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## Etymology of Some Words in Akan, Dangme and Ewe Languages Which Showed the Co-Existence of These Three Nationals in the Past

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examines how some words occur in some three Ghanaian Languages. These languages are Akan, Dangme and Ewe. It is unclear which of the three languages owns the etymology of these words. The focus of this study is to prove that some factions of these three language groups have ever co-existed before. A lot of studies have been conducted by other researchers about the origin of these three language groups but none of the studies shows that these three language groups have ever co-existed. This necessitated the study into this study to find out the converging point of these three language groups and this makes the study very significant.*

*The researchers depended heavily on interviews to gather data for the study. They used library and internet facilities also. They used Manya and Yilo Krobo national areas for the study and used purposeful sampling procedure. They used forty-five (45) people for the study. These people were carefully selected through canvassing and leading information. The people selected included the traditional leaders, Dangme and non-Dangme historians, family heads, and opinion leaders of the Zonal Councils of the three nationals i.e. Akan, Dangme and Ewe. The authors identify forty (40) words of which eighteen (18) words representing forty-five percent (45%) belong to all the three languages. The study shows that fifteen (15) words representing thirty-seven point five percent (37.5%) belong to Akan and Dangme languages. This means that Akans and Dangmes have ever co-existed. Again, seven (7) words representing seventeen point five percent (17.5%) are words that belong to Dangme and Ewe languages which means that Akans and Dangmes have ever co-existed. It is important to note that apart from the 18 words that belong to all the three languages, there are no words that belong exclusively to Akan and Ewe as we have for Akan and Dangme and Dangme and Ewe. This means that Akans and Ewes have never co-lived.*

**Keywords:** Dangme, takologo, ɔɔɔɔ, nationals, dipo

### **1. Introduction**

Akan, Ewe and Dangme are among the dominant groups in Ghana. The languages used by these three groups have some words or roots in common with the same meaning in all the three languages. The etymology of some words in these three languages is an indication that these three tribal groups have ever lived together before and that is why they have some words in common. An etymology shows the different forms the word has taken in passing from one language to another, and sometimes shows related words in other languages Microsoft® Encarta® 2018. © Microsoft Corporation.

An etymology is the study of the history of words, their origins and how their forms and meanings have changed over time. By extension, the term "etymology of a word" means the origin of the particular word. Wikipedia. <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/etymology>. Accessed date: 24th October, 2019.

There is a growing concern about how Ghana has been of late, so porous and fragile, divided along chieftaincy, religious and political lines. Hitherto, it was not so. History shows that most of the major nationals that appear to be at the extreme ends of the pole were once communal people. The tribal wars that characterised the pre-independence era made people migrated and joined other small groups to join forces to protect one another. These movements resulted in people changing their identity and language thereby losing their root. When this happens, the language of the original settlers or the immigrants gets adulterated. That was what happened in the case of Akans, Dangmes and Ewes. For better appreciation of this work, an attempt has been made to trace the origin of the Dangmes to find out who they are and how they later merged with the Akans and the Ewes.

The Migration Story

The great ancestors of the Dangme migrated from a place called *Sammeh* in Sudan. When the Dangmes were in Sudan, they were harassed by militants and this forced them to journey towards the west coast of Africa. They settled in

Yorubaland at a place called *Zago* in present day Nigeria. They were attacked again and their houses burnt. This unfortunate incident forced the Dangmes to relocate again. They journeyed through Dahomey (present day Benin) and moved on to the present-day Volta Region. It was in the Volta Region that the Voltaians named them *Dagbeawo*; meaning lucky people. *Dagbeawo* later became corrupted to become Dangme people. Ewes named the people *Dagbeawo* because they are full of life and hope. The Ewes after observing them for some time remarked that "these people are blessed; if you bless them, you are blessed; if you harass them, you encounter hard luck and if you deal with them kindly, luck comes your way." (Source: Field Research).

They moved down to the southern part of the Volta region and settled along the southern bank of the River Volta. They later discovered that the Akwamus were settled at the Northern part and the Bators were further south. They decided to cross the river to settle on the grassland beyond the river uninhabited but had to wait until the river became shallow. They crossed through a narrow and a shallow part of the river. That part of the river was full of crocodiles. Since they were familiar with crocodiles in *Sammeh* (in Sudan), they mastered courage and crossed the river on the back of the crocodiles. The present-day Sudanese still regard crocodiles as their totem. That is why they named their national football team; "The Crocodiles of Sudan". The Dangmes also revere crocodiles by adopting them as their totem. This is why the Dangmes still have a crocodile pond at Mt. Mary College of Education at Somanya.

When they crossed the Volta River, they settled at the *Takologo* Plains. The *Takologo* plains border the river Volta, stretch westwards to the Akwapem ridge stretching from Aburi through Akropong, Adukrom and Assesseseso to Atimpoku. The plains stretch from *Yogaga* at Kpong to the Coast of Guinea. The following mountains are dotted in it: *Klo* Mountain, *Osudoku* Mountain, *Shai Hills* and *Aklomor* Mountain. The Dangmes came from *Sameh* with livestock like sheep, doves and turkey which are used for purification rites. Since the land was fertile and fresh water was available, they settled there. The Dangmes multiplied and divided into seven groups. Krobo is the largest of the seven Dangme ethnic groups of south-eastern Ghana. According to Huber (1993), the Krobo national area extends from 0° 18' western longitude to 0° 8' eastern longitude and from 6° 2' to 6° 32' northern latitude.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, another group left their place of origin in Denkyira in the Asante Region during the reign of Ntim Gyakari. They travelled for days and came to Akyem Maase to settle. After some time, Ntwi (one of the leaders from Denkyira) continued with a group to the land of the Okere at Awukugua, the homeland of legendary Okomfo Anokye. From there, they heard of the Dangmes at *Takologo* and they decided to join them. They were granted permission on two conditions, that they the *Takologo* dwellers are circumcised. It is their tradition that every male child should be circumcised. The Denkyira migrants should be prepared to be circumcised. This, the Denkyira migrants agreed to do. They, however, pleaded that they themselves were too old to be circumcised but they promised to circumcise their male children henceforth. The *Takologo* dwellers agreed. The other condition was that they must be prepared to learn and speak their language which is the Dangme language. The Denkyira migrants agreed to this also. The Denkyira migrants joined the *Takologo* dwellers and they co-existed peacefully. Many years later, a third group called Zulus joined them from South Africa. Later, some of the Zulu migrants continued their journey and mixed up with the Yorubas in present day Nigeria. It is interesting to note that words like *agyale* in Ewe, *dzale* in Dangme and in Yoruba, refer to soap and *kutsa* in Krobo, *akutsa* in Yoruba and Ewe, is sponge. It is not clear which of the three groups originated the words in question. Field Research.

Some years later, these three groups fused together and became one through inter-marriages. They started building their communities through communal labour. Today, it is very difficult to tell which group came from *Sameh* in Sudan, Denkyira in Asante region and South Africa. Very little is left to show who came from where. Source: Field Research. According to Reindorf (2007), many years later, the *Takologo* dwellers started receiving threats of war from the Akwamus and the Akwapims. The group started looking for a safer place of abode. The Dangme group had two great hunters called Maja and Aklomoase. They discovered a mountain full of owls during one of their hunting expeditions. The group moved to take refuge in the mountain of owls.

Finally, the Dangme group disappeared from the *Takologo* Plains. The Voltaians were shocked by the disappearance of the *Takologo* dwellers and they described the scene as *lɔlɔvɔ* (the friendship is finished or is exhausted). *Lɔlɔvɔ* is not a place but it is an episode which described the termination of the friendship the Ewes enjoyed with the *Takologo* dwellers.

The Dangmes found safety and peace in their new place of abode. As a result, they had a lot of leisure for pleasure. Consequently, sexual and amorous relationship was developing among them. But they remembered that when they were in *Sammeh*, they were told by their great grandfathers who were believed to have migrated from the region of the Middle East that God once destroyed two cities called Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sexual misconducts. (Source: Field Research). To avert the anger of God, they instituted a puberty rite (*Dipo*) for all female children to prevent them from sexual promiscuity and all the male born must be circumcised. This was to delay their sexual activities. This is the genesis of *Dipo* the puberty rite of the Dangme people. The purpose of the puberty rite was to maintain chastity among the Krobo youth. In those days, a girl must grow and attain a marriageable age before she was taken through the puberty rite. This is to ensure that there is discipline and sanity in the sexual life of the youth. Any girl who failed to undergo the puberty rite before she became pregnant was exiled and the family of the boy who impregnated the girl was heavily fined. Any woman who underwent this puberty rite is described as an ideal woman. These are the attributes of such a woman: *Maa Nitse*, *Yo Nitse*, *Yopeyo*, *Yoma*, *Yohi*, *Yoakpa*, *Yokama*, *Yofini*, *Yomigo*, *Longma*, *Ngmatso*, *Okunɔ*, *Yosibɔsibɔ*, *Yobɔdɔbɔdɔ*. The root word 'yo' means woman. It is difficult to convey all the implications of these expressions into English. This is really a description of an ideal woman. They believed that it was only this high moral standard that will avert the wrath of God and attract His blessings upon their life for growth and prosperity. The main dance of the Dangme is the *Klama*. It was brought from

*Sammeh*. They have songs also like *Ajijaa*, *Ohuesabe*, *Nulemi*, *Tegble*, *Gbeko*, *no hue lafa*, *so* and *Asikɔ*. In addition to their own music, they adopted the music of other African peoples eg. *Gbeko*, *Atsai* and *Adzida* of the Ewes. *Bɔdo*, *Apajaa*, and *Osiade* (Adakam) of the Akan people.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. African Language Families: Afro-asiatic

According to Isichei (1997) African Languages are in families. The language family can be broken down as represented diagrammatically as follows:

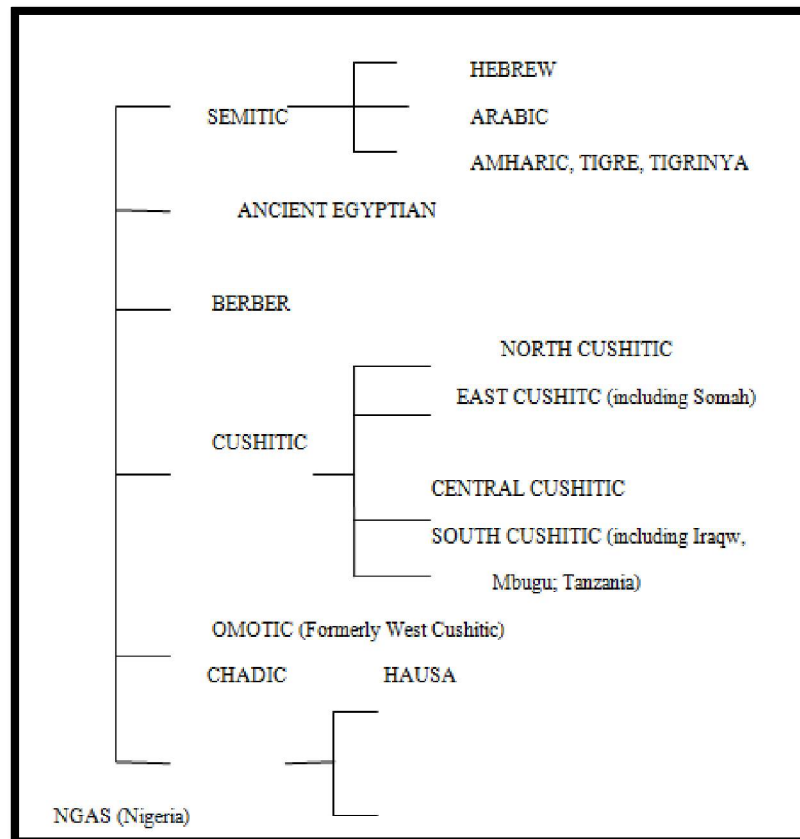


Figure 1

*African Language Families – Afro-Asiatic. Source: Isichei (1997)*

Afro-asiatic was first spoken between the Nile and the Red Sea about 15,000 or more years ago. It has six main branches – Semitic, Ancient Egyptian (and Coptic), Cushitic, Omotic, Berber and Chadic. It has been suggested that Old Kingdom Egyptian and Akkadian are rather more divergent than Romanian and Portuguese, the implication being that the Afro-asiatic branches separated in 6000 – 5500 BC.

Semitic language includes not only Hebrew and Arabic but also Amharic, Tigre and Tigrinya, spoken in Ethiopia. These languages descended from the language of immigrants from south-east Arabia before 500 BC. Arabic is now spoken as the first language in Egypt and much of the Maghreb but it is not indigenous there. Berber is spoken in the Maghreb where it is not supplanted by Arabic. The language of the Tuareg and Tamasheq belongs to this family.

The Ancient Egyptian branch of the Afro-asiatic is extinct. It has been supplanted by Arabic. It is only known from written sources. But a form of it survives as Coptic used for liturgical purposes by Egyptian Christians who have spoken Arabic for more than a millennium.

The Cushitic language family has four branches. They are nearly all found in Ethiopia or the Horn of Africa including Somalia. There are over forty living Cushitic languages. According to *Encarta* 2018, there are about 13,000,000 million speakers of Cushitic languages. Southern Cushitic is now spoken by only tiny relic groups in East Africa but despite this, it is of great historical interest.

Omotic which is formerly considered West Cushitic is found only in southern Ethiopia whose history and culture are as yet relatively little studied. The Chadic branch has the largest number of component languages assessed at between 100 and 200 depending on whether a given language is listed separately or as part of a dialect cluster. It is overwhelmingly dominated by Hausa speakers. It is spoken by about twenty-five million (25,000,000) people; The Chadic language family was the first language of millions in Northern Nigeria and Niger. It has spread more widely as a lingual Franca for trade and as a second language. Chadic languages are also spoken by a small group of people to the east and south of Hausa land.

Another family of the African language is Nilo-Saharan. This is the most scattered and least studied of the phyla. Nilo-Saharan is at least as deep in time and as diverse as Indo-European. Speakers of Nilo-Saharan languages spread across a great track of middle Africa.

To the west, they include the Songhai watermen of the middle Niger. The first Nilotic speakers are thought to have lived near Lake Jurkana. The Eastern Nilotes, who include the Maasai, and the Western Nilotes, who include the Nuer and Dinka of the republic of Sudan.

The Akan language also known as Twi is a group of dialects within the Central Tano branch of the Potou- Tano subfamily of the Niger-Congo family. The Niger-Congo family divided into the Atlantic Congo which sub divides into the Kwa family which further divides into the Potou-Tano Central family. Ewe, Ewe or Ewegebe is a Niger-Congo language spoken in south-eastern Ghana by over three million people. Ewe is part of a cluster of related languages commonly called Gbe. The other major Gbe language is Fon of Benin. Like many other African languages, Ewe is tonal. Wikipedia.[https://en.m.wikipedia.org,<wiki<etym...](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/etym...) Accessed date: 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2018.

The Dangme language falls under the Afro-asiatic family. Since they migrated from *Sammeh* in Sudan, it is natural to believe that the Dangme language might belong to the phylum of the Nilo-Saharan since the Sudanese language belongs to this family. It is also natural to believe that since the Dangmes migrated from the Middle East (Source: Field Research) before settling at Sudan, their language might be one of the phyla of the Afro-asiatic. It is the present researchers' hope that further study will fully research into the origin of the Krobo language. Though some accounts have it that the Dangme language belongs to the Kwa group. This is, however, contested by many scholars. (Kwa is a group of languages in the Niger-Congo family that are spoken in West Africa, and include Yoruba and Ibo). Microsoft® Encarta® 2018.

The study above shows that Akan, Dangme and Ewe languages belong to one phylum of languages but sub divided into families though they retain some of the roots or the original words. The tribes that emerge from this language family have their worship and rituals in common. Angmor (1996) says that rituals and dirges of the various ethnic communities express these beliefs in solemn strains. Okphewho (1990:208) says that "man is ontologically an expressive being and both actions and reactions consequently permeate our modes of life and living". According to Azasu and Geraldo (2004), though the early man didn't know how to write, he has his hopes, fears and desires. They say that there can be no worship without communication. Finnegan (1970:241) says "we learn about our ancestors through performances". Angmor (1996:10) cannot hide his feelings when he says "one of the greatest evils of colonialism in Africa was its disregard for African languages and the imposition of the language of the colonising nations, for language is the blood of culture of a people". Though Yankah et al (2010) argue that if we write African literature in African languages, we run the risk of limiting readership because in our community in Ghana, there can be over forty Ghanaian languages; the chunk of which are illiterates so only few will benefit from a work in such a language, yet writing African literature in European languages appears to be linguistic slavery. This is a dangerous situation. Amuta (1989) provides a lea way by claiming that Language needs to be conceptualised to mean the totality of the means available for communicating a cultural form to the greatest majority in a manner that will achieve a clearly defined cognitive-ideological effect in the consciousness of the audience so defined. When we lose our language, we lose our way of life. Language is a key component of culture.

### 3. Methodology

This section deals with the research methodology and procedures used to collect data for the study. Research is a methodical investigation into a subject in order to discover facts, to establish or revise a theory, or to develop a plan of action based on the facts discovered. Microsoft® Encarta® 2018.

According to *Chambers Dictionary* (2003:1287) research in a broader sense is a "...systematic investigation towards increasing the sum of knowledge." Macmillan and Schumacher (2010) state that it is a systematic process of collecting and logically analysing information for some purpose. Verna and Mallick (1999:33) over simplified it by saying that it is "the application of systematic methods to the study of educational problem."

The methods so referred to by Verna and Mallick in their definition of research and the methodology used in this chapter are one and the same thing. Oliver (2004:29) defines methodology as "... the title of the chapter in a thesis which describes both the design of the research, the theoretical orientation and the approach to data analysis." The above discussion indicates that methodology is not only a "set of rules and procedures" that guides research (Miller and Brewer, 2003:192) but also a language and format for communicating what one has found in one's research.

### 4. Research Design

The research design used in this study is a basic one. According to Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu (2007: 30) "the basic research is also called pure or fundamental research. The goal of basic research is to understand and explain, to provide broad generalisations about how phenomena are related." This research is basically concerned with explanation of a phenomenon. The researchers adopted this design because it is the most appropriate for the topic under study. The research under study is a field work. It needs to collect information from the field for analysis.

### 5. Population

The population of the study involved forty-five (45) people made up of historians, chiefs and elders of the Akan, Dangme and Ewe nations. The sample population is the people who know the history of the Dangmes from the time they were living in *Sameh* in Sudan and can follow it through to the time they were in *Zago* in present day Nigeria. And then, they can follow it to when they came to settle at the *Tokologo* Plains up to when they settled at *Klowemi*, the Mountain Home. Finally, they should know the story of how they were brought down from their Mountain Home and how they came

and settled at their present national areas. It is worth mentioning that other historians who are not Dangme nationals but know or have information on the history of the Dangme were also contacted.

**6. Research Instruments**

The instruments used for this study are the library research and the unstructured interview. Though the library and the internet facilities were used intensively, much information could not be obtained in these media. This was because there was hardly any literature on the Krobo nation in these media. This has made the researchers relied heavily on unstructured interview. Sometimes, the interview is conversational and casual. This has been very useful because the topic under study is oral literature. This is why the researchers relied so much on an unstructured interview.

**7. Data Analysis of Vocabulary**

Halliday (1970) states that there are three micro functional domains of language. These are mode, tenor and field. He explained that mode is the medium or the channel of the communication situation. Tenor is the nature of relationship between the participants in the communication and field is the register of the communication. The register may be in the domain of Science, Medicine, Law, Politics, Religion, Social Life, etc. This study dwells on the register of the social language of the Krobos, Akans and Ewes.

Adangme shares with Ga largely the same roots. It is not surprising therefore to hear the two groups lump together as Ga-Adangme. The two languages have a lot in common. The Dangme language also contains a number of words from the neighbouring Akan and Ewe languages. Examples of these words from Akan, Dangme and Ewe include:

Ewe Include:

Akan	Dangme	Ewe	English
<i>Dadie</i>	<i>dadie</i>	-	metal /cutlass
<i>Fitaa</i>	<i>fitaa</i>	-	white
<i>Makami</i>	<i>amakami</i>	-	cocoyam
<i>bayire</i>	<i>baale</i>	-	yam
<i>atadie</i>	<i>tade</i>	-	dress
<i>anoo nyam</i>	<i>anonyam</i>	-	glory
<i>dabi</i>	<i>dabi</i>	-	no
<i>ayikoo</i>	<i>ayikoo</i>	<i>ayikoo</i>	well done
<i>tirinlawa</i>	<i>tirinlawa</i>	-	congratulations
-	<i>Manwu</i>	<i>Manwu</i>	God
-	<i>ajale</i>	<i>ajale</i>	soap
-	<i>akutsa</i>	<i>akutsa</i>	sponge
-	<i>agbali</i>	<i>agbali</i>	cassava
-	<i>asaminana</i>	<i>sabala</i>	onion
<i>fufuo</i>	<i>fufu</i>	<i>fufu</i>	fufu
<i>banku</i>	<i>banku</i>	<i>banku</i>	banku
<i>emo</i>	<i>emo</i>	<i>moolu</i>	rice
<i>nkftee</i>	<i>akate</i>	-	groundnut
<i>odum</i>	<i>odum</i>	<i>odum</i>	odum
<i>wawa</i>	<i>wawa</i>	<i>wawa</i>	wawa
<i>kokonte</i>	<i>kokote</i>	<i>kokonte</i>	-
<i>aprapransa</i>	<i>praprasa</i>	<i>prapransa</i>	-
<i>aboodoo</i>	<i>abole</i>	<i>abole</i>	-
<i>musuo</i>	<i>musu</i>	<i>busu</i>	abomination
<i>bosam</i>	<i>abosiam</i>	<i>bosam</i>	satan
<i>maame</i>	<i>mami</i>	-	mother
<i>papa</i>	<i>papa</i>	-	father
<i>papa</i>	<i>papa</i>	<i>papa</i>	fan
<i>dadisen</i>	<i>dadisen</i>	-	cookingpot
<i>ahwehwe</i>	<i>ahwihwe</i>	<i>ahwihwe</i>	mirror
<i>opuro</i>	<i>oplewu</i>	<i>opro</i>	forest squirrel
<i>awura</i>	<i>awura</i>	-	lady
<i>dadaada</i>	<i>dadaada</i>	-	longtime
-	<i>blema</i>	<i>blema</i>	olden days
<i>adaka</i>	<i>daka</i>	<i>daka</i>	wooden box
<i>kyiri</i>	-	<i>tsiri</i>	hate
<i>kanea</i>	<i>kaneh</i>	<i>kade</i>	lamp
<i>Osam</i>	<i>osram</i>	-	moon
<i>brsoo</i>	<i>blsoo</i>	<i>blsuu</i>	slowly
<i>obO</i>	<i>bOlu</i>	<i>prawna</i>	

Figure 1

The Three Language Nationals	Akan, Dangme and Ewe	Akan and Dangme	Akan and Dangme Ewe	Akan and	Total
Number of words	18	15	7	0	40
Percentage	45%	37.5%	17.5%	T 0%	100%

Table 1: The Number of Words and Percentages of the Three Language Nationals of the Forty Sampled Words  
Source: Field Research

The list can be very tall. It is worth mentioning that some of the words have the same spelling but pronunciation is slightly different because all the three languages are tonal.

## 8. Discussions

The authors identify forty (40) words of which eighteen (18) representing forty-five percent (45%) belong to all the three languages. The study also shows that fifteen (15) words representing thirty-seven point five percent (37.5%) belong to Akan and Dangme languages. This corroborates the fact that the Denkyira group from Asante region joined the Dangmes at the Tagologo Plains. This means that Akans and Dangmes have ever co-existed. Again, seven (7) words representing (17.5%) are words that belong to Dangme and Ewe languages which means that Akans and Dangmes have ever co-existed. This also corroborates the fact that the Dangme were named by the Ewes and when the Dangme migrated again from Tagologo, the Ewes became very sad and described the scene as 'בַּטְבֹּנָה' which literary means the friendship is finished. It is important to note that apart from the 18 words that belong to all the three languages, there are no words that belong exclusively to Akan and Ewe as we have for Akan and Dangme and Dangme and Ewe. This means that Akans and Ewes have never co-lived.

## 9. Conclusion

The researchers relied heavily on unstructured interview to gather data for the study. Then also there was no sampling technique procedure adopted for the study. This is because as many people as possible were contacted for the needed information. Historians, the aged, chiefs and elders were all contacted for data for the study. The study traced the origin of the Krobos from Same in Sudan through to the bank of the Volta River. They settled on the vast land called the Takologo plains. They were full of life and vibrant, making the Ewes nicknamed them Dangmes. When they were constantly threatened with wars, they disappeared from the Takologo plains; an episode the Ewes called 'בַּטְבֹּנָה.' Later they were joined by a group which defected from Denkyira led by Ntwi. The Krobos accepted them on two conditions which they complied with. Years later, a third group joined them from South Africa. All the three groups fused together through intermarriages.

They were forced down from their mountain home in April, 1872 and they have settled at their present national areas. The study revealed that a section of the Akans, Dangmes and Ewes have ever peacefully co-existed before. The words used for the study and the migration story collaborate this assertion.

### 9.1. Areas for Further Studies

A number of issues were left unresolved in this study. Those issues should be thoroughly dealt with in future studies. Some of the unresolved issues include:

- We discovered that the neighbouring Ewes nicknamed the Takologo dwellers the Dangmes. By then, how were they known.
- It will be worth researching into the unique characteristic features of the three (3) groups; the Same-Sudan group, the Denkyira group, and the Zulu-South Africa group that form the Dangme nation. Can we draw a fine line between them today?
- Which language owns the etymology of the words used in the study

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