

TRINITY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LEGON ACCRA

**‘YËN ARA ASASE NI’ IN DIALOGUE WITH
ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS OF SCRAP DEALERS
ACTIVITIES**

By

DANIEL LARYEA YEBOAH

VERY REV. DR. GEORGE K. NEEQUAYE
(SUPERVISOR)

A thesis proposal submitted to the
Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon
In partial fulfillment for the degree of
MASTER OF THEOLOGY

SEPTEMBER, 2021

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking so that humanity stops threatening her life-support systems.¹ The treasure of nature, one scholar puts it succinctly, is “under mortal threat.”² This threat is occasioned by human practices of unbridled reproduction, overconsumption, and the exploitative use of natural resources.³

The destructive effect of the environment has now reached global proportions, bringing about global climate change with its consequences. Answering why climate change is changing so quickly, Marion Hourdequin posits, “The simple answer is that humans have been emitting greenhouse gases at rapidly increasing rates since the time of the Industrial Revolution when we began to burn large quantities of fossil fuels such as oil, coal and natural gas.”⁴

Christians are therefore called upon to act in caring for nature. The Scriptures as indicated by Bob White gives three reasons why we should care for the environment. First, God mentions his creation to be very good and that “the material world matters to God; He sustains it all the time. Without Him it would fall apart into chaos. “He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:16–17). So if we neglect, abuse and spoil the environment, we are damaging something that is precious to God.”⁵ Second, “in Genesis 1:28 and 2:15, God specifically commanded humankind to do so. He told us to take care of both the living and the

¹ Marietta Loehrlein, *Sustainable Landscaping: Principles and Practices* (USA: CRC Press, 2014), xvi

² Benjamin Abotchie Ntneh, Mark S. Aidoo, Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh, *Essays on the Land, Ecotheology and Traditions in Africa* (USA: Wipf and Stock, 2019), xiii

³ Abotchie Ntneh et al, *Essays on the Land*, xiii

⁴ Marion Hourdequin, *Environmental Ethics: From theory to practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 144

⁵ Bob White, Why should Christians care for the planet. Accessed 20th July, 2021, <https://www.eauk.org/church/resources/theological-articles/why-should-christians-care-for-the-planet.cfm>

non-living creation. We are to work at ruling and ordering creation as good stewards without abusing it for our own selfish ends”⁶ and third;

one day the cosmos will be renewed and re-created as the “new heavens and new earth”, to which both the Old and New Testaments look forward (Isaiah 65, Revelation 21). That will bring the fullness of life that God intended and purposed for His creation: a place where people will truly be at home, where God will dwell with His people, and both they and the whole of creation will worship Him and give Him glory.⁷

Most scholars are of the view that environmental crises are anthropogenic in nature. Hourdequin, for instance, asserts that “there is now an overwhelming scientific consensus that climate change is happening, that it is caused by human activities, and that its impacts are becoming increasingly significant.”⁸

Ghana is no exception in contributing to environmental crisis phenomena around the globe. The study seeks to use the Agbogbloshie scrap dealers who operated at Agbogbloshie, where until recently, many traded in onions at the market and had the largest electronic waste (e-waste) site in the world.⁹ The focus will be shifted to the 50 acre land at Teacher Mante, near Nsawam, where the scrap dealers have relocated to. The primary notion is whether Teacher Mante, where they have settled, will not be turned into another ‘Agbogbloshie’ since it is the same people who are now moving there? This area is a latent spot for environmental degradation with its effect on humans and the Earth, and needs interrogating.

⁶ Bob White, Why should Christians care for the planet. Accessed 20th July, 2021, <https://www.eauk.org/church/resources/theological-articles/why-should-christians-care-for-the-planet.cfm>

⁷ Bob White, Why should Christians care for the planet. Accessed 20th July, 2021, <https://www.eauk.org/church/resources/theological-articles/why-should-christians-care-for-the-planet.cfm>

⁸ Hourdequin, *Environmental Ethics*, 146

⁹ Scientific American, E-Waste Dump among top 10 Most polluted sites. Accessed 20th July, 2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/e-waste-dump-among-top-10-most-polluted-sites/>
On this list, Ghana’s Agbogbloshie was ranked number 1 on the list with an ‘A’ classification, hence beating Chernobyl in Ukraine and Citarum River Basin in Indonesia.

Ephraim Amu's song 'Yen ara asase ni' comes to the fore as it stresses the communal ownership of the land...by using 'yen' (which can mean 'our' as well as 'we' or 'us').¹⁰ Philip Laryea captures, "Amu had in mind all Ghanaians (the living, the living-dead, and the yet-to-be-born). Yet it is to the living that he made his appeal for a communal sense of ownership and responsibility towards what is considered to be dear to us."¹¹ This implies proper stewardship from all stakeholders in ensuring the appropriate usage of the land and not contamination or pollution. Ephraim Amu's song, 'Yen ara asase ni' is a patriotic call to all and sundry to contribute their quota in preserving the land which in his view is dear to us (eye aboɔdenne den ma yen).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Until recently (1st July 2021), through the "Make Accra work again campaign"¹², the government of Ghana evicted the electronic scrap dealers and onion sellers from the Agboghloshie slum area; it was the hub for the enormous electronic waste in the world.¹³

The scavenging for some metals by the scrap dealers through the dismantling and burning of electronic waste is known to emit a cocktail of poisonous chemicals released into the atmosphere and underground water. These chemicals contain substances like lead, mercury and arsenic, cadmium, copper, nickel and silver among others, thereby posing a danger to the scrap dealers and those beyond them¹⁴ which are dangerous to their health. For instance, Cadmium affects

¹⁰ Philip T. Laryea, *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian* (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2012), 201

¹¹ Laryea, *Ephraim Amu: Nationalist, Poet and Theologian*, 201

¹² "Let's make Accra work" campaign is a non-partisan project launched by Mr. Henry Quartey, the Greater Accra Regional Minister to make the cosmopolitan city clean. It was kick started on Thursday, 22nd April, 2021.

¹³ Scientific American, E-Waste Dump among top 10 Most polluted sites. Accessed 20th July, 2021, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/e-waste-dump-among-top-10-most-polluted-sites/>

¹⁴ Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies, The E-Waste Menace in Ghana, University of Ghana, UG.IESS.IB.003, October, 2011. Accessed 20/07/2021, https://iess.ug.edu.gh/sites/iess.ug.edu.gh/files/Briefs/UG.IESS_.IB_.003%20The%20E-Waste%20Menace%20in%20Ghana_0.pdf

your body's ability to metabolize calcium, leading to bone pain and severely weakened, fragile bones. Chromium can cause skin irritation and rashes and is potentially carcinogenic.¹⁵ Also, Copper can irritate the throat and lungs and affect the liver, kidneys and other body systems. Lead poisoning can cause a whole slew of health problems including the impairment of cognitive and verbal activity. Eventually, lead exposure can cause paralysis, coma and death.¹⁶

The Institute for Environmental and Sanitation at Legon, Accra averred that “burning is a common method used to reduce waste volumes. This process releases toxic substances into the atmosphere, soils and water bodies with dire health consequences.”¹⁷ The inhalation of fumes during burning exposes them to heavy metals leading to various health risks. Desmond Asare’s study at the Agbogbloshie e-waste dumpsite revealed that Health problems, including diseases and conditions associated with the skin, stomach, respiratory tract and other organs are prevalent amongst e-waste workers.¹⁸ He noted further, “they have been confronted with cases of newborn defects, blood diseases, respiratory defects, malfunctioning of the immune system and the kidneys, tuberculosis, and other blood diseases. These findings are consistent with that of Prakash, Manhart, Amoyaw-Osei, & Agyekum, (2010).”¹⁹

¹⁵ Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies, The E-Waste Menace in Ghana, University of Ghana, UG.IESS.IB.003, October, 2011. Accessed 20/07/2021, https://iess.ug.edu.gh/sites/iess.ug.edu.gh/files/Briefs/UG.IESS_.IB_.003%20The%20E-Waste%20Menace%20in%20Ghana_0.pdf

¹⁶ Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies, The E-Waste Menace in Ghana, University of Ghana, UG.IESS.IB.003, October, 2011. Accessed 20/07/2021, https://iess.ug.edu.gh/sites/iess.ug.edu.gh/files/Briefs/UG.IESS_.IB_.003%20The%20E-Waste%20Menace%20in%20Ghana_0.pdf

¹⁷ Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies, The E-Waste Menace in Ghana, University of Ghana, UG.IESS.IB.003, October, 2011. Accessed 20/07/2021, https://iess.ug.edu.gh/sites/iess.ug.edu.gh/files/Briefs/UG.IESS_.IB_.003%20The%20E-Waste%20Menace%20in%20Ghana_0.pdf

¹⁸ Desmond Asare, “The Global Environmental hazard of e-waste and its threat to human security: A case study of Agbogbloshie e-waste dumpsite”(A dissertation submitted to the University of Ghana, December 2019), 46

¹⁹ Asare, “The Global environmental hazard of e-waste”, 46

Therefore, the study examines the issue of proper interventions in curtailing the environmental crisis caused by the scrap dealers and, most significantly, the disposal of the waste products. The study will also interrogate the interventions in their new area and how they can help curb the environmental crisis caused by their activities. Without the necessary interventions, Teacher Mante will become a new Agbogbloshie with its attending problems in a few years to come. Since the study area is relatively new, this research may tentatively be one of the early research done in the area and may add up to knowledge in the field of study.

Further, the activities of the scrap dealers affect both lands, water, air, humans, and animals, making it very devastative and hence worth investigating and interrogating a topic of this nature. Therefore, although covering a small area, it reflects a broader range of activities that affect our environment.

Ghanaian authors such as Awuah-Nyamekye, Eric Asante et al. have written on using indigenous cultural practices such as beliefs, taboos, myths, proverbs, and songs to conserve the environment.²⁰ This study seeks to approach the conservation of the environment through the viewpoint of patriotism expressed through one of Ghana's patriotic songs known and sung by most Ghanaians. The choice of Ephraim Amu's song is intentional in this regard for three reasons. First, Amu was an ethicist himself.²¹ Second, it is one of the patriotic songs with

²⁰ Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, "Salvaging Nature: The Akan Religio- Cultural perspectives," *World views Environment Culture Religio*, 13 (2009): 251, accessed 21/07/2021 from doi:0.1163/136352409X12535203555713 and Eric Appau Asante et al "The use of indigenous cultural practices by the Ashantis for the conservation of forests in Ghana," *"SAGE OPEN"* (2017), from doi: 10.1177/2158244016687611

²¹ Philip Tetteh Laryea, *Patriotism and Nation Building: Perspectives from the life and utterances of Ephraim Amu* (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2017), 12

versions in Ewe, Twi, English, Dagbani, Ga and many other local languages, and lastly, almost every child who attended basic school in Ghana knows how to sing “Yen ara asase ni.”²²

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study specifically aims at:

1.3.1 Inculcating environmental patriotism through the use of the literary genre of songs.

1.3.2 Discussing environmental management interventions in the Agbogloshie/Teacher Mante slum areas.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 What lifestyle would you describe as unpatriotic that degrades the environment?

1.4.2 What are some possible ways the environmental crisis posed by the scrap workers be managed?

1.4.3 Are patriotic songs worth instilling environmental patriotism in people?

1.4.4 How have songs been instrumental in teaching patriotism?

1.5 Significance of the study

The claim that African Philosophy is anthropocentric and thus, cannot directly have a moral duty towards non-human realities raised much attention among various philosophical platforms. Such a claim implies that human beings only have a direct moral duty to their species; anything other than human beings can only be treated with indirect respect, not entirely for its sake.²³ Many writers have refuted this claim by addressing African environmental ethics, which extends the moral community beyond anthropocentric concerns by including non-human animals, plants, the

²² Kofi Agawu, “The Amu Legacy: Ephraim Amu 1899-1995”, *Journal of the International African Institute*, 66.2 (1996), 274, Accessed 20-08-2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1161319>

²³ Munamato Chemhuru, *African Environmental Ethics: A Critical Reader* (Zimbabwe: Springer, 2019), 144

unborn, and the supernatural into the moral universe.²⁴ Thus, many African writers have addressed especially taboos and values that directly correlate to the preservation of the environment.

Consequently, the study will be relevant to the contemporary Ghanaian who perhaps has little knowledge of the Ghanaian primal practices such as taboos and communal value norms and some traditional songs that many advocate that they are recalled to preserve the environment. The study draws from the known (Yen ara asase ni) to environmental ethics and care within the Ghanaian context, and may contribute a great deal to environmental interventions in Ghana and the academic world.

1.6 Method of the study

In carrying out this research, the qualitative approach of research methodology will be used. Kothari, explains that the qualitative research approach focuses on people's lived experiences, behaviours and emotions and involves a subjective evaluation of a social problem or behaviour through the use of flexible non-numerical data techniques such as in-depth one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, observations, review of documents, etc.²⁵

Personal interviews shall be utilised to solicit information from a section of the e-waste scavengers and recyclers settling at Teacher Mante in the Eastern region of Ghana. It shall be mainly unstructured/informal interviews with open-ended questions. Emmanuel Asante indicates that this form of interview enables both the interviewer and the person being interviewed

²⁴ Mbih Jerome Tosam, Open Journal of Philosophy (2019) Vol. 9 No. 2. African Environmental Ethics and Sustainable Development, Accessed 21-07-2021, <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation.aspx?paperid=92296>

²⁵ C.R. Kothari, *Research Methodology Methods and Techniques* (New Delhi: New Age International Publishers, 2004), 55-67

flexibility to ask probing questions to gain much useful information as possible.²⁶ Further, this form of interview can yield very rich and nuanced information,²⁷ which will enable a good course for the research.

Further, field visits, observations and literature reviews will be ensured. A preliminary literature review will facilitate the overall background into the global environmental crisis and the various responses to such global challenges and within the African context. Among such sources to be used will include books, journals and periodicals, newspapers, the internet and data from other researchers. “Yen ara asase ni” will be contextualized through the lens of environmental crisis in Ghana in the research.

1.7 Limitation of the study

The Agbogbloshie settlers whose activities affected the environment within the catchment area were mainly onion sellers and electronic waste scavengers. The study shall be limited to only the e-waste scrap dealer’s activities. The study will be limited to only those involved in the waste collection, burning and dismantling, and those buying the scrap and recovered products. Those involved in importing, distributing, and assembling these secondhand electronics shall not be considered in this study.

Another restraint that will be evident in the research is the language barrier since most of those engaged in the e-waste activity are northerners. It is envisaged that most of them may not be able to speak English or any of the Southern languages and hence, an interpreter may be needed to aid in the progress of the research.

²⁶ Emmanuel Asante, *Research and Writing: A Brief Guide* (Ghana: Pinpoint Media Co., 2011), 54-55

²⁷ Asante, *Research and Writing*, 55

Another limitation worth noting is the disadvantage of the methodology that will be used. The informal method makes data analysis to be more complex and time-consuming than in the case of structured interviews.²⁸

1.8 Literature Review

The environment refers to all the external abiotic and biotic factors, conditions, and influences that affect the life, development, and survival of an organism or a community.²⁹ In other words, it refers to the natural world in which we live.³⁰ Globally, the environment today has become a great concern to many countries because the survival of humanity depends on it.

1.8.1 Biblical Basis of Environmental ethics and care

God, the creator of all things, rules over all and deserves our worship and adoration (Ps. 103:19-22). The Earth, and, with it, all the cosmos, reveals its creator's wisdom and goodness (Ps. 19:1-6) and is sustained and governed by his power and loving-kindness (Ps. 102:25-27; Ps. 104; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3, 10-12).³¹ Men and women were created in the image of God, given a privileged place among creatures, and commanded to exercise stewardship over the Earth (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5).³² Central to the Christian's understanding of the environment, according to Emmanuel Asante, is the idea of creation. For the Christian, God existed before the creation of all things. The Christian is of the view that God created all there is out of nothing.³³ This understanding, however, suggests two things; that the Christian does not see creation as an extension of the

²⁸ Asante, *Research and Writing*, 55

²⁹ Chris Park and Michael Allaby, *Oxford Dictionary of Environment & Conservation* (UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 144

³⁰ Park and Allaby, *Oxford Dictionary of Environment*, 144

³¹ E. Beisner Calvin et al, A Biblical Perspective on Environmental Stewardship, Accessed 22nd July, 2021, <https://www.acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/biblical-perspective-environmental-stewardship>

³² E. Beisner Calvin et al, A Biblical Perspective on Environmental Stewardship, Accessed 22nd July, 2021, <https://www.acton.org/public-policy/environmental-stewardship/theology-e/biblical-perspective-environmental-stewardship>

³³ Emmanuel Asante, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship* (Ghana: Wilas Press, 1999), 79

essence of God and that “created things”, in the words of Francis A. Schaeffer, “have an existence in themselves, they really are.”³⁴

1.8.2 Christian faith and Environmental Stewardship

Larry Schnapf indicates that Steward comes from old English words “Stig” or “House” and “Weard” or “warden”. This was the word that the Bible translators used to translate the Greek word “Oikonomos” which consists of two Greek words “oikos”(house) and “Nomos”(putting into order, planning and administering).³⁵ Therefore, it means to put the affairs of a household into order. It involved acquiring things that were necessary to meet the actual needs of the household and not to the uninhibited pursuit of wealth. Stewardship is the taking care of something that belongs to someone else.³⁶

As God’s image, the human is a steward of God in God’s creation. As Genesis 1:26 and 28 presents it, the human is given “dominion” over creation. Also, in Genesis 1:28, God instructed the human to “subdue the earth” and to “rule” over, which also means “master” nature which suggests bringing nature forcefully under control. According to Emmanuel Asante, even though these words carry a sense of subjugation, we must not use them as a license to exploit creation. That the description of the human as having dominion over creation is not a license to exploit creation is made clear by the parallel creation story in Genesis Chapter 2.³⁷ Arguing further,

³⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer as stated in Emmanuel Antwi, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship*, 80

³⁵ Larry Schnapf, The Bible and the Environment, Accessed 22nd July, 2021, <https://nysba.org/NYSBA/Meetings%20Department/2016%20Annual%20Meeting/Environmental%20Law/2016%20AM%20Materials/Combined%20Ethics.pdf>

³⁶ Larry Schnapf, The Bible and the Environment, Accessed on 22nd July, 2021, <https://nysba.org/NYSBA/Meetings%20Department/2016%20Annual%20Meeting/Environmental%20Law/2016%20AM%20Materials/Combined%20Ethics.pdf>

³⁷ Asante, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship*, 79-80

Asante avers that the relationship between humans and creation is a rather responsible dominion that finds expression through care and respect for nature.³⁸

Christopher H. Wright also indicates that the teaching that we are supposed to be ‘stewards of creation’ is ubiquitous and popular, and of course, contains some fundamental biblical truth. Above all, it points to the fact that we are not owners of the Earth.³⁹ He discusses, however that the concept of stewardship is vulnerable to some misunderstandings and abuse. At the least harmful end is the fact that ‘stewardship’ is commonly used in Christian circles in some cultural contexts only as a term implying appeals for money (‘stewardship campaigns’).⁴⁰ More so, at the more harmful appeal of unscrupulous exploitation of resources, especially by those in non-Christian circles.⁴¹

1.9 Organisation of Chapter

Chapter one covers the background of the study, Statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, methodology used, limitations of the study, chapter organisation and conclusion.

Chapter two will discuss literature that is relevant to the research area. Areas covering the global environmental crisis, climatic change, African environmental ethics, and environmental crisis in Ghana, among others, will be discussed.

A detailed sketch of the development of Agbogbloshie scrap dealers and the slum with its subsequent demolition will be discussed. Light will also be thrown on Teacher Mante, the area the scrap dealers have relocated to.

³⁸ Asante, *Stewardship: Essays on Ethics of Stewardship*, 80

³⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the people of God* (USA: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 123

⁴⁰ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the people of God*, 123

⁴¹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the people of God*, 123

Chapter three- ‘Yen ara asase ni’ will be analysed in the context of environmental degradation, patriotism and theological reflection of environmental ethics and care.

Chapter four- Findings and analysis of the interview will be discussed in this chapter with the aid of pie charts.

Chapter five- A summary of the findings, recommendations of the study, and future research and conclusion to the study will be dealt with in this chapter.

2.0 Conclusion

Environmental issues continue to confront the globe in vast proportions, with Africa receiving its share of the adverse effects. Hence, contribution of all countries of the world to reducing the adverse treatment of our environment is required. Many African writers have argued using taboos, values and norms to reduce the negative influence against the environment. Directly linked to this oral tradition is our patriotic songs. In Ghana, one of such patriotic songs composed by one of our illustrious fathers, Ephraim Amu, will be analysed in this study to implore the spirit of patriotism in the fight against environmental degradation in Ghana.

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