Cultural Variations in the Ideas of Wellbeing for Sustainable Development: A Comparative Review on the Traditional Akan and the Western Euro-American

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Abstract
There is a strong consensus that wellbeing or sustainable living are inextricably linked to cultural values, especially regarding individuals, and individuals in relation to each other and their environment. Qualities of independence and interdependence as well as human-environment relations are essential in most cultures, but particular cultures place value on one than the other and has attracted much attention in wellbeing studies, especially, those on indigenous cultures in comparison with Western life-ways.Wellbeing studies have been skewed towards Western cultures and traditional cultures of developing countries in the Pacific Islands and Asia, even though the greater majority of sub-Saharan African countries are going through periods of transition, including industrialization and the accompanying nutrition transition, nuances of public health burden and environmental degradation, as well as poverty and conflicts, which are directly or indirectly related to people's assessment of their own wellbeing, including indigenous people.This paper therefore compares the traditional Akan culture's ideas of wellbeing with that of the Western Euro-American. Due to the broad nature of the wellbeing subject, the paper focuses on independent- interdependent values and ideas of the "person" between the two groups, and how these ideas impact on their environments for sustainable development.
Keywords: Western/Euro-American, Traditional/Indigenous Culture, Wellbeing, Sustainable Development, Akan, Independence, and Interdependence

1.1 Introduction

It has become increasingly apparent through studies on quality of life that it is possible for one to be materially endowed and be dissatisfied with his or her life at the same time (Rojas, 2007). The idea that wellbeing transcends the amassing of wealth or material possessions is not so new. Aristotle (2004:12) is perhaps the first to have articulated this when he, around 300BC, asserted that making material wealth the prime objective of life serves the "intent upon living only, and not upon living well". This notion has drawn attention and interest to the subjective component of wellbeing (herein after referred to as SWB) over objective measures such as GDP, in quality of life studies in recent times at both national and global levels (Addai et al., 2013; Widgery, 2004).

SWB generally aims to capture an individual's overall sense of wellbeing, which includes happiness and life satisfaction based on an integration of the individual's self- knowledge with regards to the individual's physical, social and psychological functioning (Diener et al., 1999). It is thus broad and subjective in outlook (McGillivray & Clarke, 2006).

Due to its subjective nature, the authenticity of SWB measures across cultures have been questioned (Diener, Kahneman, & Helliwell, 2010; Wierzbicka, 2004). That is, the way in which people conceptualise wellbeing and what constitutes wellbeing have been argued to differ markedly from one culture to another. Diener et al. (2010), through a review of literature, found cultural differences in what constitutes wellbeing in North- America and Asia (in addition to other Pacific Islands) as well as differences in ways of expressing it. Tsai et al. (2007) also found differences in what constitutes a well-lived life for different religious cultures. On the contrary, other comparative studies assert that SWB measures are validly and reliably comparable across cultures (Kahneman & Krueger, 2006).

Wellbeing is therefore said to be inextricably linked to cultural values, especially regarding individuals, and individuals in relation to each other and their environment (Ingersoll-dayton et al., 2004). Qualities of independence and interdependence as well as human-environment relations are essential in most cultures, but particular cultures place value on one than the other (Greenfield, 1994) and has attracted much attention in wellbeing studies, especially, those on indigenous cultures in comparison to Western life-ways. Izquierdo's (2005) study on the Matsigenka's of the Peruvian Amazon, for instance, reports that, service to family, relations with wider community and improving fishing and hunting skills are the major things that constitute wellbeing to the Matsigenkas. Also, Richmond et al. (2005) and Crighton et al. (2003) respectively, report on how traditional environments and communal relations are valued by the 'Namgis First Nation (Alert Bay, Canada) and the people of Karakalpakstan in Uzbekistan, for their wellbeing.

Generally, this rapid surge of interest in SWB has been fuelled by the crucial information it provides on how individuals judge their own life circumstances, which informs social policy decisions and interventions aimed at improving the wellbeing of people; ensure equitable resource allocation, and thus decrease social

exclusion (Carr, Thompson, & Kirwan, 1996; Diener et al., 2010). Studies on indigenous people have gained wide currency, especially, in recent decades due to the "modern" society's search for ways to ensure sustained balance between human livelihoods and ecological resources (Apusigah, 2011; Panelli & Tipa, 2007).

However, comparative studies on SWB have usually focused on Western cultures and traditional cultures of developing countries in the Pacific Islands and Asia, with only a little of traditional African cultures seen in such studies. Meanwhile, a greater number of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries are going through major economic reforms, modernization and industrialization, democratisation, increasing public health complications, poverty and environmental degradation, which are directly or indirectly linked to people's assessment of their own wellbeing, including indigenous people therein.

2.1 Culture

As mentioned above, culture and wellbeing are closely linked and it is one of the most dominant vehicles by which wellbeing is investigated and understood. That is, whether culture has an effect on wellbeing and whether individuals from different cultural backgrounds have different perceptions of what it means to be "well", which in turn determine the affects they consider most desirable. A deeper understanding of the subject of wellbeing cannot therefore be reached without taking cognisance of the meaning of culture and what it entails.

Culture has been defined to mean a way of life; a set of values, beliefs, attitudinal and behavioural patterns shared by a group of people and transferred between generations (Ferraro & Andreatta, 2010; Matsumoto 1996). Tylor (1920:1) also defined culture as "that complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". It is also viewed as the distinctive sum-total of the material and spiritual values created by a people through history (Okrah, 2008; UNESCO, 2010).

It includes the knowledge, manners, education, and mode of thought, behaviours and attitudes accumulated by people over time. UNESCO (2010) therefore indicates that culture is extensive and determines people's attitudes, world-views and/or perceptions and a powerful contributor to economic development, social stability and environmental protection. Haviland (1993) and UNESCO (2010) also add that, it varies considerably by location, but no society is "more cultured" anthropologically, than the other. Interestingly, it is described as "a renewable resource…carefully nurtured for it to grow and flower. When neglected, it is easily lost or destroyed" (UNESCO, 2010:2). No wonder Okra (2008) posits that the culture of a people determines the direction of their development.

3.1 The Concept of Wellbeing

Despite the intense multidisciplinary scrutiny of the subject of wellbeing, it is apparent from the resulting copious literature that there is not an all-encompassing definition for it, and it remains a complex and debatable construct (Carlisle & Hanlon, 2008). Present knowledge and evidence, in diverse forms, about wellbeing has chiefly been produced from diverse disciplines through fieldwork and statistical experiments (Huppert et al., 2005). However, the greatest proportion of the evidence on wellbeing scholarship has been bred through psychology and economics research (Carlisle, Henderson, & Hanlon, 2009).

Contemporary debates and research in psychology on wellbeing, according to Deci & Ryan (2008), have been developed from two main perspectives- the hedonic approach, which is premised on happiness and sees wellbeing in terms of the realisation of the highest level of pleasure and averting pain of any form; and the eudaimonic approach, which focuses on "being fully functioning" and an individual fully realising his/her inherent human potential. Both are extensions of "Aristippus and Aristotle" ancient debates concerning the ideal human experience of what good life is (Carlisle et al., 2009).

According to Waterman et al (2006) notwithstanding the stark distinction between the two paradigms, they overlap in many other ways. They posit for instance, that, even though, not all forms of happiness (hedonic) can be experienced when an individual realises his/her full potential (eudaimonic), a person who realises his/her full potential in life will automatically experience happiness.

Most researches that have sought to study wellbeing from the hedonic standpoint have involved measuring it based on three components: the presence of positive mood, the absence of negative mood, and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1998; Diener, Kahneman, & Helliwell, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2001). However, for the eudaimonic theorist, subjective happiness is not equal to wellbeing: though some activities and their outcomes may be satisfying, they may not necessarily be good for an individual or ultimately lead to wellness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Theorists who are deeply rooted in Aristotle's eudaimonic ideologies advocate that wellbeing should not only comprise life satisfaction and positive affect, but also, constructs such as independence, growth, self-acceptance, mastery, a sense of psychological strength and positive affiliation or connectedness (Kasser & Richard, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Thus, according to Huppert (2009) it is not just the feeling of positive affect that matters, but the degree to which an individual is fully functioning, within the setting of his or her society.

3.1.1 Economic Growth and Wellbeing
There has also been a growing interest in wellbeing from the field of economics. Economists like Richard Layard and Richard Easterlin among other economists have in several publications examined the relationship between economic development (GDP) and wellbeing, both within and between countries over time (for example, Easterlin, 1973; 1995; 2005). Such economists have argued that there is little or no link at all between economic growth and wellbeing with most of such arguments emanating from what has been referred to as the " Easterlin Paradox", which suggests that no connection exists between a society's economic development level and the total happiness of all members therein. Easterlin's studies of countries over the last fifty years or so found sizeable growth in income, which has not been paralleled with reported happiness levels (Clark et al., 2008). For instance, Easterlin (1973: 4) in summarising his findings observes that:

"In all societies, more money for the individual typically means more individual happiness. However, raising the incomes of all does not increase the happiness of all…. what is true for the individual is not true for society as a whole."

These results occurred especially in western societies in which most of the serious social and health burdens have long been eradicated, and recently (Easterlin, McVey, Switek, Sawangfa, & Zweig, 2010) in some developing countries. Layard (2003), Clark et al. (2008) and (Lane, 2000) among others also contend that income per head is an essential factor for wellbeing only when income is below the poverty line or "subsistence level" and once it grows past that level, healthy social and family lives become the most important. Economists from this standpoint therefore argue that social policies which aim to ultimately achieve overall wellbeing of society but are rooted in continued economic progress are only fallacies (Easterlin, 2005).

Other studies by other economists like Stevenson & Wolfers (2008) however present a positive correlation between income levels and the level of happiness. Stevenson & Wolfers (2008) argue that, the period during which the income-without- happiness paradox was formed suffered data scarcity. Di Tella & MacCulloch (2008) also argue that the paradox could be produced as a result of the omission of other relevant variables like number of working hours or environmental degradation.

**4.1 The Euro-American Individual Oriented Wellbeing and the Environment**
Referring to Suh's (2000:63) metaphorical assertion on the "self as the hyphen between culture and subjective wellbeing", the composition of the self and its involvement in social institutions and life's daily activities may present essential clues to appreciating what happiness, and for that matter, wellbeing means to different cultures. The Western or Euro-American conception of wellbeing, according to Lu & Gilmour (2004), is deeply rooted in a highly individual self-concept. In a comprehensive definition, Geertz (1975:48) described the Western "person" or "individual" as ''a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background''.

Such conception of the person is what has been referred to as the "independent self" (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000). According to Lu & Gilmour (2004:274), such a view of the self "derives from a belief in the wholeness and separateness of each individual's configuration of internal attributes" and it is the "prototypical" characterization of the Western self. There exists a common cultural belief of being independent from others in the society (Kitayama et al., 2000). In such a culture of individuality, the efforts of all social institutions, including the media, are geared towards ensuring free will and individual reason (Markus & Kitayama, 1998). Particularly in the American culture, there is an incessant quest for individual interests and personal successes being rewarded generously. Individuals are thus encouraged to develop and articulate their personal preferences and desires, and to find meaning in life in their own unique way through an independent pursuit of "intellectual directions (intellectual autonomy) and by pursuing positive experiences for themselves (affective autonomy)"(Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2012). Though this speaks to the hedonic paradigm, Christopher (1999) contends that it is more informed by the individualised visions of the good life.

Individuals from such societies also derive meaningfulness from actualising and confirming an array of inherent attributes of the self, including capabilities, talents, or individual peculiarities, which are more eudaimonic. These beliefs naturally manifest in the daily lifestyles such as stressing and safeguarding "one's own rights, acting on the basis of one's own judgement, and separating and distinguishing the self from the context" (Kitayama et al., 2000). Carlisle et al. (2009) thus argue that the Western view of eudaimonic wellbeing has been shaped by individualism, with its stress on individual freedom. Lu & Gilmour (2004:283), in their study on what happiness means to the Western Euro-American, report that, to the Euro-American, "…happiness is doing and being who one wants to be without being held back by the restrictions of society".

Resulting from such individualism is not only the lack of care and concern for the wider society, but also a wellbeing idea which is dependent on "superficialities" like material assets, fame, wealth and physical looks among others (Cafaro, 2001; Carlisle et al., 2009). This in turn has created a "social logic of consumerism" and a materialistic way of life (Jackson, 2009), which according to Rosa (1998), serve the purpose of capitalism.

Figure 1: Location of Akans in Global and National Contexts

Ghana in Global Context

Akan (Shaded Area) in National (Ghana) Context
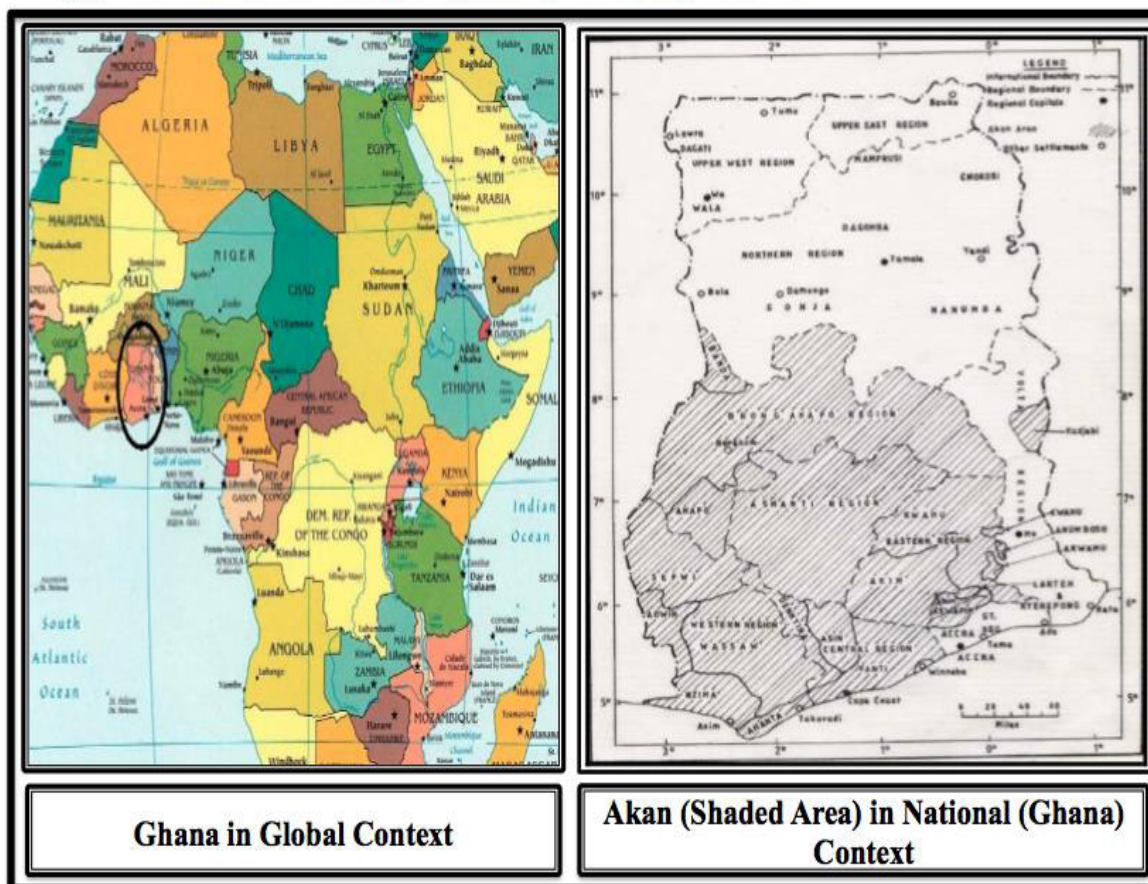
Sources: Anderson, 2013; Chwanya, 2014

In such "modern" societies, the increasing demand for material goods to achieve life's satisfaction has warranted the extraction of ecological resources to produce more to meet such demands and make more profit without recognising the rate at which the elements of the environment are being depleted (Jackson, 2009). Thus, according to Lu & Gilmour (2004), the West's explicit pursuit of happiness as a means of living out the independent personhood, masters, controls and aggressively impacts the external environment.

These ideas and means of achieving wellbeing and life satisfaction are being exported internationally as universal "templates" for achieving wellbeing and happiness worldwide (Carlisle et al., 2009). However, several comparative studies have shown variations in the conception of wellbeing across cultures (Diener, Oishi, & Ryan, 2013; Kitiyama & Markus, 2000). Developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa have been integrated into the cultural specificity of wellbeing discourse only to a limited extent. The following section therefore looks at the traditional Akan culture in Ghana, West Africa and their ideas of wellbeing for sustainable living.

5.1 THE TRADITIONAL AKAN

The Akan constitutes the largest cultural group in Ghana, which is the reason it has been selected for this study. The recent census reports that they form about 47% of the total population of Ghana (GSS, 2012). They occupy six out of the ten Ghanaian Administrative region, namely, the whole of the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo, the entire Central Region (excluding the Efutu and Awutu Areas near Winneba), larger portions of the Western and Eastern Regions, and minute parts of the Northern and Volta Regions as shown in Figure 1.

More specifically, the Akan cultural group includes the Asante, Bono, Denkyira, Assin, Sefwi, Wassaw, Tufu, Akwamu, Akyem, Akwapim and Adansi tribes (GSS, 2012). Twi and Fante are the languages they speak. However, by "traditional" Akan, I refer to "the Akan who in spite of the inroads of western civilization and religions such as Christianity and Islam, have still not abandoned the indigenous [life-ways] and religion bequeathed to them by their forebears''(Appiah- Sekyere & Awuah- Nyamekye, 2012:137).

5.1.1 Traditional Akan notion of Wellbeing: Personhood, Interdependence and Human-Environment Relations
The culture of the traditional Akan people is one of the world's long- established cultures and has developed a rich set of cultural beliefs, values, ethics and norms which guide their life (Wingo, 2006). Of particular

importance to this study are the Akan conception of the "Person" and his/her relations with the Earth as a Living Being, Spirituality and Communal Living, which are discussed below.

The "Person", his/her Relations with the Earth and Spirituality

According to the Akan ontology, the "person" is made up of various components, which defines his/her "beingness" and has been explored by diverse Akan philosophers (Gyekye, 1984; Wiredu, 1992). However, Appiah's (2004:28) summary of the Akan concept of person in his three-way analysis, perhaps, presents the clearest picture (italics in the Twi Language):

> "... a person consists of a body (*nipadua*) made from the blood of the mother (the *mogya*); an individual spirit, the *sunsum,* which is the main bearer of one's personality; and a third entity, the *okra*. The *sunsum* derives from the father at conception. The *okra*, a sort of life force that departs from the body only at the person's last breath; is sometimes as with the Greeks and the Hebrews, identified with breath; and is often said to be sent to a person at birth, as the bearer of one's *nkrabea*, or destiny, from *Nyame* or the Supreme Being (God)...."

Thus the traditional Akan's conception of the person is one that is more spiritual than physical. The Akan people therefore perceive spirituality as an inseparable part of their personal make-up and see a strong connection between their spirituality and their happiness. The world of the traditional Akan contains nothing that is non-living that may be deemed incapable of awareness or action (Minkus, 1980). Anything that exists, in the thought of the Akan, is endowed with spirit and is active. Singleton (2010) and Abel & Busia (2005) therefore wrote that, living well, to the Akan, is not limited to the state of the physical being, but an all-embracing balance that also integrates the mental, spiritual, social and natural. It hence calls for harmonious living with other society members, the natural environment and one's own self. Illness, disease and psychological trauma, are perceived to be consequences of diverging from such natural balance (Nobles et al., 2010).

The traditional Akans, for instance, hold the Earth in high esteem, and not as sheer soil, due to its generous support for human, plant and animal life, and its provision of minerals, water and tree resources, among others. It is seen as a living thing with a soul of its own and with religious importance (Apusigah, 2011). The Earth Spirit (Asaase Yaa), to the traditional Akans, wields supernatural powers, making it a god; a medium through which they relate with the Supreme Being and their ancestors (Apusigah, 2011; Osei, 2006). Traditional Akans therefore believe that land is not owned by the mortal being. The land instead, owns the people. Fetish land priests and chiefs who are usually the custodians do so only as a duty to the community members and the Earth deity. According to Apusigah (2011) the Akan's Earth goddess is not only a kind healer, provider and guardian of lives and livelihoods, but also "a point of spirituality and renewal". Rivers and water bodies are also believed to be the dwelling of the Water goddess (Maame Watta) and her offsprings. They are in like manner perceived to have souls, wield supernatural powers and thus revered. Several customs in the forms of cults, taboo and rituals have thus been instituted as means of protecting and revering water bodies, lands, evil forests, sacred grooves and animals, and their sprits. Non-fishing seasons and non-farming days among the traditional Akans, during which all are supposed to retire from work, are examples of such institutions (Osei, 2006). Deviating from such institutions are believed to attract the wrath of the gods (who are believed to omnipresent) in the form of calamities like drought, famine or low crop yields and epidemics, not only upon the culprit, but also on the entire community. Belief in the powers and deity of the elements of the traditional Akan universe and the conception that they are living beings with souls, enable the Akans to relate harmoniously with their environment, which they perceive as pivotal to their overall wellbeing. Through such religiosity and indigenous knowledge, the Akan people ensure sustainable living.

Communal Living

Another way of living of the traditional Akan people, which is perceived, as a major means of happiness and wellbeing is communalism, which Gyekye (2010) has explained as "A humanistic morality, whose central focus is the concern for the welfare and interest of each member of community". Gyekye (1995:155) elaborates that, the ''emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of, or to the detriment of, the individual".

For the traditional Akan, such sociality is natural since every person is birthed into a human town. An Akan philosopher, ((Gyekye, 1996) therefore asserts in an Akan proverb that:

> "When a man descends from heaven, he descends into a human society.
> (*Onipa firi soro besi, obesi onipa kurom)"* (Gyekye, 1996:36).

This crux of this Akan belief is that, mankind are social beings by nature. This, according to Wingo (2006), happens to coincide with Aristotle's popular assertion that: "The human being is by nature a social animal".
According to Gyekye (1995), communal living in the Akan culture is not to negate individualism, but it emphasises the Akans' recognition of the limited nature of the individual's capabilities to be self-sufficient. The Akans express this in a maxim, which says:

> "Man is not a palm-tree that he should be complete (or, self sufficient).
> (*onipa nye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho*)" (Gyekye, 2010)

Just as Gyekye (1995) observed above, the maxim points out that the traditional Akan believes that the individual with all of his/her talents and endowments, is still inadequate to solitarily achieve his/her economic, social, emotional and psychological wellbeing; realise his/her full potential and satisfy his/her basic needs. With such understanding, traditional Akans therefore live in a way which demonstrates that an individual unavoidably needs the succour and the connectedness of other members of the society to be successful, achieve life's full satisfaction and fulfilment (Appiah-sekyere, 2014). Wingo (2006) cites an example in which traditional Akan farmers, due to the seasonality of agriculture, help each other to complete work (for instance, planting of crops) on their farms on time (to meet the rainy season), which would not have been achieved if the farmer did it alone. This practice is called "nnoboa" by the Akans, which they have carved in a proverb that says:

"*Obra ye nnoboa*" which translates as:

"Life (*Obra*) is mutual aid"

To the Akan people, in a universe where mankind, weak and inadequate in diverse ways, are susceptible to many vulnerable circumstances, mutual aid and reciprocity become a moral necessity to wellness and happiness. Another major way in which the Akans portray mutual aid is when members of the community help a neighbor to quickly put up a traditional mud house for the family, which is reciprocated for other community members. The importance of communal living to the happiness and wellbeing of the Akans is perhaps captured by Gyekye (1996:38) in his explanation of the Akan proverb:

"*Ankonam yɛ mmɔbɔ*" which means,

Solitariness [literary, "walking alone"] is a pitiable condition."

This is evidently true since loneliness deprives an individual of the benefits of communal life such as those cited above and exposes the individual to emotional and psychological trauma.

The Akan ethic of communal living finds variants in Bujo's (2001) observation that indigenous "Africans of which traditional Akans are integral part, do not think in 'either/or', but 'both/and' categories". That is to say, for the Akan, "it is not Cartesian cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am"), but cognatus sum, ergo sumus ("I am related, therefore we are") that is decisive" (Bujo, 2001:4). According to Gyekye (1996:35), these cultural values reinforce and guide the traditional Akan as to the kind of "social relations, attitudes and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community sharing social life and having a sense of common good".

6.1 Discussion

From the ensuing discussion the contrasting understandings and approaches to wellbeing between the traditional Akan and Euro-American cultures are clear. Whilst interdependence, reciprocity and the placing of the common good of the society above the individual's personal interests and desires, form the pivot around which the traditional Akan wellbeing revolves, the Euro-American's is defined by autonomy and independence. As supported by steadily increasing volume of evidence from the environmental sciences (IPCC, 2007), the dominant cultural norms and values of Western societies have led to significant imbalance between a particular way of life and the environmental carrying capacity of the planet (Harrison, 1993). On the contrary, the traditional Akans through spirituality and belief systems have fostered sustainable human-environment balance through time.

However, like other indigenous communities, the traditional Akans of Ghana have not been exempt from the effects of colonization and other ideals of Western civilization such as modernization, globalization and industrialization, which are wrapped in capitalist ideologies. The uncritical embrace of these Western life-ways, including individualism and materialist ideals with their attendant aggressive consumption, have not only distorted and divorced most traditional Akans from their cultural values and life-ways, but also, their natural worlds. Today, faced with the ugly truth of deforestation and desertification, most of Ghana's forests have been reduced to savannah lands as a result of excessive logging fuelled by the abled hands of industrialization and mechanization. Ghana's forests are now only 25% of the original size (UNDP, 2011).

Also, the hitherto revered earth is today, an object of scorn, whiles loggers enter and destroy forests, which were once sacred and protected, without replacement plans. The earth surface and beneath have been turned into holes by both local and multinational commercial mining companies, from which valuable mineral resources are derived with barely no benefit to local populations (Lawson & Bentil, 2014). Moreover, water bodies have become receptors of all kinds of pollutants from all sources, rendering them unsafe for human use. The Ghana Water Company had to discontinue operations in the River Birim Basin since it had been excessively polluted with chemicals from mining explorations (Yeboah, 2013).

In Ghanaian societies today, with most indigenous people divorced from their indigenous life-ways, selfishness and greed have robbed them of care for one another and seeking the common good. Not only do people destroy public and communal resources with impunity, but also the lives of fellow humans. The rich procure and construct in waterways and reserved areas regardless of consequences like floods, which affect entire society. Corruption among politicians and civil servants has also become a norm. Teachers and other civil

servants spend working hours attending to personal businesses. These are, perhaps, some of the grim realities Christopher (1999) envisaged when he warned that Western conceptions of wellbeing could not be exported to different cultures without risk. It follows therefore that, to alienate people from their culture, is to actually alienate them from their roots. They are no longer able to naturally develop and ensure their wellbeing sustainably.

These alarming results have given rise to the search for alternatives that nurture and enhance sustainability, with the United Nations and its agencies at the forefront. International initiatives like Agenda 21 for Culture (2002), World Commission on Culture and Development (1992), UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, (2001) and the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples Rights, among others, present hope for culture and a common understanding of "the place of the local in the global" in fostering sustainability (Apusigah, 2011; UCLG, 2007; UNESCO, 2001). These efforts underscore Apusigah's (2011:3) argument that, "to alienate culture from development is actually to alienate people from their roots". The importance of culture for sustainability is also underpinned by Hawke's (2001) argument and proposition that, culture should be made the Fourth Pillar of sustainable development, in that; it gives meaning to the other three: environment, social and economic.

7.1 Conclusion

The review of the life-ways of the traditional Akan people and their notions of wellbeing in comparison with those of the Western Euro- American, has underscored the importance of place-specific occurrences (such as how particular people live and relate with each other and their environment) to wellbeing, which Kearns (1993) among others have argued. Differing conceptualizations of wellbeing among different cultures result in different sets of elements that come together to constitute wellbeing for particular cultures. Inspired by outcomes of this review and other similar studies (Ingersoll-dayton et al., 2004; Izquierdo, 2005; Panelli & Tipa, 2007; Richmond et al., 2005), it is argued that wellbeing is place-specific. That is to say, it means different things to different people.

For the traditional Akan people, it has been demonstrated that, spirituality, connections with wider community, interdependence and reciprocity are some of the elements that come together to constitute wellbeing. Through taboos, beliefs in and reverence to environmental elements as possessing souls and supernatural powers, they ensured human-ecological balance. By so doing, indigenous knowledge and values demonstrates deep understanding of sustainable use and management of natural resources. Today, the modern society is not only aware of its unsustainable life-ways for which change is being sought, it has also come to understand and realise the opportunities and insights offered by indigenous worldviews on sustainable natural resource management and social wellbeing. At the international level, Agenda 21 and UNESCO present culture as the key to unlocking the paths to sustainable development (UCLG, 2007; UNESCO, 2013). National and local governments as well as Civil Society Organizations have also not just come to understand the place of local perspectives, culture and indigenous knowledge, but also incorporate indigenous worldviews into policy decisions and designs (NZMCH, 2006). There is no better time than this, to make culture the fourth pillar of sustainable development. It is "in all its dimensions, a fundamental component of sustainable development" (UNESCO, 2010:2).

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