CHAPTER 2

The Eʋe-Speaking Peoples

2.1 An Introduction to the Eʋe-Speaking Peoples

Eʋe-speaking peoples, whose folk proverbs or wise sayings constitute the African tree of life on to which ‘shoots’ from the biblical proverbial tree of life might be ‘grafted’ are found in Kpando, Hɔhɔe, Ho, Tanyigbe, Adaklu, Peki, Tɔŋu and Aŋlɔ areas of Southeastern Ghana and in Togo, Agɔme Kpalime, Agɔme Tɔmegbe and neighboring areas, in Benin and parts of the Niger basin. These regions are occupied by three main migrant groups - the Northern Eʋes, Central Eʋes and the Southern Eʋes, respectively. In Eʋe oral tradition, these groups of Eʋe peoples migrated from the Ketu District of the Republic of Benin, in the Niger basin and settled in an area of land, approximately eighty (80) kilometers wide and one-hundred-and-sixty (160) kilometers long along the banks of the Volta and Mono Rivers. This area lies in the Southeastern corner of Ghana, and the Southwestern parts of the Republic of Togo and Benin, respectively. The land of the Eʋe peoples is a former German colony, partitioned along a North/South axis during the Second World War (WW II) by a mandate endorsed by the then League of Nations and allocated to France and Britain on an East/West regional basis. Some sources trace the Eʋe peoples to Asia (i.e., the Far East), via Southeastern Nigeria and Ketu in Benin to Ōtsie in Togo. Their migration arose from a revolt against the wicked, autocratic King Agɔkɔli in Ōtsie.

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1 D.E.K. Amenumey, The Ewe in Pre-colonial Times: A Political History with Special Emphasis on the Anlo, Ge and Krepi (Ho, Ghana: E.P. Church Press Ltd., 1986), 1–3. Amenumey provides a very detailed history of the Eʋe peoples of Ghana from pre-colonial times through the 1900s. See also E.B. Asare, Akwamu-Peki Relations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. MA Thesis (Ghana, Legon, 1973). Although somewhat dated, this resource helpfully describes the strained relationships, which culminated in the wars between the various groups of Eʋe peoples during the process of migration and occupation of the present localities.


3 Cf., the migration of the Eʋe peoples with the history of the revolt and migration of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage under the Pharaoh, under King Solomon’s son Rehoboam and other despotic kings, until the split in the United Israelite Kingdom, to the period of the
The language and culture of these groups of Eʋe-speaking peoples differ from each other only slightly. The differences can be observed mainly in the tone of voice, with some of the language groups speaking the Eʋe with either a higher or lower-pitched voice. Others speak with excessively nasalized or gutturalized sounds in their speech. The cultural practices and religious beliefs of the various groups of Eʋe peoples are also similar with only slight differences in regional or locality-specific names and practices, which can be explained by the Eʋe proverb, “Du sia du kple efe koklo koko,” which means, “Every town has its own way of dressing chicken.” In spite of the slight linguistic and cultural variations that exist among the various groups of Eʋe peoples, their fundamental social relations are not jeopardized by these differences.

Despite these differences among the Eʋe peoples, their folk proverbs, which also sometimes, have universal application, are very similar and have common cultural contextual applications to circumstances, which emerge from issues relating to and addressing their daily life experiences. Eʋe folk proverbs teach important values or virtues and can be used in unlimited performance contexts, which are relevant to the Eʋe peoples. Other African peoples and other peoples globally can also find these proverbs very useful. It is in this context, that this book focuses on how the moral values or virtues embedded in African Ghanaian Eʋe folk proverbs can constitute an African tree of life on to which ‘shoots’ from the biblical tree of life—in particular sayings from Proverbs 25:1–29:27 can be ‘grafted’ and how such a ‘grafting’ can facilitate the teaching, learning, understanding and appropriation of the message of the Bible (the book of Proverbs) in an African Eʋe context, and do so in a more fully African manner.

2.2 The Values or Virtues of Eʋe Proverbs: A Conversation with Noah K. Dzobo’s Collection of African [Eʋe] Proverbs

Proverbs and the African Tree of Life: Grafting Biblical Proverbs on to Ghanaian Eʋe Folk Proverbs uses part of Noah K. Dzobo’s4 collection of Eve proverbs as a