs, *mmoatia* plural of the singular noun *aboatia* is a well-known Akan supernatural creature. They are said to be physical in nature and are believed to live within the thickest parts of the forest where they conjure magic and sometimes kidnap humans. They are known to be either good or bad but nonetheless very witty.

The illustration below emphasizes their well-known features. Namely, big heads, stout short bodies and big foot with the toes facing backwards.

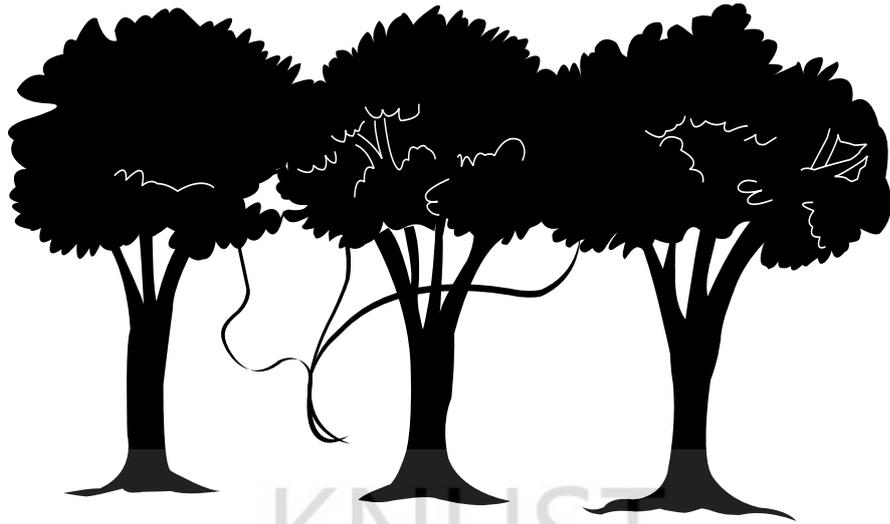


**Figure 4.22: Aboatia**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.26 Homakyem /Ahomatia**

This literally means thin cords or threads that extends from some tree tops to the ground. These are known to be some sort of tree creatures that live in between the branches of big trees, they are pliable and can be used for utility purposes but can turn snakes when they sense danger. They are known to be protective spirits but have the capacity for evil. In the illustration below they are seen dangling down from tall trees.



**Figure 4.23: *Ahomatia***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.27 *Apaee* /*Apayɛ* (cleansing of the land)**

The myth of *apea* is closely associated with the various Akan festivals that mark new seasons. They are rituals performed to cleanse the land and water bodies to rid it of evil. This is done with the support of the community or township god. As such, it is commonplace to hear “*ye de di tano reko yi apaee*’ meaning we are going to cleanse the land with Tano (a water god). This ritual involves the performance by the traditional priest working under the inspiration of the god of the township.



**Figure 4.24: *Apaee***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.28 *Nsuo bosom* (water spirit)**

The illustration below is a depiction of a water deity. The indigenous Akans believed in the existence of spirits inhabiting water bodies and can manifest themselves in various ways. The image below is a female spirit, with the drops of water surrounding her symbolizing water.

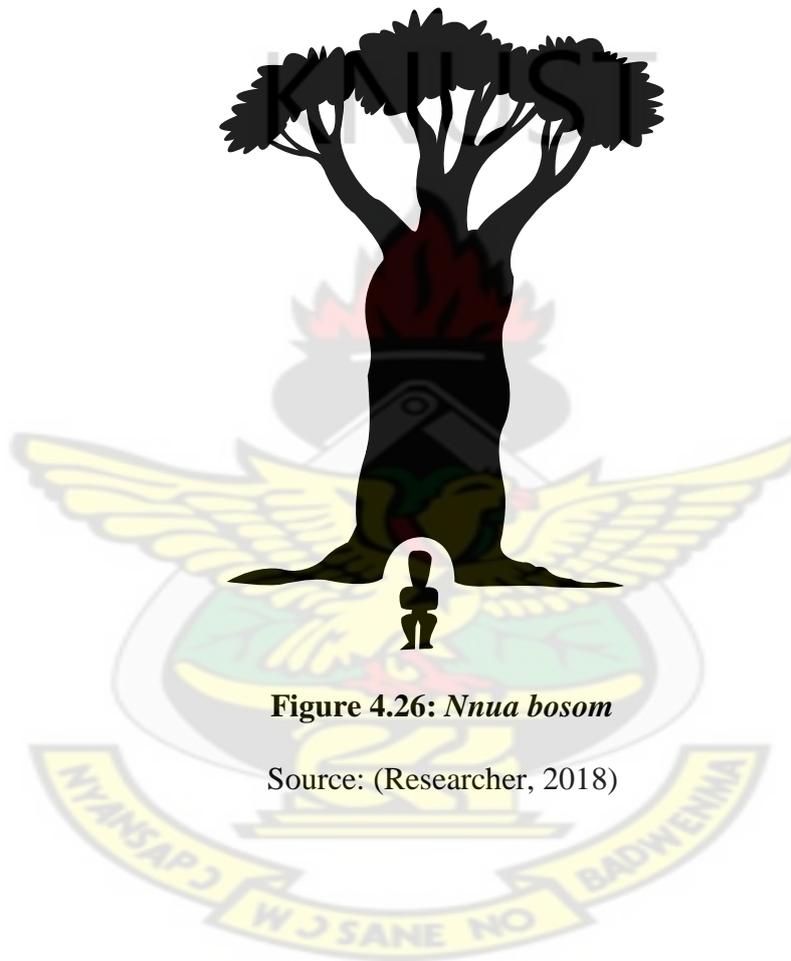


**Figure 4.25: *Nsuo bosom***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### **4.4.29 *Nnua bosom* (tree spirit)**

The illustration below depicts a tree spirit. These are tutelary spirits that inhabit trees and have supernatural powers to intervene in the affairs of man. The emerging image seen beneath the tree is the spirit. This can be interpreted as the spirit of the tree though it can also exist on its own. In that, it is mobile and can inhabit or relocate into other objects in nature.



**Figure 4.26: *Nnua bosom***

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

#### 4.4.30 Mpaapaemu – eternal separation

The myth of *mpapaemu* stems from the Akans conviction of death as a passage and a realm that offers its ‘citizens’ supernatural abilities to interfere in the affairs of their living relatives. This account for such fears as being haunted by the ghost of a dead relative. The act of *mpaapaemu* is contracted between the bereaved and deceased upon burial. The performance of *mpaapaemu* varies according to the relationship of the deceased to the individual be it mother to children or wife to husband. For mother and child/children, they will be presented to her corpse by an elderly member of her family saying “these are your children, as you leave, you no longer know them. Never show yourself to them or call the”. After monies which are often in coins are thrown into the coffin by the children as a final token and also as fare for the deceased’s passage to *Asamado*. Another myth surrounding *mpaapaemu* performed by widow of the deceased. She is said to break a funnery pottery at the outskirts of the village or town where the dead was a citizen.



**Figure 4.27:Mpaapaemu**

Source: (Researcher, 2018)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Overview

This chapter has made some provisions on summary, conclusions and some recommendations gathered in order to answer the research questions tackled in the earliest chapter of this study. In this regard, the chapter equally bring to bear some limitations encountered or unforeseen in this study. The core mandate for the conducting of this study is to seek through diverse means and bring to light in the form of visual documentation some selected myths of the Akans of Ghana.

#### 5.2 Summary

The introduction of the study provides readers with the context for the study, where myths among the Akans in Ghana with reference to the Asantes are considered. This was followed by the review of related literature in the examining concepts of myths it, significance and moral communication within the Akan society. Literature in the field by a number of experts were analysed, synthesized and evaluated.

The research design employed was phenomenological and four interviews were held with key informants in the field on the topic being researched. The questions that were asked in the interview can be found in the Appendices section. In the presentation and discussion of findings, the research questions were answered and five categories of myths were discussed extensively in addition to the visual representation of the myths. It is worth noting that though four interviews were not of a significantly strong number to justify the results of this study, it is hoped that future researchers would collect more data in the field that focuses on the individual categories of myths and also how these myths

could be illustrated in abstract, in addition to other variables from this study. In the light of this, the key findings for this study are as follows:

- The attitudes and practices of Akans are influenced by mythical beliefs.
- The Akan language is proverbial and figurative in nature and could be misunderstood by non-indigenous.
- Mythical beliefs still influence the customs and practices of some communities today.
- Akan myths can be classified into five categories: death and the after-life, protection and social governance, births and children, gods and tutelary spirits, and creatures and beings.
- Thirty myths have been translated into visual representations (symbols) which depicts what each of those selected myths represents.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

In conclusion, a study of this nature has helped to unearth some myths among the Akans in Ghana, specifically those which belong to the Asante ethnic group. It can be concluded that this group of Akans who speak Asante Twi may choose to do many things based on their mythical beliefs that influence their customs and practices some of which are relevant even today. They also speak in a figurative and proverbial language which foreigners living among them would have to pay heed to, in order to get the deeper meanings of those proverbs which they use in daily communication. Failure to listen carefully and attentively or to ask for clarification when one is not sure about what was said is likely to result in a misconception of what an Akan person might have said, so it stands to reason that these mythical beliefs still influence the customs and practices of

today's society. It is also interesting to note that Akan myths have been wrongfully attributed to as fetishism which connotes some triviality or playfulness.

Additionally, since five categories of myths emerged after the thematic analysis from interviews with key informants, future researchers may possibly consider these myths in depth in relation to the religious practises in Ghana. This will add to the body of knowledge in the field and also provide a strong basis for large-scale study which will consider other variables in this study.

Moreover, from the explanations and description given by key informants during the interview process, the researcher is of the view that there could be more than one way of representing the symbols captured in section 4.3 of Chapter Four. However, the illustrated myths were selected to help readers understand what these myths represent when they see them anywhere.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

It is recommended that more data should be collected for future research since four interviews with key informants is not a significantly strong number to justify the results of this study and make a definite conclusion. Potentially, the researcher or other researchers should conduct further studies into the individual categories of myths identified in this study. Future research works should benefit greatly by using data from this study and other primary data from participants.

Future research could look into the application of abstracts symbols that can be derived from the myths translated into motifs for cloth designs as these prints could be worn by persons such as traditional priests and priestesses, linguists, among others. Other artefacts may also be produced based on the symbols in this study

The Kumasi Traditional Council could commission further studies into these myths and perhaps provide a book on the identified myths which will serve as documentation for future generations yet unborn. This will help students appreciate their cultural identity while gaining knowledge.

# KNUST



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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Interview Guide for Key Informants 1**

KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI  
COLLEGE OF ART AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT,  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL INNOVATIONS IN SCIENCE AND  
TECHNOLOGY

#### **SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR KEY INFORMANTS ON A VISUAL DOCUMENTATION OF SELECTED AKAN MYTHS AMONG THE ASANTES**

Dear Respondent,

This study is being conducted as part of my master's programme African Art and Culture in the Department of Art Education at the KNUST.

The objectives of this study are to explore some Akan myths among the Asantes, classify them and finally provide a visual representation of those myths in symbols.

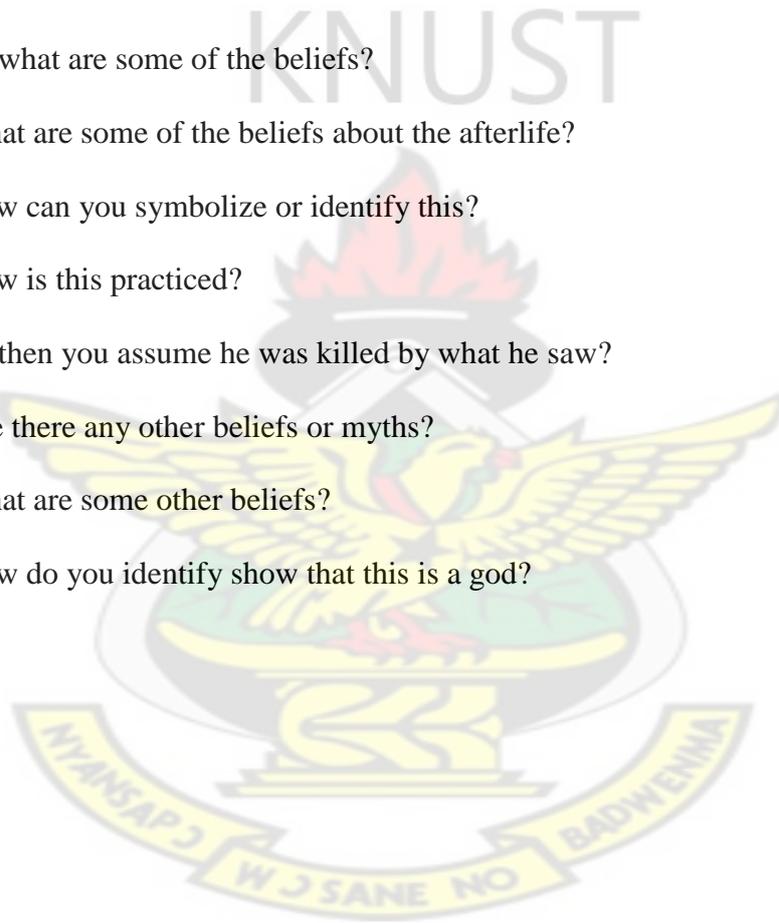
There are a number of questions for you to respond to and your views to these questions will be recorded and treated as confidential. No one will get to know how you answered these questions. Your identity will not be revealed during reporting of the findings of this study or in any future publications.

Thank you.

Benedicta Efua Apprey

Here are the questions for the study:

1. Please introduce yourself
2. What are some of the indigenous beliefs?
3. Where do you as a person go when you sleep? – asked by the interviewee
4. Why do you think the way you do?
5. Or do things so differently from others yet still find your place in the many diverse areas that are available?
6. So what are some of the beliefs?
7. What are some of the beliefs about the afterlife?
8. How can you symbolize or identify this?
9. How is this practiced?
10. So then you assume he was killed by what he saw?
11. Are there any other beliefs or myths?
12. What are some other beliefs?
13. How do you identify show that this is a god?



## **Appendix B: Interview Guide for Key Informants 2**

KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI  
COLLEGE OF ART AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT,  
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Thank you.

Benedicta Efua Apprey

The questions are as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself?
2. What is your knowledge of the Akans?
3. What are some of the basic beliefs of the Akan people?
4. Who are the Ashanti people?
5. What is your knowledge of Akan / Ashanti myths?
6. Are there any traditional practices owing to these beliefs?
7. How can these be classified or grouped?
8. How can these myths be identified / illustrated?
9. What are the implications of these beliefs?
10. Any recommendations?

