



## **Beliefs about Ghosts among the Akan of Ghana: Discussion on a Culture and Language Radio Program in Ghana**



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### **Abstract**

As a thanatologist who specializes in mortuary beliefs and rites in Ghana, I frequently come across information on Akan cultural beliefs about ghosts, as well as individual or personal stories of ghost encounters. Yet, there has been virtually no academic inquiry into the topic. Between January and February 2015, I listened to four consecutive weekly radio programs focusing primarily on ghosts on a commercial radio station in Ghana. The programs were broadcast in Twi, the Akan *lingua franca*, which the author is fluent in. Following extensive discussions about Akan cultural beliefs regarding ghosts and other superhuman entities by the host and co-hosts of the program, listeners were invited to share their personal stories about ghost sightings and other encounters with ghosts. The current article presents a narrative of the discussion that occurred on the four featured programs. The data show that Akans of Ghana maintain a strong cultural belief in ghosts. Several listeners shared with the host and listeners their personal encounters with ghosts and ghost activities.

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## 1 Introduction

What is a ghost? Where do ghosts come from? What are the characteristics of ghosts? Where and when are ghosts frequently sighted? Are ghosts malevolent or benevolent? The preceding questions and many more have intrigued people in many societies across the globe. Among the Akans of Ghana, ghost beliefs are strong and stories about ghost sightings are rife. Yet, to date, the amount of published work on the subject is limited. The objective of this paper is to describe the discourse on ghosts featured on a program on the Obuoba FM 91.7 commercial radio station in Nkawkaw, Ghana, called *Amamere Safoa* and formerly hosted by the late Wofa Kwame Fosu.

*Amamere Safoa* was an Akan language and culture program focused on teaching Akans and general listeners about past Akan cultural beliefs, language, and practices and is educational in design and content. The host, late Wofa Kwame Fosu, was assisted by a panel of two to three co-hosts. Each week's program included a call-in segment where the host allowed listeners to pose questions or offer their own perspectives and describe their own experiences related to the subject or theme of that day's program.

## 2 Materials and Methods

Information for the current article was obtained from a careful, systematic, and thorough review of the contents of four consecutive radio broadcasts of *Amamere Safoa* on an Akan commercial FM Radio station in Ghana. The programs appeared on Obuoba FM 91.7 commercial radio station in Ghana on January 20, January 27, February 3, and February 10, 2015. All four programs focused primarily on Akan beliefs about death, the afterlife, and ghosts, with the central focus on ghost beliefs and ghost stories. The programs averaged 85 minutes per program and totaled 340 minutes, or 5 hours and 40 minutes. All programs were hosted by Wofa Kwame Fosu and featured Ahoma Nsia, one of his regular co-hosts.

For this research, the author listened to each weekly program live as it aired on radio. Copious notes were taken down in a notepad. In addition, all programs were recorded on a personal cassette recorder. Each program was played back multiple times and transcribed in order to analyze the content. The author's ascribed characteristics, as an individual of Akan ethnicity and Ghanaian birth origin were facilitating factors in conducting this research. Raised and educated in Ghana up to the university level, the author is fluent in the Akan *lingua franca*, which is Twi, the language of communication in the program which is the focus of the current analysis. The author is currently a professor of sociology at a university in the United States who has also regularly conducted field research in Ghana.

### *The Akans of Ghana*

Numerically, Akans constitute the largest ethnic group in Ghana, comprising about 46% of the country's population of 33 million. Spatially, Akans reside in areas from the southern coastal region up through the central areas of the country. Akans are subdivided into smaller groups, differentiated by linguistic dialectical differences. The major groups are Akim, Akuapem, Asante, Brong, Fante, and Kwahu. Akans are matrilineal, the only group in the country that traces descent and transfers property through the maternal line. Traditional Akan religion is ancestor veneration. Akans are also animistic, believing that rivers, mountains, lakes, trees, and animals possess spirits that can be harnessed for positive means. Akans believe that death is inevitable and is part of God's creation plan. Akans also believe in the afterlife and reincarnation. They believe that upon death, the spirit of the deceased departs from the body and journeys to *Asamando*, the mystical land of spirits, where it will live in harmony in the company of previously deceased lineage members, until they are reincarnated and return to life as part of the same matrilineage. Life in *asamando/the hereafter* is supposed to be similar in structure to life on earth (Adinkrah, 2020, 2021, 2022).

## 3 Results and Discussions

The following information derives exclusively from the discussion on the four *Amamere Safoa* radio programs focusing on the theme of ghosts. For the current article, the information has been organized thematically, rather than sequentially, as presented in the programs.

### *Ghosts Are Real; They Do Exist*

The Akan word for ghost is *saman* or *ɔsaman*. On the featured program, it was stated, usually emphatically, that *ɔsaman wɔ hɔ* (ghosts do exist/ghosts are real), *ɔsaman wɔ hɔ paa* (ghosts are very real/ghosts really exist). According to the host and other panelists on the show, Akans believe that whatever exists has a name or that a name does not exist for something that does not exist. Since the word *saman* exists and is an Akan linguistic reference to some phenomenon, it means that *saman* exists or is real. The analogy was made that wherever there is smoke, there is the certainty of fire (*baabiara a wisie firi no, na ogya wɔ hɔ*). The host affirmed that Akans believe that when a person dies, he or she becomes a ghost. The spirit which used to reside within the living individual transmigrates into a spirit which is called a ghost (*ɔkra no dane ye ɔsaman*).

The host of the show and other panelists provided some examples of what Akans consider to be evidence of the existence of ghosts. First, mention was made of the Akan mortuary practice of burying the dead with grave goods (*asiedee*). Akans believe that upon death, the spirit of the deceased departs the body and embarks on a journey to the afterlife (*asamando*). This is a long journey lasting several days. The journeying spirits will encounter rugged terrain, encompassing mountains, lakes, and rivers. It is believed that the deceased will need money to pay for the cost of transportation and to pay for snacks and drinks during the journey. One of the Akan grave goods is money which the deceased is enjoined to accept and use to pay for the cost of such transportation as car, boat, or ferry. The Akan deceased is also buried with an *afredewa* (handkerchief) which they are supposed to use on the journey to wipe sweat from their faces and bodies during the long arduous journey. The deceased is also routinely buried with a sponge and towel which is supposedly used to take a bath during or after arriving at their destination. The Akan deceased is also typically buried with cloth (*ntoma*), bracelets, rings (*kawa*) for change of clothes at the conclusion of the journey.

Other evidence of Akan beliefs in the existence of ghosts is the messages given to the deceased during various stages of the Akan mortuary process. One example of such messages occurs during the lying-in-state ceremony where mourners file past the body and pay their last respects. Mourners at the scene may approach the deceased with a variety of messages. Two examples of such messages were given on the featured programs under study:

- a) *Wo rekɔ yi, me yadee yi oo, fa kɔ, ente saa a, kɔ na mane me aduro na me ho ntɔ me.*  
As you leave, take my illness with you; otherwise, when you get there, send me medicine so that I will heal.
- b) *Matena ase a, menwo ba; mesre wo, wo kɔ a, mane me ba.*  
All these years, I have not been able to bear a child; when you arrive there [*asamando*], send me a child.

### *Diminution in Frequency of Ghost Sightings*

There was some discussion about the relative decline in ghost sightings in contemporary Akan society. Some Akans believe that in former times, ghosts and ghost sightings were much more common. They say there are fewer ghost sightings now than in the past because in earlier times, dead bodies were not refrigerated in morgues or mortuaries. Instead, they were preserved with local herbs. Some people suggest that the sighting of ghosts has waned with increased refrigeration of corpses. It is asserted that refrigeration has curtailed the ability of the spirits to roam freely and wander around. Essentially, the suggestion is made that refrigeration has tamed the spirits of the dead.

### *Types of Ghosts*

One area of focus in the radio program was the classification of ghosts by the types and nature of ghosts in Akan society. Akans believe that there are three types of ghosts. The first ghost type is known as *saman pa* (good ghost). These are spirits of people who lived exemplary lives and died good deaths—that is, death in advanced age and by natural causes. Ghosts of this genre are remembered periodically by Akans. Consistent with this, Akans say *saman pa na yekae no* or “good ghosts are the ones who are remembered or celebrated.” The names of such spirits are invoked or mentioned in Akan libation prayers. Supplications are directed at or submitted to them periodically and they are petitioned to help the living by bestowing upon them good health, long life, material prosperity and general well-being. This type of ghost is also periodically offered food, sacrifices of sheep, gin, wine, and mashed yams. New babies born into the matrilineage are given the last names of good spirits. For this, Akans say, *saman pa na yema no etɔ*, (good ghosts are the ones given mashed yam), *saman pa na odi odwan* (good ghosts are the ones who

are given sheep), *saman pa na yesosɔ ne so* (good ghosts are the ones we celebrate), and *saman pa na yeto no abadin* (we name children after good ghosts).

Another type of ghost recognized by Akan society is the bad ghost. This is known in Akan as *saman bɔne*. This type of ghost represents the ghost of a person who lived a disgraceful life and/or died a tragic death (*owu tantan* or *atɔfowuo*). For this reason, the ghost is presumed to be punished in the hereafter. Ghosts of this type include the ghosts of renowned criminals and malevolent witches.

The third type of ghost is the wandering spirit or ghost. In Twi, it is referred to as *samantwentwen* (*wandering ghost which lurks in corners*). This is the ghost of a person who died prematurely through their own actions. The person may have committed suicide, which is quintessential Akan bad death. Self-killing or self-inflicted death is tabooed in Akan society (Adinkrah, 2012, 2015). Among Akans, committing suicide or dying from a self-inflicted injury or wound means that the person did not die his or her destined death. Akans believe that due to the non-destined nature of suicide death, the spirit of the deceased cannot journey to *asamando*. If it dared make the journey, it will be prohibited from entering; it will be flogged by *Amokye*, the gateman, and asked to return to earth. Here, it is consigned to roaming the length and breadth of the earth. *Samantwentwen* is a wandering ghost because it cannot journey to *asamando* yet, nor can it return home because it has now morphed into a spirit, having lost its human form. Such a ghost is said to be afraid of humans and is feared by humans.

### *The Ghost's Spirit Form and Physical Mobility*

Akans believe that ghosts are spirits (*saman ye honhom*). They believe that ghosts have no body, no flesh, and no bones (*saman nni honam anaa dompe*). They believe that because ghosts are spirits, they can move fast and effortlessly, having easy mobility. Because a ghost is a spirit, it can be at any place at any time. It was stated on the program that there is no restriction in a ghost's physical mobility and general physical abilities; its mobility cannot be impeded physically. The statement was made that *osaman tumi kɔ baabiara* (a ghost can go anywhere).

Akans believe that there are certain conditions or circumstances where ghosts are more likely to appear. First, when a person goes against the wishes of ghosts or commits an offense against a ghost, then they will make their presence known (*yɛfom osaman a na yehu no*). The second common condition under which a ghost may be seen is when a person grieves too much from the death of a loved one. When that happens, then the spirit of the person so deeply mourned will appear to the mourner. In regard to this, Akans say, *yeyɛ mmɔbɔ pii a na yehu osaman*. Such a ghost will give comfort to the grieving individual, assure them that they are currently in a good state, or to ask them to moderate the mourning as it hampers the ghost's ability to transition to the spirit world.

### *When Ghosts Can Be Sighted?*

A curious listener who was interested in sighting ghosts called in with a question about where a person interested in seeing ghosts would actually be able to sight one. He was told that ghosts are more commonly sighted at night, though they can be seen at any other time of the day. Ghosts also appear in the living world at a time when they want to come and punish the living. Additionally, ghosts can be found more frequently at or near cemeteries or burial grounds.

### *What Ghosts Do*

A segment of the program focused on the activities of ghosts and their role in the lives of the living. According to this discussion, a ghost can bless (*ɔsaman betumi ahyira*) as well as curse (*ɔsaman tumi dome*) and punish (*ɔsaman tumi twe aso*) the living. Some ghosts come to the land of the living to visit the children they left behind (*ɔbehwɛɛ ne mma*). Some listeners called in reporting incidents of others being slapped by a ghost. In another instance a ghost was said to have pushed a person down for infractions they had committed against the ghost.

### *Ghosts and Why Akans Spend Lavishly on the Dead*

Akans are well known in Ghana and internationally for devoting considerable time and financial resources on the mortuary rites of their deceased relatives. Indeed, Akans are frequently criticized for spending less on their living poor relatives than their deceased relatives. Why do Akans spend so much more on the dead than on the sick? The answer is related to Akan beliefs about ghosts, their supposed abilities, and temperaments. It is more difficult to raise

money or obtain a loan to take care of the medical expenses of a living person who is ill than it is to raise money for a funeral. This follows from the tremendous respect for ghosts among Akans. They say, *yede obuwo ne nidie ma osaman*. They are afraid that if they wrong a ghost, the ghost can afflict them with misfortune (*onim se ofom osaman no a obeye no bone*). If a person does not honor behaviors expected by the ghost, the ghost will afflict the individual with difficulties (*waanye biribi a, osaman no beha wo*).

Throughout the program, a great deal of the discussion focused on why Akans spend so much time, energy, and resources on mortuary rituals for the deceased. According to this discussion, Akans do this to avert the potential wrath of the deceased and other ancestral spirits. Akans believe that unless they treat the corpse with honor and respect, the soul of the deceased will become angry and will become an avenging spirit that will return to haunt the living. A ghost becomes angry if they did not receive a proper burial, a fitting funeral, or some other mortuary rite. When the ghost responds negatively to perfunctory mortuary rituals, Akans say, *osaman no bo afu* (the ghost is angry). They say, *se obi wu na wansie no yiye a, ne saman beto wo so were* (If a person dies and you don't give them a befitting burial, the ghost will come and punish you). Akans believe that the lineage head or the person who oversaw the mortuary rites, known as *yipasohe*, may fall sick, go into a coma, or die as punishment for not giving a fitting burial to a dead relative. A divination is often needed to ascertain the true cause of the illness or untimely death. Usually the divination will reveal that the ghost of the deceased was responsible for the affliction. For this reason, Akans often give lavish burials and funerals to their deceased relatives (*yeye n'ayie kamakama*). In addition to acting to avert the wrath of an angry spirit, Akans also acknowledge that organizing a grand burial and funeral for the deceased is one powerful means of bringing honor and prestige to the lineage. The lineage will gain esteem as it will be known as the lineage that took care of its deceased with finesse, or in grand style. Akans say, *din pa ye sen ahonya* which literally means "good name is better than riches." Matrilineages with honor attract good suitors as everyone wants to marry into such a lineage.

#### *Samantoa: When Errant Persons Are Summoned to the Hereafter*

Related to the previous two themes, a portion of the discussion focused on the Akan concept of *samantoa*. Akans believe that there are serious negative consequences for offending a deceased person. *Samantoa* occurs when a person wrongs a deceased person. The spirit of the deceased person, now residing in *asamando*, will bring a complaint or file charges against the living individual. The allegedly errant individual will be invited to *asamando* to go and answer the charges. To travel to *asamando*, the person will have to fall sick and die. A common illustration of the concept of *samantoa* occurs following the conclusion of the mortuary rites of a deceased person. An example is when the deceased individual or the ancestral spirits domiciled in *asamando* express dissatisfaction over the mortuary rites commemorating a person's death. In this instance, the overseer of the funeral activities will be summoned to the other side to come and explain why the deceased did not receive a fitting burial or funeral. However, they will sicken and die in transit to *asamando*. The unfortunate thing about *samantoa* is that once they depart this life, they will not be able to return, even if they are acquitted of the charges lodged against them. Another common instance of *samantoa* is when the written or spoken will (*samansee or samamansew*) of the deceased person was not followed or adhered to. The *osaman* or ghost becomes deeply offended and summons the violators of the will to the council of lineage elders in *asamando*. The alleged violator will also be summoned to *asamando* to explain the situation, suffering a similar fate, falling ill and dying while traveling to *asamando*.

#### *Spiritual Activities That Occur During Funerals (Saman si)*

According to Akans, much evidence of the reality of ghosts is manifested during the celebration of Akan funerals. Known as *saman si*, the ghost of the deceased will come to possess one of the funeral attendees and use the person as a medium to communicate messages to lineage members, relatives, and friends. The person used as a medium is typically someone unrelated to the deceased. The rationale for this phenomenon is to give credence to the activities and or behavior of the medium. In the second episode of the program that aired on January 27, 2015, the host related two separate incidents of *saman si* that he witnessed at two funerals he attended. Akans believe that, in addition to the deceased hovering around or attending their own funerals other deceased members of the lineage or community of ancestral spirits can also come to the funeral to assess whether or not a funeral was conducted properly and befitting of the deceased.

### *Samanfrɛ: Invoking a Ghost to Appear*

Among Akans, there are processes for invoking or calling upon the spirit of the dead, known as *samanfrɛ*. *Samanfrɛ* literally refers to “calling of a ghost.” Though a rare practice, some Akan individuals and lineages go to paid necromancers to ask for their assistance in contacting their deceased relatives. The ghosts are called upon to reveal, explain, provide an explanation, or provide some information about a particular issue or problem. This is particularly the case in instances where survivors believe the deceased would be in a source of such information. Then the service of a necromancer may be called upon to call the spirit. This includes cases where the death of the deceased is deemed suspicious; then the ghost will be called upon to disclose the circumstances of their death—whether the death was by natural causes or whether it was the result of someone’s actions.

### *Respect Given to Ghosts*

It was emphasized throughout the four programs that Akan political and religious leaders grant much respect to ghosts. This was found in the repeated statement, *nananom de obuɔ ne nidie ma nsamanfoɔ* (our political and religious leaders give a lot of respect to the ancestral spirits). Evidence of this was provided. First, in Akan libation prayers, the names of Akan ancestral spirits are invoked. Traditional Akan religious practitioners begin their libation prayers by calling upon God (*Onyankopon*), then Mother Earth (*Asaase Yaa*), the tutelary deities (*abosom*), then the ancestral spirits (*Nananom Nsamanfoɔ*). This demonstrates the high regard Akans have for the ancestral spirits. Further evidence of the respect Akans give to the ancestral spirits is found in the fact that Akan chiefs often take the name of a previous chief, prior to acceding to the throne, shedding their old name. The rationale is that the previous chief is now a benevolent, magnanimous spirit now able to guide the new chief to political success.

### *Akans Fear of Ghosts*

Another segment of the program focalized on Akans fear of ghosts. We have already described that people fear the potential harm that deceased relatives can visit upon their living relatives for failing to give them a proper funeral and for other transgressions. Ghosts are also feared because they come from the land of death. So, automatically people are afraid of ghosts. They are afraid that the ghost will take them to the land of death. There is a cultural proscription not to say anything bad about a ghost. Akans say, one should not speak ill of the ghost or a deceased person. They say: *Yenka ɔsaman ho asem bɔne. Yenka owufuo ho asem bɔne*. Akans are afraid of *saman*. Since ghosts are believed to lurk in the dark, when Akans are in the dark, or walking through a dark area, they keep quiet, for fear of disturbing a ghost. Even if the deceased person was known to be unpleasant or even a criminal while living, after this person’s demise, no one will remark about the person’s bad deeds and will only selectively pick and discuss the person’s good deeds.

There was a lengthy discussion in the third episode on February 3, 2015 about the supernatural consequences of maltreating orphans and widows. Akans prohibit the maltreatment of orphans and widows. They fear that the ghost of the orphan’s deceased parents will punish them. In the case of the widow, they fear a retributive response of the deceased husband for mistreatment of the widow. Ghosts punish the living by giving them an illness. Ghosts can punish the living by making them suffer accidents. Ghosts can make hurtful things happen to them. Ghosts can make them experience bad happenings. A person who inherited the deceased’s property but neglects his wife and children will be punished by the ghost of the deceased. For example, if you don’t pay the school fees of children whose parents are deceased despite your having inherited the deceased’s property, you will be punished by the ghost. The errant person will be invited to come to *asamando* to answer to charges of dereliction of responsibility. The errant individual will sicken and die in order to arrive at *asamando*. Unfortunately, they will not be able to return to the earth/the land of the living, even if found innocent of the charges or is acquitted of the charges. Even if the errant person does not sicken and die, several negative happenings or events can happen to him or her. Akans say: *Ne bra eensɛ no yie. Onya sika na ahye (he/she will never prosper in life; he/she will continually lose money)*. For instance, the offender will not see success in employment. Contrariwise, people who take good care of the orphan or widow will be blessed. The blessing will ensure that the person can continue to take care of the widow or orphan very well. Blessings from a ghost comes in the form of good employment, success in one’s business ventures, achievement of academic success etc (Yang et al., 2008; Langston et al., 2020; Adom, 2019; Addaney et al., 2022).

### *Types of Ghosts*

As described earlier, Akans believe in two major types of ghosts. There are good ghosts and bad ghosts. A good ghost is called *saman pa*. A bad ghost is known as *saman bɔne*. A good ghost blesses its people. A bad ghost affrights and harms its people. One type of bad ghost is known as *samantwentwen* or *samantefie*. *Samantwentwen* refers to a wandering ghost. *Samantefie* literally refers to a ghost of the house or a ghost that lives or lurks around the house. *Samantwenwen* is a ghost of a person who suffered a bad death. Such a spirit emanates from such deaths as suicide death, a death by accident, a death by drowning or a death during childbirth. Because of the tragic circumstances of the death, and because the death is regarded as untimely and a non-destined death, the spirit of the deceased is unable to journey to *asamando*. It becomes restless and is often seen wandering or hovering around the scene of their death. It is said that *samantwentwen* is afraid of people (*samantwentwen suro onipa*). People are also afraid of *samantwentwen* (*nipa nso suro no*).

### *Some Characteristics of Ghosts*

An important characteristic of ghosts is that they lack body and bones. It was stressed repeatedly throughout all four programs that ghosts are spirits and, thus, do not have bodies that can be touched or felt. Akans believe that *ɔsaman nni honam, nni dompe* (a ghost does not have body or bones). One of the most persistent beliefs about ghosts in Akan society is that ghosts do not eat pepper plants, i.e. chillies, hot pepper, or cayenne pepper. They say: *ɔsaman nni mako* (ghosts don't eat pepper). Some also believe that ghosts do not eat salt (*ɔsaman nni nkyene*). Thus, it is believed that ghosts will not be attracted to food which has pepper or salt in it. For this reason, persons preparing offerings of food for the spirits of deceased relatives (*ɔsaman aduane*) must not add pepper to the food lest it be shunned by the intended spirit. Another characteristic of ghosts which surfaced in the discussion was that ghosts do not like people to whistle at night. Akans are therefore warned not to whistle at night. It is said that a ghost may respond to the whistle and that is bad luck to the whistler who may fall ill and even die. Akans believe that ghosts like to live in or stay at quiet places. They also like to stay at places which are dark or unlit. According to Akan folklore, people who have had the experience of sighting a ghost can become so terrified by the experience that they may develop cold sores (*nyarehu*) around the mouth. The claim was substantiated by three callers who called to talk about ghost sightings, each of them claimed to have suffered an illness after encountering a ghost, including *nyarehu*.

### *Akan Literature on Ghosts Ghost Songs, Ghost Proverbs*

The host referred to Akan language fictional books that include discussion about ghosts or Akan beliefs about ghosts as a resource on Akan beliefs about ghosts. These were *Owuo San Bra* and *Obeede*. Both books describe aspects of the journey to, and life in *asamando* in detail. The host had featured the books in a previous weekly program called *Kenkan Me*, which he hosted on the same radio station. The host also played two Akan highlife songs whose contents focused largely on ghosts. The first was by Nana Kwame Ampadu and titled *Saman Bi*. The second was *Saman Ba* by Yamoah's Band. A number of Akan proverbs about ghosts were shared on the program. Here are a few: *ɔsaman ebubu ba a na eye hu, onya bedu a enye hu bio*; *ɔsaman tene ne nsa a, wo punu wo dee mu*; *saman pa na yeto no abadin*; *saman pa na odi odwan*.

### *“Send Me Something If Someone is Coming this Way”*

Among Akans, an oft communicated message to the deceased is that “if *asamando* is a real place, then send me a remittance or send me something if someone is coming this way.” This was the focus of discussion for the last ten minutes of the second program on January 27. This is based on the Akan belief that *asamando* is a place inhabited by the spirits of the dead. Life in this place is commensurate with life in the land of the living: there are shops, businesses, schools, hospitals, restaurants, and other features of earthly existence. Akans also believe in reincarnation. They believe in an impervious boundary between the living world and the afterlife. The living may request specific things from their deceased relatives or ask for more general items to enhance general well-being on this earth. They believe the deceased body can see and can hear, they approach the corpse with a messages of various types, such as “Buy me a car, buy me medicine, help me give birth.” They believe that the deceased have extraordinary powers that can be used to fulfill the needs or wishes of living relatives. Many people believe that their



requests are granted. People who are expected to provide certain grave goods also do so for fear that failure to do so will incur the wrath of the decedent.

### *How Ghosts Communicate with The Living*

Ghosts sometimes communicate with the living through dreams. There were reports of ghosts having revealed to their children, lineage members, and even friends the whereabouts of some family treasures. Having taken this information to their grave, the spirit uses the medium of dream to make the revelation.

### *Ghost Encounters: Listeners' Stories*

In one of the programs (January 20), a listener called to share a ghost story. According to the account, there lived a wealthy man in an Akan community. He owned several successful business firms, several large farms, several expensive cars, and multiple buildings. He also had many children. He died without having left a will. Following his demise, one of his wealthy sons who had never contributed to the deceased's upkeep or maintenance hired an attorney to claim his deceased father's entire estate. He claimed that his deceased father verbally agreed to grant him all the properties before his death. He won the legal case in court and took over all the properties. A few months later, the son died. Shortly thereafter, the lawyer who represented the son in court over the litigation also died. Next, all other persons who participated in the man's appropriation of his father's estate also died, one after the other. It was surmised that the father's ghost was unhappy about his son's usurping of his estate under a false claim that he had verbally willed it to this son and had punished the errant son, the lawyer, and all those who facilitated the son's takeover of the estate. The concerned family went for divination, and it was revealed that indeed the deaths were attributable to the son's claim over his deceased father's estate. Certain rituals were performed to appease the deceased father. Then the deaths ceased. The story highlighted the message that a person who offends a ghost will suffer serious spiritual punishment.

In the program, that aired on January 20, a listener called to relate a story about a ghost activity. There was a practicing spiritualist in the caller's hometown. This spiritualist reportedly "died" and recovered several times. The people around him observed that he wore a special bracelet and suspected that the bracelet had spiritual powers that allowed him to repeatedly revive himself from death. and was the reason why he could not die and go permanently. They decided to go and find a spiritualist to tell them what to do to remove the bracelet so the man would die peacefully. In the same town lived a man called Fokuo. Fokuo was a known alcoholic who was also known for his jocular behavior. Fokuo told the concerned neighbors that it was unnecessary to go to a medicine man to remove the bracelet. He then took it upon himself to tear it up. After tearing it up, the man finally died. About three days later, Fokuo himself died. Fokuo's ghost was said to have appeared to a person who had been unaware of Fokuo's death. When he asked Fokuo where he was going, he told him that a certain man had summoned him in a court of law and that he was on his way to attend the court session. It was interpreted that Fokuo's ghost appeared to the man to explain Fokuo's current circumstances. It was surmised that that the man who died has summoned Fokuo to a spiritual court in *asamando* to come and explain why he tore the bracelet from the dying man's hand.

Another caller related a story regarding a ghost who returned to complete an unfinished project. A man was having a house constructed. The house was about 80 percent complete when he died and was going to be abandoned by the lineage who lacked the financial resources to complete construction of the home. He was said to have gone to a city, purchasing the building materials, hiring a truck, and instructing a driver to bring the items to the town where he lived. The driver brought the materials to the family to complete the house. This story was recounted to the amazement of everyone in the town (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009; Fentiman et al., 2001; Tanko, 2020; De Angelis & Ekström, 2020).

Among Akans, there are oft-told stories of people who died in one place but were discovered to have moved to go and live in another city or town. In some instances, the dead man or woman had even gone on to marry and have children in their new location. Some of these "ghosts" reportedly returned the children from these other relationships to their natal families, along with their material items. In the program of February 3, a caller called and related a shocking story about a ghost who went to live elsewhere and later returned her children to her matrilineage. According to the caller, the woman who lived in her neighborhood died. Several years later, three young boys were delivered to the home of the deceased woman. The oldest boy was 13 years old. The children carried a picture of their mother, which was a picture of the deceased woman. The boys said their mother sent them there. Along the way, she told her sons that she had to go and buy something from the market and that she would be returning soon.



She never returned. The three boys were raised by the woman's relatives without incident, attending school, and going on to live normal lives.

During the February 3 program, one caller described the case of a woman who lived in his residential neighborhood and had died. As part of the mortuary rites, the body of the woman was dressed and laid in state for grievors to come and pay her their last respects. The caller asserted that a few days later, he saw the dead woman standing near an orange tree in the neighborhood. She was dressed in the same fashion and clothes as he saw her while she laid in state. He said he went and called upon other neighbors to come and witness what he had seen. By the time they returned to the scene, she had vanished. The caller described falling ill with cold sores (*nyarehu*) around his mouth after the encounter.

In another contribution, a man called to relate a ghost story that involved a deceased uncle. A few years after his uncle died, a man who lived in another town came to tell his family that his deceased uncle was living and working as a carpenter in the visitor's city. His deceased uncle happened to be a carpenter when he was living. The family traveled to the town to investigate. When they arrived, they found his carpentry tools and equipment at the town's carpentry workshop, but the man was nowhere in sight. When they enquired of the other carpenters in the shop about his whereabouts, they were told he had just stepped away for a few minutes and would return. They waited for three days but he never returned.

One caller provided the account of a woman who arrived in his hometown and opened up a stall in the local market to sell goods. Another woman ran into her and said, "Hei Asomasi, is this where you are currently living?" She went and reported the sighting matter to the relatives of the woman. When they went to her home, they discovered that she had packed her things and was gone. Another caller described the sighting of his deceased cousin's ghost. He said his cousin was involved in a serious auto accident and later died. He had been on admission at a hospital for several days before his death. When he visited him in the hospital, he observed that his head was in bandages. A few days following his cousin's death, he saw his ghost standing near a tree near their house. He was sporting the same bandages around the head as he was while in the hospital. The caller said that he ran home and told other relatives about his observation, leading other relatives to the site. By the time they got to there, his cousin had disappeared. Out of fear for what he had experienced, he suffered physical paralysis for three weeks. He said the experience had confirmed his belief in ghosts. While about thirty listeners called to express their belief in the existence of ghosts, about five skeptical listeners callers called to deny or dispute the existence of ghosts. One caller said he had a very close relationship with his mother before she passed away. He argued that if ghosts were real, then his mother's spirit would have contacted him in the twenty years since her death. Yet there was no communication from his mother's spirit, either physically or through a dream (Nordfjærn et al., 2012; Stephens, 2000; Adinkrah, 2021; Putrayasa, 2017).

## 4 Conclusion

The foregoing essay has demonstrated that Akans have a robust belief system surrounding ghosts. In the course of over 300 minutes of discussion on an Akan language radio program, the host, co-hosts, and listeners contributed to a vibrant discussion of Akan ghost beliefs and personal encounters with ghosts. While Akan society is no different from many societies and peoples around the globe who hold beliefs about ghosts, these are aspects of a belief system specific to Akans. During the program, several callers related their own experiences with ghosts. These individuals said these encounters strengthened their belief in ghosts. The same individuals said that when they related their stories to their Christian pastors, they were told that ghosts were not real and that what they witnessed were the work of some devilish entities, such as witches. It may be asked: to what extent is the waning of beliefs in ghosts attributable to Christian religion's influence and overriding of Akan traditional beliefs? This is a piece of research that students of religion and culture can undertake.

### *Conflict of interest statement*

The author declared that he has no competing interest.

### *Statement of authorship*

The author have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author have approved the final article.

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