

## **Religion, Gender and Environment: the case of the Okule Cult in Ghana**

**Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu**

University of Ghana

**Jonathan Brindle**

NTNU, Norway

**Richard Awubomu**

University of Ghana

### **Abstract**

*Using archival sources, participant observations and oral interviews, we present the female cult of Okule and the role it played and plays in the conservation of the environment, through the regulation of hunting, fishing, felling of trees and farming activities in the Nawuri traditional area in North-Eastern Ghana.*

**Key Words:** Balai, Nawuri, clans, Okule Cult, climate change, environment.

### **Introduction**

In October, 2012, Chankpana [tʃaŋkpana], well-known female spirit deities, visited Nawuriland, after abandoning the area for almost fifteen years. It is believed that Chankpana left because no more recruits were engaged to worship it. Despite its anger it returned in October. Someone told us that Chankpana “(she) came because its children are dying unnecessarily” and that “she could not witness this destruction without attempting to redress the calamity”. On the final day of Chankpana’s visit, one of the long time settlers of Balai commented thus:

*Chankpana has refused coming. Our crops don’t produce any longer; our children are dying of strange diseases. Chankpana, now that you have come please don’t go again, we need more children, we need more food, we don’t want debt and we hate death also, so don’t bring any of these. Bring good rain for our crops’.*

This statement from a migrant woman shows the extent to which both migrants and indigenous Nawuri appreciate the role of Chankpana in their everyday lives: the spirit can improve the economy and health of that woman. Chankpana, according to the ‘children’ (called devotees or members henceforth), has a way of ensuring that there is order in society, a sort of ideal, especially order with regards to the environment. For that woman, the spirit ensures that the environment is spared (e.g. proper rain), that there is enough food to feed everyone that products one normally depends on are available, and that known sicknesses stay away.

At the beginning of the last century in the North-eastern part of Ghana, Nawuri women formed the Okule<sup>1</sup> cult to address health concerns, male domination, as well as environmental management. By the first decade of the 1900s the cult had spread to several areas including the Nanumba and Gonja areas. Through the use of a cult language called Kiliji [kíliǰí], female members of the Okule cult controlled the use of natural resources including water, trees and wild animals. In this paper evidence are provided which supports the argument that the religious practices of the Okule cult can ensure the survival of numerous animal and plant species. It discusses how the cult dealt and deals with their past and current ecological concerns. It provides another case study where religion plays a role in environmental conservation, but also discusses the cult’s vulnerability especially in the context of reduced fear of ancestral spirits and potential lack of knowledge of the environment.

---

<sup>1</sup>The word Okule is derived from the greetings of the cult members any time they meet. Usually women greet each other by saying ‘ Okuoku [òkúòkù] and the response usually is Okuoo [òkúù] or Okulee.

### ***African Traditional Religion and the Environment***

Like in many other African Traditional Religions, the expression of loyalty to specific spirits is observed in ritual performances and manners of behaving or conducting oneself. Throughout history in Africa, shrines, deities and other sacred objects have contributed positively and negatively to the stabilisation of the environment. Shrines exist mainly to maintain peace, given human needs. There is a literature to the positive effect of shrines. For example, Denis Etiendem et al (2011) discuss the role of traditional systems in the conservation of Gorillas in Bechati, Fossimondi and Besali in Cameroon. In Ghana, Clement Dorm-Adzobuetal (1991) utilise the Malshegu Sacred Grove in Northern Region of Ghana to discuss the positive implications of traditional religious beliefs in environmental protection in Ghana.

Lately in Ghana, None Governmental Organisations (NGO) and academics reported that products and practices of traditional medical knowledge, which are in general linked to shrines and uses mostly parts of woody and non-woody plants, absorb a considerable load of the country's primary health care. (Abekar 2013, Konadu 2008)

Outside Africa, Liu Hongmao et al (2002) have documented the importance of traditional beliefs to environmental protection in Southwest China. NGOs which sponsor research-based documentation have done a convincing work of translating the sort of dependence to nature of 'non-industrialised people', but more importantly this research does tell us that for them 'nature does not need man'.

Some have argued that the typical worldview of African Traditional Religions is such that many respects nature because of established rules ultimately given by a shrine, and not because of environmental conservation. This is different from the romantic view of the relation between traditional religions and the environment, which maintains that non-industrial people hold environmental values and that their ecological management is driven by them (Tomalin, 200). So what causes people to manage the ecology is where lie the difference. Obviously, the attitudes toward nature can thus be said to be more about relation with spirits than with ecological issues in the scientific sense, an argument made by Taringa (2006) and with which we partly agree, but ultimately the origin of these prohibitions come from situations women were facing and still continue facing today, problems which needed to be solved in their eyes.

#### ***Ethnography sketch: historical, social and political background of the Nawuris***

The Nawuris live in the north-eastern part of Ghana, at about 400 kilometres away from Accra, the capital of Ghana. They are part of the indigenous Guan of Ghana. Linguistically they classified as Guang. Ethnically and socially they interacted in their past with Adele, Achode, Krachis, Nchumburu and Dagomba and today with Gonja, Nanumba, Konkomba and Bassari. The Guan is believed to be among the first settlers in Ghana (P. Barker, 1986F.K Buah, 1998, Goody 1963, 2010).

Politically the Nawuris are under a paramount chief, a position which rotates among the towns of Kpandai, Balai, Nkanchina, Katiejei, Kabonwuli, Bladjai and Kitare. Under the paramount chief are divisional chiefs in the various towns so mentioned above? The divisional chief, whose function is to work with the paramount chief in running the Nawuri state, is assisted by sub-chiefs and lineage and clan heads who act as advisors in managing the town (S.A. Ntewusu 1998). The social life of the people is organised on clans and family lines. A number of families make up a clan and each clan is under the control of clan head. The economic activities of Nawuris continue to revolve around hunting, farming, fishing among the men and farming, oil extraction, pottery, spinning and pito brewing among the women. Aside these indigenous economic activities Nawuris are engaged in modern day business activities such working in government establishment, and in trading goods at local markets. Religiously they continue to worship the Supreme God [ébuári] through the divinities [àgbíri], the earth gods [kàsúúlè] and ancestors [ààbúni].

On religion, it is important to single out the Balai community and discuss their religious life since the community played an important role in the evolution of the Okule Cult in Nawuriland. There are about five clans in Balai namely, Balai, Kabisu, Chintimai, Wurai and Chaga. Each of these clans has contributed in a very unique way towards the religious and environmental development of Balai through the specific shrines which they venerate. For example the Balai clan have the Wurachina shrine which has made it possible for the Wurachina forest to develop. In the same way the Kabisu clan has the Kankpe forest which houses the Kankpe deity, so far the largest forest in the area measuring initially about three kilometres square. As a community, almost all members are associated with one shrine since every clan has a shrine. It is in this context that one needs to understand the seriousness they attach to the Okule Cult.

### ***The Okule(òkúúlé) Cult in focus***

In Ghana, the belief in spirits exists in almost all societies. All societies profess belief in a Supreme creator – Onyame, (Akan), Mawu (Ewe), Nawuni (Dagomba), Nyongmor (Ga), Ebuare (Nawuri), and personal spirits, ancestral powers, witches and sorceress. A cult is a worship group devoted to a deity. Cult practice usually refers to the formation of a group of initiates around the figure of a god, deity, saint and so on, often concentrating on a particular doctrine within the body of religious beliefs. A deity is worshipped according to prescribed ritual with which certain attributes are emphasised as the basis of the cult. Traditional aspects of cult practices include priesthood and sacred rites, with all rites conducted in secret or public (E.K Agozie, 2000).

The Okule Cult is believed to have originated from the Republic of Togo, and specifically from Atakpame which is located about 161 kms north of the capital Lome. Oral tradition of Balai postulates that, some hundred years ago, a woman called Nkegyali married a man from Keri. Keri is located 380 kms north-east of Accra the capital of Ghana. She served as one of the pioneers of the Okule cult in Keri. Informants indicate that this cult was brought to Balai around the 1900s through the instrumental role of a woman called Nana Kasinyaba, one of the great granddaughters of the founder of the Kankpe shrine. The deity according to informants possessed Kasinyaba and carried her as far as Siare, in the land of the Achodes in present day Northern Volta region. Her brothers pursued her there and saw her at the Shrine of Chankpana at Siare. They left her there to finish her training after which she returned and introduced the practice she had learned to other females in the area. It is important to discuss the power structure of the cult at this stage since it is directly linked to the recruitment and training of cult members.

#### ***Power Structure of the cult***

The leader of the cult is the Olami [ólààmī]. She is the custodian of the cult and caretaker of the sacred objects. The position of the Olami is determined by long service to Chankpana. Even though this is the case her accession to office had to be confirmed and validated by members and Chankpana. The Olami wields absolute power over all the members. For example, they are supposed to obey and do whatever she has asked them to do.

The second in command is the Onigbo [ónígbó]. She is the spokesperson for the Olami and the community. During moments of visit of Chankpana it is the Onigbo who leads the members of the cult to the bush to meet Chankpana. She receives sacrifices from the worshippers and offenders and offers them to Chankpana. In the same manner Chankpana reveals its wishes through her. The position of the Onigbo rotates among dedicated members of the cult. The Olami who has the right to veto, appoints her not over looking good social standing as a prerequisite for appointment. A woman with many children is usually preferred. This is an important pre-requisite since as we have pointed out already that Chankpana came at a time when the reproductive capability in Nawurland was ebbing. Even though there are other positions in the hierarchy such as the Baniima for [bànímánfór] who in most case assists the Onigbo in her sacred dealings, it is the last first two that is the Olami and Onigbo whose positions are critical as far as the functioning of the cult is concerned.

There is only one male drummer and he is not part of the membership or leadership of the cult. He is not initiated into the cult and does not take part in management or protocols apart from beating the drums as and when he is instructed to. He learns the language and the songs from the Olami but unlike the females who could even speak the language at will and encode or decode vital information to others, the male drummer is not supposed to speak it, either to the cult members or to any other person (Interview with Kofi Ntewusu October, 2012). His comprehension of the language is only to help him drum and take instructions from the female cult members while performing.

#### ***Membership and Recruitment into the Cult***

There are about three ways by which one could get recruited into the cult. The first has to do with possession by the spirit of Chankpana. The second had to do with an initiate who joined while pregnant in that case once the child is born the child is supposed to also become a member of the cult on becoming an adult. One could describe these two processes as involuntary. The third and final means is voluntary where an individual decides to be a member.

There is usually a period for acceptance of new members, usually in the month of August. During that period, anytime of the day, members are admitted. The new entrant has to put the hands on her head and begins running to the house of the Olami while shouting aloud the words je-je-je [dʒéé dʒéé dʒéé] which in Kiliji means “danger”. On hearing the wailing other members then proceed to the house of the Olami.

It must be noted that special names are given for time or period of arrival in addition to the cult names, such as chignini [tʃɪɲɪni] for the last person to be recruited for the season, or dudu [dúdu] for the first recruit. Although not necessary as a prior condition to membership, every cult member is advised to have their children initiated into the cult, thus evoking a kind of relationship between membership and parental associations with the cult. Most people always want their children to be enrolled into the cult and this is very true of children who have their relatives in leadership positions in the cult. Another reason for such encouragement for Nawuri females to get recruited is due to the fact that Nawuris did not have female initiation rites, unlike other ethnic groups in Ghana such as the Akan and Krobo. The cult became the means through which most young girls got initiated into adulthood. During the period of training basic hygiene as well as lessons on housekeeping was among knowledge taught. It was therefore not surprising that cult members were highly sought after for marriage by the men of the area. Non-member females only had their luck when the list of members was exhausted by men.

As previously discussed, new recruits are first instructed on the taboos of the cult after which they are taught the language which is called Kiliji?<sup>2</sup>

Usually it takes between one to two months for a recruit to learn the language and the songs. The Olami and other senior members teach the recruits both the language and the cult songs. Training usually takes three months. A recruit could opt out at any level without sanctions and join the next badge at will. What makes it easy to learn the language and the songs is the congregation of members in the Olamis house on a daily basis at the time of instruction. The local language is not spoken by members at this time; only Kiliji this makes it easy for new recruits to pick up the language. The language enables members to communicate among themselves since it is the only language aloud for Okule affairs. As part of their training both senior members and the new recruits usually go to the bush often moving from place to place and returning usually after two to three hours each day. Reasons for this would be explained later in this paper. In the last month of the recruits 'graduating' from the initiation, both recruits and the top hierarchy members mentioned above, that is the Olami, Onigbo, Banimafor among others, spend a week in the bush living from the nature. This involves eating wild fruits and other edible plants. The one week spent in the bush is supposed to expose them to the plants, animals and insects that inhabit the wild in the area. It is also to afford them the opportunity to know aspects of the dietary, medicinal and ecological uses of plants, animals and insects.

The one week sojourn culminates in a ritual bath in one of the streams in the community. After the bath they adorn themselves with cowries, beads, leaves, shrubs, etc. They are then led by the top hierarchy back to the community normally amidst songs. The drummer, who does not take part in the initiation, is informed to start drumming to welcome them at the village. The whole community gathers to witness the new members' arrival as well as to listen to the taboos. Old taboos are repeated and if new ones were established during the one week sojourn, it is announced to the community. A fowl is slaughtered to mark the end of the training session.

### ***Sacred Objects and rituals associated with the cult***

The sacred objects include two pieces of metal; one is a scepter and the other a metal plate. These are kept by the Olami and brought out during the passing out ceremony or festivities. During ceremonies and festivities, it is kept in the middle of the ritual ground and members dance around it. The Olami, during festivities, sacrifices several fowls and a goat, and pour the blood of the animals on the metals. Reptiles are considered sacred by cult members and are considered their totems. The same holds for about twenty or so tree and shrub species. Even though they eat honey they have specific regulations on which kind of honey they can eat. Further discussions on the importance of these prohibitions would be discussed in the section below.

### ***The Okule Cult and Environmental Protection***

In this section we shall look at the role of the cult in environmental protection. As already indicated the Okule members would usually spend about a week in the bush: a period that allows them to improve their knowledge of animals, plants and insects in their ecosystem and their potential use in society. The 'field stay' takes place during the raining seasons, which occurs from August to October/November. This period coincides with the clearing of land by farmers for purposes of planting yams which is the major crop of Nawuris.

---

<sup>2</sup>Note that sometimes some people refer to Kiliji as Kitabaa

One could thus infer that the one week sojourn was originally thought to enable cult members to have a better appreciation of their ecosystem, both in its natural and disturbed form, and thereby design taboo systems that would protect animals, insects and plants.

So what are the taboos and practices of the Okule cult and how relevant are these to environmental protection? Let us consider the issue of prohibitions related to reptiles in the area. Almost every reptile of any size is considered a totem by the cult members as result hunters cannot hunt any sizeable reptile, especially the crocodile, python and turtle. Reptiles are not only very important in balancing the eco-system but are also an important part of the eco-system. Like every carnivorous animal reptile have a very important role to play in the ecosystem. This role is to control the equilibrium of nature by controlling the population of the animals that are lower on the food chain. For example rodents eat the same kind of cereals that humans eat which makes them prevalent around human populations. Corn snakes do not really eat corn; they eat rats and mice that destroy the corn and by doing so they help in ensuring abundant harvest and thus prevent hunger. Similarly crocodiles and pythons are known species that clean up the river as they eat carcasses of other species and balance its population habitat. This is a major role to ensure that rivers are functioning smoothly. To add more crocodiles and pythons provide a sense of security to plant, animal and fish diversity in most areas in Nawuriland. Being aware of the existence of these animals in the streams and forests many people do not easily go into such areas to hunt or fish. For example fishing in Kowa is a yearly ritual and only done once in a year and hunting is prohibited in the Kankpe forest. In the same way no one is allowed to farm in and around Chintimai Kupoo located on the Kpandai- Lugni road. Aside these areas being groves, Okule members always circle around forest and walk by the banks of streams and rivers during the time of training. They consider forests, rivers and streams important ritual spaces due to the presence of these reptiles.

As previously noted, the mere thought of the presence of any of these reptiles in a forest or river usually prevents people from engaging in unwarranted fishing or hunting in those areas for fear of being attacked by them. It is therefore not out of place that even hunters and fishermen who intend to fish or hunt for other animal species had to seek permission from the Olami. This is considered necessary as the inhabitants of the area feel the Olami and cult members have control over the reptiles. Indeed from time to time they regulate the hunting and fishing franchise by revoking the rights of individuals whose hunting and fishing activities are considered destructive to the environment.

It is important to consider the number of Okule members as a way of appreciating their overall influence and impact in the area. Until the arrival of western education and Christianity in Nawuriland in the 1940s, the cult registered an almost hundred percent female enrollment. What this meant was that in theory every home had at least a member in the cult. Their presence in every home ensured that no one actually killed any reptile because whether one is the husband, brother or relation once such an individual is caught killing or in possession of any giant reptile, the cult member will start shouting jeejeejee [dzéé dzéé dzéé] to the Olami's house. Immediately other members upon hearing the shouts would assemble at the Olami's house and upon being informed would charge towards the hunter in the bush. If the hunter has not killed the prey he or she has no choice than to abandon it and go into hiding. But if she or he succeeds in killing it and the dead reptile was sighted, it served already as a testimony of the committal of crime. In that case they would come to the offenders' house and ensure that she goes to the Olami. There he or she is given a fine and also undergoes spiritual cleansing. It is obvious that by utilizing large size reptiles as their totem they have succeeded in protecting the environment in a way to ensure that hunters and fishermen do not carry out their trade indiscriminately. More importantly the totems are general, not merely limited to a clan or family as it is the case in most ethnic groups in the country, therefore they have a far-reaching effect on the local environment.

We have already revealed the respect with which the Okule members must attached to bees. The Okule cult prescribe not to eat particular types of honey harvested at particular times of the year and would normally punish those who harvest honey in these periods. As hunters, fishermen or farmers, honey-hunting tradition is therefore part of their occupation. Honey hunting and beekeeping have been practices associated with humans for at least 4500 years (N. Bradbear, 2009) so human societies have long been aware of the worthwhile benefits to be gained from bees. These benefits include mainly pollination of crops and wild flora, and harvest of beeswax. Indeed the spending of time in the bush normally affords the Okule the opportunity to observe the role of bees in their ecosystem. It is on the basis of such observations that the cult members restrict society from harvesting bees from August to November.

Usually the rainy season in the area falls in these months and therefore it goes without saying that, that would be the period that most plants, would be reproducing and bees would play a prominent role in this direction. Bees and crops, flowers, plants and trees are interdependent and thus sustain the agriculture by pollinating crops and thereby maintaining yields. Being part of their teaching, the Okule cult does at a local level what apicultural research had been doing in the last fifty years.

Without bees there would be no flowering plants, and without flowering plants there would be no bees. Without bees biodiversity would not be so great. Biodiversity is measured as the number of different plants and animal species found in a certain unit area ((N. Bradbear, 2009). Hence the prevention of men from firing the bees is to ensure the very survival of these insects which are also very important in fertilization. Besides bees there are several plant species which Okule members consider important to their everyday ritual activities.

Thus it becomes a taboo for such plant species to be destroyed.

One important prohibition is that of the fruit of any of the *Aframomum spp.* it may be harvested, but when the plant is still budding or growing, it is not to be destroyed. The reason for such taboo to cult members and to members of the community in general is two-fold:

First, *Aframomum spp.* is an important nutritional source for reptiles, most of which are totems to the cult members. At a medicinal level, *Aframomum meleguetta* is used in the treatment of many ailments such as headaches, fever and also used to spice meals in most communities in Ghana, including the community under review (H.M. Burkill 2000). It is also used in the protection of cereals: farmers use it as repellent. In today's Nawuri area, insecticides are expensive or in short supply, before they were nonexistent. *Aframomum spp.* has been used as a source of cheap and readily available insecticides for local use by resource-poor farmers who normally put the pods of *Aframomum* into barns containing cereals.

Furthermore, trees such as Fig ( *Ficus Carica*), African locust bean tree (*Parkia biglobosa*), Rafia palm tree (*Raphia farnifera*). Wild Custard (*Annona Senegalensis*) Rafia, Northern Rafia (*Raphiasudacia*), Swallow worth (*Calotropis procera*) Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) Gambian Teabush (*Lippia Chevalieri*), Sheanut tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) are important medicinal, economic and magico-religious plants of cult members who always seek the protection of such trees.

For example most performances of cult members are done under Fig trees. The fruits of the shea tree are used to prepare shea butter. Shea butter is used as pomade. It is a particularly effective moisturizer because it contains so many fatty acids which are needed to retain skin moisture and elasticity, in addition to treatment of broken parts of the human body (S.A. Ntewusu 2012). Finally the male drummer of the cult uses the shea butter to maintain drums which are considered one of the most important ritual objects of the cult. These numerous uses for shea butter naturally encouraged the preservation of shea nut trees in addition to its inclusion into the rituals of cult members. It is therefore not surprising that in the Nawuri areas the shea nut trees are the oldest and most visible trees in the area.

From what has been discussed so far, it is evident that cult members play a very important environmental role by ensuring that the relationship between human beings and their ecosystem are not broken through overuse, and that products of nature are available. It is also evident from the above that the conservation practice is tied to already existing trees in the wild. At the same time, the expression of loyalty to specific spirits translates into these ritual performance and manner of behaving or conducting oneself. The next section considers one particular ritual activity that fosters the establishment and growth of groves and forests in Nawuri area due to the activities of the cult members.

### ***The Sacrificial Basket and the establishment of forests***

Okule members end their season by raising a mound on which 'the burden of society is cast' [Gyima asig]. In the morning of the final day of the 'throwing away' [Chankpana Kutoo] Chankpana cult members come with a hand-woven basket normally made from Raffia palms, and put it under a tree in the village. Usually the preferred tree is a baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) or a Fig tree. On that day everyone in the community will sweep their rooms and put a portion of the accumulated rubbish in a broken calabash, and place it in the basket. The broken calabash is of great importance in this ritual process. According to Nawuri culture the whole calabash signifies wholeness of life. So to have come with a broken calabash means that one want Chankpana to intervene in some aspect of their supposedly broken life; be it economic, social or political.

In addition to the rubbish most people will add the products of poor harvest which they want Chankpana to bless. At about noon the Olami comes with a fowl and local beer (pito). She pours libation on one of the ritual metal object where the spirit of Chankpana resides. She begins by welcoming Chankpana again but will immediately follow with complaints to Chankpana about the numerous burdens of society, evidence by the broken calabashes and rubbish placed in the basket. She adds that 'rubbish and misery have taken the place of wealth and joy in peoples' homes. And as the spirit is leaving, it should take away all the problems. She then slaughters the fowl, and the blood is then poured on the basket containing the problems of society. The leaves of the trees and shrubs mentioned above are soaked in a calabash. People present come to fetch the water and wash their face in anticipation of solutions to their problems. The basket with the problems is carried to a specific destination in the bush, and at times too by the roadside; always according to where the deity directs them. A mound is erected on which the baskets containing the problems are kept.

One of the significance of this final ritual is the extent to which the practice promotes the establishment of new groves and uncultivated land in the area, which in turn becomes a source of food for wild animals. Immediately the basket is placed on the mound, the taboo of 'no turning back and no entry' is evoked. Cult members flee the place, running away from the mound without looking back, to avoid any of the problems that have been thrown away to catch up with them. Crucially, farming, fishing and hunting activities are prohibited in the area. Anyone who passes by the mound is not supposed to look at the mound (for long). The belief is that some of the problems that have been thrown away will follow the transgressor. Similarly, if one farms there, the belief is that one would only harvest problems and not products, just as hunters will only bring back bad luck with any animal they kill within the vicinity. Due to these prohibitions, most of the areas where the baskets have been placed throughout the years have mostly turned to virgin groves, since hunters, farmers and fishermen usually avoid those places.

Therefore, through the rituals of 'mound-erection' and 'basket-placement' and prohibitions resulting from them, the cult members have not only succeeded in throwing away societal problems but also helped by regulating land and saving degraded portions of farm land, in addition to transform such lands into sacred groves. By doing so, a sense of consideration and connection between the natural world and human beings is expressed by the Okule cult's established rules.

### ***Conclusion***

Through Okule, Nawuris have established and continue to show a particular relationship with an attitude toward nature. Traditional religious beliefs are powerful in the Nawuri area and members of the cult through their taboos and totems have played an important role in environmental conservation. Although the attitude may be said to satisfy primarily spiritual beliefs rather than ecological ones, the sacredness of particular items and events are nonetheless man's invention or adaptation. For instance, we saw that the erection of the mound and the taboos around it with regard to farming, hunting and fishing allow the presence of specific plants and wild animals which enable other organisms to survive on the land. Since many animals and organisms thrive very well in serene and undisturbed areas, such areas are the location where Chankpana normally meets the devotees. The evidence provided above supports the argument that religious practices of the Okule cult can ensure the survival of numerous animal and plant species.

It is therefore necessary that in this era of climate change and agricultural revolution in Africa, African traditional religions, such as the Okule, are given consideration. To our knowledge no attempt has been made to integrate these well-sustained system into management policies; we suggest that an integrated approach, with traditional belief system on the one hand and scientific knowledge and practice on the other, could alleviate the negative consequences of climate change. An understanding of traditional belief systems is a key-step towards an integrated approach to environmental conservation.

## Bibliography and References

- C. Dorm-Adzobu, O. Ampadu and P.G. Veit, 'Religious Beliefs and Environmental Protection: The Malshegu Sacred Grove in Northern Ghana', Washington D.C., Centre for International Development and Environment, World Resource Institute
- D.N., Etiendem, L. Hens and Z. Pereboom, 'Traditional Knowledge Systems and the Conservation of Cross River Gorillas: A Case Study of Bechati, Fossimondi, Besali, Cameroon', *Ecology and Society* 16(3):22, 2011
- E.K. Agozie, 'Cult names and appellation in the socio-cultural milieu of the people of Veta traditional areas', Mphil. Thesis, University of Ghana, 2000
- F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana*, (Macmillan, 1998)
- H.M. Burkill, *The Usefulness of Plants in West Tropical Africa*, Vol. 5, families S-Z, Edition 2 (2000)
- L. Hongmao, X. Zaifu, X. Youkai and W. Jinxiu, Practices of conserving plant diversity through traditional beliefs: a case study in Xishuangbanna, Southwest China, *Biodiversity and Conservation* 11: 705-711, 2002
- J. A. Braimah & J. R. Goody, *Salaga: The Struggle for Power* (London: Longmans, 1967)
- J.E.K Kumah, *KeteKrachi Traditions*, (Legon: Institute of African Studies, 1969)
- M. Arbonnier, *Trees, Shrubs and Lianas of West African dry zones*, (CIRAD, MNHN, 2002)
- N. Bradbear, Non-Wood Forest Products, 19: Bees and their role in forest livelihoods (FAO, Rome, 2009)
- R. Awubomu, The Okule Cult and its significance for the Nawuri People of Balai in the Northern Region of Ghana, B.A. Long Essay, University of Cape Coast, 2010
- S.A. Ntewusu, A History of the Nawuri People of Northern Ghana, B.A. Long Essay, University of Ghana, 1998
- P. Barker, People, Languages and Religion in Northern Ghana, Asempa Publishers, Accra, 1986
- S.A. Ntewusu, *Settling in and Holding on: A socio-historical study of Northern Traders and Transporters in Accra's Tudu* (Leiden, African Studies Centre, 2012)
- PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/3/42, Census Report for the Southern Province of the Northern Territories, 1931.
- PRAAD, Tamale, NRG 8/2/211, Enquiry regarding the claims of Nawuri and Nchumburu, 1954
- Mary Esther KroppDakubu. 2013. Research on Vanishing Languages and Practices in the Northern Guang Area in Ghana: a preliminary report. *Ghana Journal of Linguistics* 2.1: 79-86
- NisbertTaringa. 2006. How environmental is African Traditional Religion? *Exchange* 35.2:191-214
- Jack Goody. 2010. *Myth. Ritual and the Oral*. Cambridge U. Press

Respondent's name	Place of interview	Date of interview
Olami	Balai	24 July 2012
Oningo	Balai	27 <sup>th</sup> July 2012
Banimafo	Balai	4 <sup>th</sup> October, 2012
Chignini	Balai	4 <sup>th</sup> October, 2012
Nana Obimpe	Balai-Kpandai	5 <sup>th</sup> October, 2012
Kofi Ntewusu	Balai	5 <sup>th</sup> October, 2012