



AFRICAN INDIGENOUS ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

**RELIGION, PHILOSOPHY
AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD

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**Edited By
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13245 Trebleclef Lane Silver Spring
20904, Maryland,
United States of America

Dedication

Dedication

*Celebrating Professor Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA
@40*

"...now the text ends, and the commentary and fascination begins"

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Environment

The naturalist and materialistic worldviews, which are basically atheistic, secular and humanist, have been at the base of the mentality that drives the wheel of the degradation of the environment both in Africa and beyond. The naturalists hold a philosophical perspective that unspiritualizes the world and understands everything that exists or events in the world as a response to particular laws of nature that have been designed to govern the structure and behavior of the natural universe. Taking from their name: naturalists, the proponents of this perspective are of the view that there is nothing spiritual about the universe or about the human person. Thus, the universe is all that there is; there is no soul and there are no supernatural powers. Naturalists in the history of thought include: Charles Darwin, Steve Irwin, David Attenborough, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Montessori, among others.

Alongside the naturalists are the materialists who hold that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes and laws, thus denying the supernatural or metaphysical laws. They believe that the only thing that exists is matter and that all that there is is reducible to matter. One thing that the materialists have in common with the naturalists is the denial of the creative power of a Supernatural Being. It is logical that they hold this position because the affirmation of the existence of God as creator will water down or question the substance of their position and imply the existence of a spiritual reality other than matter. While there are some who admit the existence of God, they, however, hold that He is not the creator of the world and that nature evolved to its present state over time. They

naturalists also hold that there is an energy in the universe which is uncreated, unlimited and indestructible. Since there is no God for most materialists and naturalists, they fall back to science as the solution to all human problems.

The naturalists and materialists disbelieve the existence of God or the creative act of God is the basis for their assertion that there is no divine imperative on a particular order for the use of the universe and its resources. Therefore, the usage of the universe and its component parts are to be carried out at the whims and caprices of the human person. And since energy is unlimited, and can never be exhausted, they hold that the resources of the earth recycles itself, and therefore, the human person will not run out of the resources for his or her use. This perspective is at the base of the mismanagement, exploitation, abuse and misuse of the environment and her resources.

The emergence of the naturalist and materialist perspectives and its taking the centre stage in the historical development of thought in the 19th and 20th centuries led to the massive exploitation of the environment in an industrial scale which saw the extraction and processing of raw materials in the mining of the resources of the earth, steam power, machinery and wood work. This exploitation and degradation was reinforced with massive consumption of energy which was sustained by the extraction of fossil fuels like oil, coal and gas. The consequences of this mismanagement of nature or the environment include the degradation of forests in terrestrial ecosystem and the pollution of aquatic ecosystem.

While the mismanagement of the earth's resources were driven by the consumerist and hedonist philosophy of the modern world, the whole world now faces the consequences of these exploitative activities which hoped to assure a better life and

brighter future for humanity. It is becoming more obvious that the human person can no longer achieve his or her full potential when the environment is degraded and unsafe and must ensure the preservation of the environment that hosts him or her (Agbo 2010; Gaudalli 2017; Nnamani 2013). To achieve this, there is the need for a re-avaluation of human acitivity or relationship with nature, knowing fully well that whatever he or she does in relation to nature will have consequences for the present and future occupants of the earth.

Contrary to the naturalist and materialist perspectives, Francis (2020) strongly holds that the only way towards the sustenance of the human environment is through a healthy and integral human social fraternity and relationship, not just between human persons but also between human persons and the environment, which he refers to as 'our common home'. He teaches that: "to care for the world in which we live means to care for ourselves. Yet we need to think of ourselves more and more as a single family dwelling in a common home" (no. 17). He, therefore, points to the importance of thinking of our humanity in relation to other existent realities that also affect our own existence. He adds that: "such care does not interest those economic powers that demand quick profits. Often the voices raised in defense of the environment are silenced or ridiculed, using apparently reasonable arguments that are merely a screen for special interests" (no. 17). He strongly believes that the continuous exploitation of the environment will lead to even more serious crisis in the future: "In this shallow, short-sighted culture that we have created, bereft of a shared vision, it is foreseeable that, once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars, albeit under the guise of noble claims" (no. 17).

Given the several human efforts to grapple with the challenges of ecological crisis in the last twenty years and more by environmental experts and International Organizations or Conferences on Environmental Protection as a way forward or in view of solving the frightening global ecological crisis, shows that there is need for alternative perspectives or approaches to the issue bordering on the environment. These proposals include: the United Nations Millennium Project's Task Force on Environmental Sustainability that recommended investment in cost-effective and sustainable energy technologies, elimination of distorting subsidies favouring fossil fuels at the expense of renewable alternatives, the development of climate-friendly markets, etc., (Melnick et al., 2005, p.28). There was also a recommendation from the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which member states expressed their commitment to protect the planet from degradation and take urgent action on climate change (Tarusariran. 2017, p.398). These measures, inspite of the availability of the will to achieve them have not been able to solve the problem at hand.

As a result of the inability of these recommendations and proposals to solve the problem of ecological crisis, scholars have argued that these measures have only been able to address the symptoms rather than the main issues, implying that there might be need to go deeper than some of the present measures can go (Sponsel 2014; Crockett 2014 & Bonfiglio 2012). This lack of depth is attributed to the modern man's defective worldview, which denies the transcendence, and secularizes and instrumentalizes nature. This has engendered in the modern man the attitude of ill-exploitation and degradation of nature, leading to the present ecological crisis. It is in this regard that Speth (Cited by Crockett 2014) avers that the fundamental problem borders on "human selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation" (n. pg.). In the contention

of Francis (2015), “The ecological crisis is essentially a spiritual problem,” (no. 9) requiring from the human person a spiritual and moral response (no. 206). This spiritual problem for Sponsel (2014) recognizes the spiritual facet to all issues related to conservation, environmentalism, and earth stewardship (p.1718). Virginia (cited in Bonfiglio 2012) concludes that eco-spirituality is about helping people experience 'the holy' in the natural world and to recognize their relationship as human beings to all creation.

The search for alternative perspectives and approaches to the problem of ecological crisis is what has led to the emergence of the views in this book of readings titled: *African Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems: Religion, Philosophy and the Environment*. It is a collection of papers by distinguished African authors who have endeavored to explore the possibility of employing African indigenous knowledge systems in search for 'the holy' in the natural world or for the spiritual and moral response that the present ecological crisis requires. This work is very significant at this time as Africa as a continent is today beginning to be united by the consciousness that our individual destinies are caught up with the health of natural systems at the national, regional and continental levels. This Book of Readings does not only focus on scholarly and indigenous perspectives regarding the issue of ecology in Africa but also attempts at providing answers to fundamental questions that have been looming at the horizon of thought for years, if not centuries. The beauty of these responses is that they take into cognizance the particular contexts or categories of the African people.

Interestingly, the perspectives in this book reveal how in African anthroposophy, earth-based spiritual traditions and innovative spiritual practices are already emerging in response to the painful realities of climate change, mass extinction, biodiversity

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loss, and the disruption of local and global ecosystems which have for long not received the attention that it duely deserves. This piece, therefore, will become one of the greatest ornaments and lights in the world of African eco-spiritulaity as it responds to questions that are long overdue.

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Chapter One

SACRED ANIMALS AND IGBO- AFRICAN ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1977-202X

Executive Summary

A cursory glance at the developments in ecological studies reveal that a wide range of environmental problems have emerged in Africa and beyond with huge physical manifestations. These problems include global warming, the depletion of stratospheric ozone, the acidification of surface waters, often referred to as acid rain, the destruction of tropical forests, the depletion and extinction of species, and the precipitous decline of biodiversity. While these manifestations are physical in the main, the solutions to them does not entirely depend on the physical. This is where religion comes in given that a good number of human persons are bound up with beliefs among other factors. While there are a few papers written on sacred animals in Igbo traditional societies, there is hardly literature that discusses its relationship with the eco-system or their ecological relevance. It is, therefore, from this background that this work discusses the place of sacred animals in Igbo-African religious context in the entire project of preserving the environment, especially in traditional African societies. Sacred animals occupy a fundamental place in African traditional religion. If they are not considered the symbol of the ancestors and deities, they are considered more suitable for the offering of

sacrifice, etc. The scope of this study is the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria and Western Africa. The phenomenological approach was employed for the collection of data, while the hermeneutical and analytical methods of investigation will be used for the evaluation of the data at hand. The Conservation of Resources Theory would be employed for the purpose of this study. This paper shows that the Igbo-African indigenous beliefs, taboos, sanctions and knowledge have contributed hugely to the checking of the abuse of the environment.

Keywords: Sacred, Animals, Igbo, African, Anthroposophy, Eco-system, Conservation

Introduction

Over the years, a wide range of environmental problems have emerged with huge physical manifestations. These problems include global warming, the depletion of stratospheric ozone, the acidification of surface waters, often referred to as acid rain, the destruction of tropical forests, the depletion and extinction of species, and the precipitous decline of biodiversity. While these manifestations are physical in the main, the solutions to them does not entirely depend on the physical realm. This is where religion comes in given that a good number of human persons are bound up with beliefs among other factors.

It is, therefore, from this background that this work discusses the place of sacred animals in Igbo-African religious context in the entire project of preserving the environment. Sacred animals occupy a fundamental place in African traditional religion. If they are not considered the symbol of the ancestors and deities, they are considered more suitable for the offering of sacrifice, etc. For the purpose of this research, the Igbo-African world of the Eastern part of Nigeria and Western part of Africa will be studied, given that the entirety of the African will be an area to

wide too be captured in a research of few pages such as this. However, because of the ideological relationships in Africa, an understanding of the Igbo would advance a better understanding of the African perspective. The phenomenological approach will be employed for the collection of data, while the hermeneutical and analytical methods of investigation will be used for the evaluation of the data at hand.

Theoretical Framework

The preservation of sacred animals in African traditional societies was based on the Conservation of Resources Theory (CRT) that was proposed by Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989, which describes psychological stress as the motivation that moves human beings to preserve the resources that they have and also go for new ones (Hobfoll 1989). This stress emerges whenever there is a threat to loss of resources, and by resources, it is meant that which a person values (Halbesleben, Paustian-Underdal and Westman 2014). The theory was developed from the works of Walter Canon, Hans Selye, Elliot and Eisddorfer and McGrath who were among the first scholars to study stress as it applies to human beings (Canon 1932; Selye 1950; Elliot and Eisddorfer 1982; McGrath 1970). This theory stresses that it is more harmful for individuals to lose resources than to gain resources, and thus, people will invest resources so as to avoid the loss of resources.

In relation to sacred animals among the African people, the creation of taboos for the preservation of sacred animals and the effort towards ensuring that these taboos are kept is based on the African belief that the loss of natural resources (animal species) must be avoided as the loss of it is more stressful than the gain of it. The traditional African society knew the importance of these animals in the balancing of the eco-system and they also knew the consequences of losing these animals on the lives of individuals in the society. The preservation of these animals

through taboos was to avoid the stress, in the form of ecological crisis, that would come as a result of the loss of these species.

The Need for an African Religious Input on Ecological Discourse

Several convergencies make the African religious input indispensable in the fight against ecological crisis, especially as it relates to the place of sacred animals in the entire project of environmental sustainability:

- a. Religious perspectives have been able to articulate an understanding of nature as the outcome of divine ordering which must not be manipulated and exploited for the purpose of maintaining a balance, harmony and equilibrium in nature. This is based on the interconnectedness and interdependence of the different dimensions of creation (Francis 2015 & Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective, 2015).
- b. As a result of the connection of the greater number of human beings to religious beliefs, there has been an effort to respond to ecological questions within the context of stewardship and trusteeship. Thus, the human person is understood as being entrusted with nature to care for and account for (Halpert 2012; Islamic International Climate Change Symposium, 2015; Northcott, 2013 & Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective, 2015).
- c. There is a better understanding of scientific positions on climate change even by those in religious circles. This has led to those adhering to religious beliefs to queue behind the policies that have been made from the outcome of these scientific findings. This is evident in the position of the Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective 2015 and *Laudato Si'* by Pope Francis.

- d. The connection between religious beliefs and the belief in unlimitless pursuit of prosperity has made religious perspectives on the issue of climate change very necessary. There is the need for a new model of wellbeing from the religious perspective (Northcott, 2013; Khalid, 2013; Izzi Dien, 2013).

In the face of the contributions of religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and, religious bodies and alliances, it is very important that the position of African traditional religion be made manifest on the important issue of eco-system conservation.

Sacred Animals in Igbo traditional Societies

Among world religions, animals belong to an important class of nature that feature prominently (Durkheim 1995). Gods were named after animals- like the goddess *Epona* in ancient Celtic religion whose name means Horse, whose icon includes a horse (Durkheim 2008). Among the Igbo, different communities and families hold different animals as sacred and they some affinity with the clan or to be the manifestation of some spirit (Kanu 2015a; Aniako 1978, 1984, 2002). There are times the sacred animals are treated as property of some deities. The python, eke, is not to be killed in many Igbo communities because it belongs to the deity Idemili (Achebe, 1982; Ifesieh, 1989).

Particular animals are considered sacred because the supernatural reveals himself in them. Boyle (1981) defines the sacred as the opposite of the profane. Mckenzie (1995) uses holiness and sacredness interchangeably. He further identifies the holy with the numinous, the mysterious quality of the divine, which is tremendous (fear) and at the same time fascinating (attracts). Hornby (1989) sees the sacred as something connected

with religion, and for Haladus (1997), it is a relation between an objective and transcendent reality and a man. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, Okeke (2008) avers that the terms sacred and profane throw light on the attitude the people adopt towards the world and material things. Thus Robertson (1971) thinks that “The sacred is to be treated with a certain specific attitude of respect” (p. 55).

What makes animals sacred in African ontology is the spirit that is related to them. And because spirits dwell in them, these sacred animals possess great powers and are respected. Thus, Hemingway (1984) sees the sacred as power. Metuh (1981) opines that “they are ferocious and ruthless and inspire great fear and extreme caution” (p. 72). Some of these sacred animals in Igbo-African traditional societies include:

1. *Eke (Python)*

It is a sacred animal and is called *Nne anyi* (our mother) when it visits homes. It is a snake that does not look for trouble and so it is not killed in most parts of Igbo land. The people of Arondizuogu honor it. If a person steps on it, it will hiss and recoil itself. It respects citizens because the citizens revere it, however, if an outsider steps on it, it would attack the person. It is respected because it is believed to be the abode of spirits. It is a symbol of ancestral spirits. According to Adibe (2008), no one makes the mistake of killing it voluntarily or involuntarily. When it is done accidentally, it is buried as though it were a human being, with the appropriate religious rituals and rites accorded to it. If it is killed knowingly, it is considered an abomination. The eggs are also useful to the *dibia* for medicines. In some Igbo communities, the python is understood as a symbol of wisdom, object of ancestral adoration, earthly bliss and benefaction (Rim-Rukeh et al 2013; Eneji, et al 2009).

2. Ikwikwi (Owl)

The owl among the Igbo is a symbol of vigilance. When it moves or makes a sound it is believed that it is alerting a person about a movement or alerting that somebody is coming. This is based on the belief that the owl does not move or make a sound without a reason. There is also the belief that when the owl makes a sound that the ancestors are sending a message. This explains why when its cry is heard people go to ask questions as regards what the ancestors might be saying to a person or the community. As a consequence, the Owl is not killed by hunters or members of the community. To kill it will mean shutting oneself off the message of the gods (Kanu 2015b).

3. Udene (Vulture)

The African vulture is a monogamous bird that stay with their mates for many years, and feed their young for several months. They do not attack healthy animals like the eagle do, however, they may kill a wounded animal to feast on its flesh. They have very powerful eye sights as they can see a three-foot carcass from four miles away in the sky. It is a mystical religious symbol of the spirits; in fact, it is a ritual consumer of the spirits. When a sacrifice is offered and thrown into the open and a vulture does not come to pick it up or to eat it, it would be interpreted that something must have gone wrong in the world of the spirits. May be, that the sacrifice was not accepted by the spirits, since they consume the offering through the agency of the vulture (Kanu 2015a). From the foregoing, the presence of vultures signify the presence of the spirits and the ancestors. This explains why it is not killed or eaten by the Igbo.

4. Icho-Oku (Parrot)

The African parrot is a small bird with colorful wings that inhabits the warmer parts of the African world. They feed on insects and seeds and are mostly found in many African homes for various reasons. The Igbo-African believes that it is a bird that

is capable of seeing all and saying all. According to Adibe (2008) “The feather is regarded as the power of insight in the spirit world. The diviners use the feather in their caps and for other rituals. It is diviner’s mystical symbol of sight and proclamation” (p. 214). Like the owl, it is also a symbol of surveillance and, therefore, not killed or eaten.

5. *Ebuna* (Ram)

Among the Igbo, *Ebuna* is a great symbol and stands for something great or big, especially in terms of ceremonies, festivals or rituals. It is used for offering sacrifices. It is a symbol of *Amadioha* and *Amadioha’s* choice animal for sacrifices. The symbol of *Ebuna* is so important that the name “The killer of *Ebuna*” is used to refer to a *dibia* (medicine man). During burials, *Ebuna* is also used to burry a strong man. On the day of the burial ceremony, the *Ebuna* is brought forward and the jaw is cut while it is still alive and lowered to the coffin where the diseased is laid so that the blood is allowed to drip into the eye of the dead man. The *Ebuna* is later slaughtered and eaten by those who consider themselves sincere and recognized by the society as courageous. The *Ebuna* is also used to activate an *ofo* (symbol of authority). Once an *ofo* has been designed by the community, it is still without power. However, one of rites that gives it power to stand for what it represents is the dripping of the blood of an *Ebuna* on it (Kanu 2013).

6. *Mbekwu* (Tortoise)

It is considered by the Igbo as a wise and cunning animal. It is, therefore, a religious mystical symbol of wisdom and discernment. It is capable of manoeuvring all traps and obstacles. Its shell is used by diviners in mystical religious rituals, like during the activation of an *ofo* (Kanu 2015).

7. Okuko (Chicken)

There is a myth told about the chicken to little children. It is about a meeting that was fixed by the animals in their kingdom and when the day came, other animals discovered that the chicken was absent. When the chicken was asked why it was not attending, it said that there was no reason, however, that the animals can go ahead with the meeting in its absence and that whatever they decided would be accepted by it. The animals decided that all of them will be eating chicken. This explains why the chicken is a favorite meal for most animals. The kite eats chicken, cat eats chicken, snakes take chicken for meal, dogs eat chicken, fox eats chicken, etc. It is not only a choice animal for other animals, it is also a choice animal for particular sacrifices as in the case of *Iru Agwu* (dispelling of spirits that affect the success of a person).

The ecological significance of sacred animals

Sacred animals were protected through taboos used in traditional African societies for the preservation of nature and the promotion of biodiversity. Some of these taboos include not killing or hunting of the animals like python, fish, vulture, tortoise, parrot, not washing in some particular parts of water bodies or not using metal containers to fetch water, knowing fully well that the chemical in the soup or detergent and the metal could be destructive of the fishes in the water body. These taboos were the ecological guardians that played major roles in the conservation of animal species (Adu-Gyamfi 2011; Johannes 1978, 1982, 1984; Chapman 1985, 1987; Gadgil 1987).

Strongly connected to the preservation of sacred animals is the preservation of sacred forests and water bodies. These forests and water bodies were areas set aside by the Igbo ancestors as sacred sites and strictly protected by customary laws, beliefs and enforced taboos. They were regarded as abodes of the spirits and

deities and places for worship, sacrifice, etc., (Kanu 2015). Due to the lack of human disturbance, as in the case of forests, monkeys and other animals often live in these forests, and because it was free of human activities, it provided a ground for biodiversity. In some of the groves in these forests, the sanctuary for wildlife is provided for which is absent in the surrounding lands. Here in, reside rodents of all kinds, butterflies, bats, birds, primates, minor mammals and fauna. In some of these forests where exists water bodies, it is forbidden to fish. Herein you find fish in big sizes and in large numbers. These sacred water bodies connected to other waters become breeding grounds for fishes in other water bodies.

Very important is the understanding of the natural environment, including sacred animals as integral part of the world. It is not just an animal, but sacred personalities as a result of the spirits that inhabit them and thus are given respect. The ecological significance of this understanding is that it made human persons to treat the sacred animals with the respect that their sacred personalities deserved.

The understanding of sacred animals as a dimension of the human life, of which whose destruction will have consequences on the health of the human inhabitants of the universe had great ecological implications in terms of preserving the environment. The human person in traditional Igbo-African societies understood sacred animals as a part of himself or herself and so to treat them without respect is to treat oneself without respect, and to exploit them will mean waging war against oneself as there are future consequences. As a part of humanity, these sacred animals are not only respected but interacted with in various capacities.

In some of these cases, such animals referred to as sacred and revered as such have low productivity rate and so their species were preserved through such restrictions. There are some Igbo communities where it was forbidden of hunters to kill an animal and not eat it; this had a way of reducing wastage; and in some cases, they were forbidden from hunting animals that were pregnant or hunting the young ones of such species, or hunting animals that are fending for their young ones. The punishment associated with these include dying at ones, or not having children.

Some of these sacred animals were protected not just because they were sacred, but also because of the medicinal value that their existence offered the community as in the case of a python whose eggs were used by medicine men for the production of particular medicine. As such, keeping it alive was necessary for the sustenance of the supply of that particular medicine. The oil and the shells of the tortoise were very important to medicine men too.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, the following recommendations are, therefore, made:

1. The indigenous religious beliefs of the African people should be restudied within the context of respect for the particular experience of the African rather than dismissing them as fetish. There should be a focus on the rationale behind the taboos.
2. Society should work towards the utilization of indigenous knowledge, especially as it relates to the preservation of the environment among indigenous people. This is very important as indigenous groups adapt to their natural environment in ways that conserve both their eco-systems and themselves as an integrated social ecological system.

3. Traditional leaders who are the custodians of African traditional values should be involved in the process of environmental preservation among indigenous people.
4. African indigenous knowledge should be considered while developing policies for the preservation of the eco-system.
5. The government should draw up strategies for the preservation of the eco-system in such a manner that the indigenous knowledge systems are supported and employed.
6. There is need for legislative protection to traditional or indigenous methods of conservation of the environment.
7. There is need for a scientific study and documentation of indigenous ecological knowledge systems, and should also be incorporated into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools so that people can know the rationale behind indigenous ecological knowledge systems from their early stages of development.

Conclusion

A cursory glance at the different world cultures, reveal that animals of different kinds have been regarded at one point or the other as a symbol either to life and culture or to the religious sphere in terms of symbolizing the gods. In any of these, they have contributed immensely to the shaping of culture and the establishment of a connection between religion and the natural environment. These animals received veneration because of their connection with particular deities, as in, they were believed to be manifestations, representations, epiphany or incarnation of the gods. However, this association is usually done in such a manner that the nature of the deity is visible in the nature of the animal that is symbolizing the deity. Thus, Society for Conservation Biology (2008) holds that religion has played significant role in defining relationships and creating links between religious systems and natural systems. This, according to Ghanashyam

and Singh (2015) and Rukeh et al (2013) positions religion to contribute to the rethinking and responding to the crisis in world environment.

As there is an increasing threat to sacred animals among many African communities, given the spread of modernism and urbanization, which has weakened traditional taboos and belief systems, this paper recognizes that there is an urgent need to investigate traditional methods for the preservation of the environment and to repackage these traditional values for the saving of the environment. This explains why this work on sacred animals among the Igbo African people was written. This work has, therefore, given an overview of the place of sacred animals with regard to their spiritual, socio-cultural and ecological status. The taboos and sacred folk tales regarding these sacred animals and their habitats are the prime reasons for the preservation of these animals in traditional African societies. This work submits that religious beliefs and practices such as the belief in sacred animals can affect the way species of animals are understood, utilized and preserved. This points to the fact that religious perspectives and practices have played significant roles in the preservation of the ecosystem and can still be useful.

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Chapter Two

IGBO TALE-SONG AND THE ECO-SYSTEM: ANTHROPOLINGUISTIC INQUIRY

Nwagbo, Osita Gerald

*Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria
osynwagbo@gmail.com*

&

Okafor, Ebele Eucharika

*Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies
University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria
eokafor@unilag.edu.ng*

Executive Summary

Folk songs in Igbo are essentially used for entertainment, education and a good resource for projecting cultural identity. A number of studies have focused on Igbo folk songs in relation to child development and societal cultural development, with inadequate attention paid to the aspect of folk songs and ecosystem. Consequently, this study examines Igbo folk song with a view to delineating the Igbo perception of the ecosystem. A tale-song from Nnabuenyi Ugonna's *Abu na Egwuregwu Odinala Igbo* was purposively selected for analysis. The result shows that traditional Igbo society paid much attention and placed a huge premium on the ecosystem. From the examination of the tale-song, it was seen that simple, ordinary activities by animals (symbolizing humans) were sufficient to upset the environmental and threaten the existence of all species. It was shown that, the animals reacted as a community and in time to confront the ecological challenge. It is recommended that

contemporary Igbo society and others should emulate the pristine Igbo world and holistically fight threats to the environment, as well as take practical steps to avoid acts that degrade the ecosystem while engaging in activities that preserve natural habitats.

Keywords: Anthropolinguistic, Ecosystem, Igbo, African, Folk songs, Tale song

Introduction

The environment is the physico-ethereal space that encapsulates entire humanity; all animates operate within the environment, where they live out their lives, hence the primacy of the environment. An important aspect of human existence is not the acknowledgement and recognition of the environment, but how humans respond to it. In traditional societies, people reacted to the environment in awe and fear, out of ignorance. For instance, among the Igbo, at the flash of lightening during or before rainfall, people make some cultural smacking of the lips to ward off the dangers of the lightening. In the event of a draught, flood, or erosion, the cause is attributed to the gods of the land who may have been offended, through one infraction of the custom or the other, and who reacted by withholding rain, unleashing water to destroy things, or causing the physical land to give in some places. In spite of the dread with which the Igbo held aspects of the environment, the fact remains that traditional Igbo, and even present day Igbo had respect for the environment and highly evaluated it. For instance, the Igbo always looked forward to the change of seasons, and welcomed each season with excitement and sometimes fanfare. The rainy season is welcomed for reasons of planting, while the dry reason is well received for reasons of harvest, an in addition, the harmattan is received with so much excitement due to the dry wind in the day and cold in the night. During the dry season, and especially the harmattan

period, it is forbidden to burn things for fear that the fierce winds will extend the fire to the forest, resulting in bush-burning. This rule attests to the value attached to vegetation as a source of life and food. Due to the medicinal cum spiritual value seen in certain trees, such as *ngwu*, *ogirisi*, *udara*, they are seen as sacred, which is a subtle way of preserving them.

A paramount dimension of Igbo attitude towards the environment is the veneration of the earth; among the Igbo, the earth is almost everything, as it is regarded as sacred and revered as a goddess, or the spiritual mother of humans. This veneration is premised on the understanding that, the earth gives life and nurtures it. All the food that man eats are from the earth, as well as all medicine, like herbs and roots. Additionally, when man dies, they are buried in the same earth, hence, the earth doubles as the sustainer of the living and the custodian of the dead. It is for this reason that, in almost every Igbo community, there is a shrine dedicated to the earth goddess, *okwu ala*, where sacrifices are made to honour her or appease her during violations of her principles. It is also for this reason that, during invocation or libation, Igbo throw a piece of cola nut on the ground before sharing it, and pour a little of palm wine on the ground before drinking it. And in the morning, the first thing women do is to sweep their kitchen, followed by sweeping the compound, and thereafter, throw the debris into the farm land to act as manure. The dumping of refuse into farm land is deliberately done as a recycling process to boost the productive fertility of the earth in the course of maintaining a clean environment.

The evaluation and reaction of the Igbo to the environment is reflected in their language through proverbs and names. Beyond these, Igbo folklore is the medium where many Igbo environmental ethics is reflected. Based on this construct, this

study examines an Igbo tale-song Awanjenje, with a view to critically estimating Igbo idea of the eco-system.

The eco-system

The term 'ecosystem' was coined by A.G. Tansley, an Oxford botanist and ecologist, in 1935 to explain the interactions among components of the environment at a given site. Odum et al, (1971) views ecosystem as, "an unit that includes all the organisms, i.e., the community in a given area interacting with the physical environment so that a flow of energy leads to clearly defined trophic structure, biotic diversity and material cycles, i.e., exchange of materials between living and non-living, within the system". In corroboration, the Convention on Biological Diversity, (1992) defines the ecosystem as "a dynamic complex of plant, animal and micro-organism communities and their non-living environment, interacting as a functional unit"

The definitions suggest that the eco system encompass the living community of plants and animals in any area together with the non-living components of the environment such as soil, air and water. Natural ecosystems include the forests, grasslands, deserts, and aquatic ecosystems such as rivers, lakes, ponds, and the sea. It is a unit of nature that encompasses interaction between biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) elements. The biotic elements refers to biological component of the ecosystem, such as plants, animals and micro organisms. Abiotic elements include climate, temperature, rain, snow, hill, soil (Thirmurthy, 2004)

In these definitions, the idea of interaction is paramount signifying that the ecosystem is the aggregate of nature where living and non-living elements co-exist and interact with each other for the overall good of each species. The entire elements in the ecosystem are interlinked so much there is a chain reaction

effect in the event of a missing link. For instance, if there is insufficient water, sun or water or if the soil is deprived of the right nutrients, the plants will die. If the plants die, animals that depend on the plants for food will die. All the components in an ecosystem are integrated as they work together to achieve symmetry; every species has a role it plays in its ecosystem that helps to maintain the system (Singh et al, 2017).

The importance of the ecosystem to life and nature cannot be overemphasized; The natural ecosystem are instrumental to sustaining earthly life in the following ways: maintaining biodiversity and the production of ecosystem goods, such as seafood, wild game, forage, timber, biomass fuels, natural fibers, and many pharmaceutical and industrial products. The harvest and trade of these goods represent important and familiar parts of the human economy. Other benefits include mitigation of droughts and floods, partial stabilization of climate, moderation of weather extremes, detoxification and decomposition of wastes, pollination of crops and natural vegetation, dispersal of seeds, protection of coastal shores from erosion by waves, protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays, provision of aesthetic beauty and intellectual stimulation that lift the human spirit, cultural, spiritual and recreational services (Gretchen et al, 1997; Corvalan et al, 2005)

However, ecosystems are frequently disrupted by human actions as a result of population explosion that needs to sustain itself on resources, coupled with the growth of affluent societies, which consume and waste a very large proportion of resources and energy. These disruptions lead to the extinction of species of plants and animals whose elimination seriously affect the ecosystem. Some of these human actions are deforestation for timber, draining wetlands to create more agricultural land, using semi arid grasslands as pastures, pollution from industries and

waste from cities . Others include oil spillages, carbon emissions from automobiles, poor waste management, gas flaring, bush burning, mass production of non-biodegradable substances such as plastics and nylon, etc, (Raven et al, 2015). It is evident that, humans have contributed more to disrupting the ecosystem and leaving in its wake conditions and situations detrimental to human existence and the existence of other species.

Igbo folk songs

Folk music is a vital dimension of the life of traditional societies including the Igbo; all traditional societies have their folk songs. As the name 'folk' suggests, it is the music of the people, that is, citizens or kinsmen. It is created by ordinary people and sung by all members of the community. Such songs encapsulate the mores, beliefs, myths, of the people. In other words, folk songs are a repository of the culture and world-view of the community; a reflection of the way of life of the community. They are native products, arising spontaneously from the imaginations of simple folk, and not crafted to convey any definite expression of meaning as seen in modern songs (Echezona, 1966; Ojukwu et al, 2014). Accordingly, they are used by members of the community to express their culture, and are passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition. Okwilagwe (2002: 105) describes folk music as music that 'derives its origin and versatility from oral tradition or the folk lore of the different ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian nation'. Accordingly, folk music can be referred to as the expression of the totality of a people's way of life, their tradition, indigenous practices which are peculiar to them without the interference of other cultures

In traditional societies, folk song is one of the means communities entertain themselves. Beyond entertainment, in Igbo society, music is a way of life; it is an integral part of Igbo culture and resonates with the feelings, emotions, and

experiences of the people. Agu (2011: 2) affirms that ‘the musical tradition surrounding his birth begins as soon as he is born. From the age of two, he starts listening to and enjoying music, especially the lullabies the mother or the baby-sitter sings to lull him to sleep’. Ekwueme (2004: 59) corroborates by stating that, ‘music accompanies the life of a black man from the womb to the tomb, being featured at celebrations; to announce the birth of a baby, at children’s games, at peer group functions, at work and leisure, in religion and death’. Fitting traditional music is principally used as a form of entertainment during festive occasions such as title taking, new yam festival, funeral rites, marriage rites, age-grade festivals, child birth and naming ceremonies, etc. But it also used during other non entertaining events such as during work in the farm, chores at home, fetching water from the stream, milling palm oil, etc.

Music constitutes an important aspect of the life of the Igbo people. It is known to possess cultural and spiritual values. In Okafor’s (2005) opinion, Folk music tales and folk tale songs play a very important role in Igbo traditional society since through both of them young and old are taught good morals and social responsibilities. As a result, each folk tale must have a theme and must have songs to accompany them.

Folk music can be classified into three categories. The first category is the tale by skillful performers told in plain speech known as *iko akuko* in Igbo. The second category is a solo recital with chorus refrain form where the song comes at intervals referred to as *akuko na egwu* (tale and songs). The third category is the common musical tale where the story is sung from beginning to end (Egudu & Nwoga 1974; Okafor & Ngandu 2003)

Method

One folktale-song was purposively selected for this study; the tale-song is one of the songs in Nnabuenyi Ugonna's *Abu na Egwuregwu Odinala Igbo*, a book of traditional Igbo poetry. Out of the number of songs in the book, "Awanjenje" was chosen due to its relevance to the issues of the ecosystem and incidentals in man's natural environment.

Data and analysis

The tale-song *Awanjenje* is a song that is rendered by one person, while the listeners deliver a chorus, which incidentally is the title of the story. By its name, *Awanjenje* is a depiction of a journey that starts from one point to the other. It is a story of animals in their natural habitat but who were upset by a singular incident that had a chain reaction effect in the entire animal kingdom. The analysis will follow the trajectory of events from the beginning of the story to the end. The data is presented below.

Kwa danda ka-akpuru isi	Ant was barbed;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
O wee riraa aka n'isi	He rubbed hands on its head;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
Si nke a o dika e gburu ya ichi	Said this one is like a sacrifice;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
Okeokpa etikepu ochi;	Cock burst into laughter;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
Wee turu nkukwe ochi;	As it shook in laughter;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
Mai onu ya n'oku;	It put its mouth on a coal of fire;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
Rui ya n'ogu ede;	It put it off in a cocoyam trunk;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.
Mabie ijiji abuba;	and cut off fly's wings;
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.

The story begins with an ant (*danda*) who had a haircut; the poor ant described the hair cut in glowing terms, comparing it with the beauty of the scarification done on the face of a titled Igbo man. On hearing the ant's description of the haircut, the cock burst into laughter because it (cock) thought that reverse is the case. The humour in the ant's description can only be understood in the context of *igbu ichi* "scarification"; in traditional Igbo world, *igbu ichi* is an incision carved on the two sides of the cheek of an Igbo man who had taken the *ozo* title, which is one of the highest titles in the community. The incision, which comprises of diagonal lines of varying numbers is actually a mark of honour and greatness. Evidently, the ant is arrogating greatness to itself, which is countered and negated by the reality of its diminutive and miniature size. The fact is that, in the animal world, where the rule is, the survival of the fittest, the ant is one of the weakest and down-trodden species; therefore, any attribution of importance to it, by any means, can only be ridiculous. It is not fortuitous that, out of the entire animals in the land, it is the cock that overheard the ant's description and reacted. In the food chain, the cock is one of the beings that eat ants. Therefore, it is possible that the duo met in the course of the cock's food hunt. Incidentally, the cock's uncontrolled laughter led it into trouble; it inadvertently picked a burning coal of fire with its beak, which triggered a frenzied attempt to temper the heat in its beak. The cock ended up cooling its beak in a water-logged leaf of a cocoyam. Unfortunately, in the course of doing that, it severed one of the wings of a stray fly. It is interesting that this story began in a domestic setting; it appears to be a cooking scene, either within the kitchen or in the open, which explains the possibility of the cock, a domestic bird, burning its beak in a hot coal.

Ijiji apu tom tom tom; Awanjenje Fekwuru mbe onu; Awanjenje Si n'ike ya puo; Awanjenje Mbe onye ime na-eme; Awanjenje	Fly hops here and there; Awanjenje. Flew into tortoise's nostril; Awanjenje. Flew out through the anus; Awanjenje. The tortoise that is pregnant; Awanjenje.
Mbe eyie ala kirimamma; Awanjenje Yibiri agwoaka odu; Awanjenje Agwoaka eburu ngusi mmee; Awanjenje. Bakwu ewi na umu naasato; Awanjenje	Tortoise trods about frantically; Awanjenje. Treads off the tail of a mamba Awanjenje. Mamba ran with dripping blood; Awanjenje. Intruded into rabbit with eight children; Awanjenje.

From the domestic setting, the drama shifts to the wilds. The fly, without part of its wing, and therefore flying haphazardly, without as much control and balance as it used to exercise, flew into the mouth of a tortoise and came out through its (tortoise) anus. In another version of this oral tale-song, the fly flew into the big nostril of an elephant, and came out through its anus. Incidentally, the female tortoise was in labour pains at the time; compounding labour pain with the distress occasioned by the fly's entry into its mouth, the mad tortoise treads about and eventually severed a mamba's tail with its foot. Smearred in its own blood, the snake loses control and inadvertently runs into the hole of a rabbit which has eight little ones.

Ewi agbaa, gbaa, gbaa;	Rabbit runs, runs, runs;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Gbakpuru be enwo;	Enters the house of monkey;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Enwo aha n'elu gororom;	Monkey jumps about on the tree;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Wee gwejiri nku uko;	And breaks a dry tree branch;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Gwejikwa nku uga;	And also breaks a wet tree branch;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Wee tuwaa akwa okwa;	And the branch broke Hawks's egg
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Okwa achia, chia, chia;	Hawk, cackles, cackles, cackles
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Chitee obu n'ura;	Woke up Falcon with its cackling;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Obu ekuo, kuo, kuo;	Falcon howls, howls, howls;
Awanjenje	Awanjenje.
Were kusasia chi; And upsets/ disperses the weather with howling;	
Awanjenje.	Awanjenje.

The interesting part of this aspect of the tale-song is the dimension of the birds of prey; from domestic animals, to land animals, and now to birds of prey in the jungle, the tale is inclusive of different species of animals and birds. The tale continues with the upset Rabbit intruding into Monkey's domain on a tree. The shocked Monkey runs, jumping from one tree to another, and in the stampede breaks both dry and wet twigs or branches of trees. The broken twigs fall and break Hawk's eggs in a nest. The enraged Hawk cackles in mourning for its unhatched eggs, and wakes up a sleeping Falcon with its cackling. The Falcon howls in anger at the disruption of its sleep that it upsets the natural order of the weather and by extension, the season. In another version of this tale-song, which coincides with the present one, the Falcon howls so much and precisely puts the weather into a stalemate, where there is no dawn and

no dusk, or, no day and night (*chi efo efo, chi abo abo*). It is not accidental that the events culminate in the Falcon upsetting or disorganizing the natural order of the weather and seasons. In Igbo cosmology, it is believed that, the Falcon is the bird that controls time, with particular respect to announcing the dawn. It is believed that it is its howling that disperses the darkness of the night and gives way to the light of day. The idea of *kusasia* 'upset/disperse' seems to connote the same effect of a stalemate in weather conditions where there is no sunrise and no sunset. The implication of this confused weather condition is that nature is at a stand-still, and there is no more time. What began as a joke has culminated in an environmental disaster that threatens the life and existence of all species, plants, birds, animals, man, and therefore entails an emergency meeting to resolve the crises.

Umu anumanu ezukoo; Awanjenje.	All animals are summoned; Awanjenje.
Were bido ikpe ikpe; Awanjenje.	And starts to judge the matter; Awanjenje.
Juo 'Nwa obu gini mere gi?' Awanjenje.	Asked 'Falcon, what happened to you?' Awanjenje.
'Ano m nwa nga m no; Awanjenje.	'I was quietly in my place; Awanjenje.
Okwa achitee m n'ura; Awanjenje.	Hawk cackled and woke me from sleep; Awanjenje.
'Nwa obu na o maghi gi'; Awanjenje	'Falcon it was not your fault'; Awanjenje.

The assembly of all animals is aimed at finding a solution to the environmental crises; the assembly began by interrogating the latest actor in the chain of events, the Falcon. The assembly, without much ado pointedly asked Falcon to say what happened to him and Falcon narrated its experience and it was absolved from any blame, and from the falcon, the Assembly asked the

Hawk, monkey, snake and down to *danda* (ant), in that same order of events. When it came to the part of *danda*, the ant explained that what he said was simply an irony; it did not, by any stretch of the imagination, suppose that it was beautiful nor equate itself to the prestige of an *Ozo* title holder.

'Danda gini mere gi?'

Awanjenje.

Danda akwaa aka n'akpa korokoro;

Awanjenje.

Wee weputa ofo ya;

Awanjenje.

Kwuo gwa anumanu niile;

Awanjenje.

Mu na unu onye huru ihe di mma; You and I, whoever sees a good thing;

Awanjenje.

Si ihe ahu na o di mma;

Awanjenje.

Ofo a ya gbuo ya;

Awanjenje.

Onye huru ihe di njo;

Awanjenje.

Si ihe ahu na o di njo;

Awanjenje.

Ofo a ya gbuo ya;

Awanjenje.

'Ant what happened to you?'

Awanjenje.

Ant foraged in its bag;

Awanjenje.

And brought out its ofo;

Awanjenje.

Said to all animals;

Awanjenje.

You and I, whoever sees a good thing;

Awanjenje.

And said the thing is good;

Awanjenje.

May this ofo kill them;

Awanjenje.

Whoever sees an evil thing;

Awanjenje.

And says the thing is evil;

Awanjenje.

May this ofo kill them;

Awanjenje.

The ants respond in this inquiry is full of irony; it is not what he said that he meant but the other animals understood the point. The ant brought out its *ofo*, a stick symbolizing truthfulness in Igbo epistemology, and swore to an oath involving its life and that of other animals. What the ant actually said was 'if anyone sees a good thing and says that it is good, may the *ofo* kill the person'. But what it actually meant is 'if anyone sees a good thing and says that it is evil, may *ofo* kill the person'. The reason why *danda* adopted that approach in responding to the inquiry of all the animals is its spiritual nature as the medium through which

the ancestors visit their kindred in the form of masquerades. As a matter of fact, ant is, to a large degree, equated to masquerades, because it is believed that masquerades turn to ants before they go back to the underworld through ant holes, until the next communal festival. Masquerades talk in ironies, unlike ordinary mortals who use language in a straight way. When a masquerade speaks, it is understood that, it means the opposite, especially when people who are not initiated in its cult are present. In this present case, the ant used irony to explain to the assembly of animals, constituting of initiates and non-initiates that, he used irony while describing its hair cut. Implicit in the speech of the ant is the need to prioritise the truth in matters that concern life and the ecosystem. By including all animals in the oath, it was imploring all of them to be objective and realistic in dealing with the ecological crises challenging their corporate existence. If any animal saw another animal engaging in acts capable of endangering the environment, and keeps silent instead of condemning the act and raising alarm, the concerned animal will be damned. His response brings the inquiry to a close. In sum, the tale-song is a narrative of the Igbo perception of the ecosystem and how they react to challenges posed by the environment, particularly climate change.

Discussion

The discussion will follow the order of findings in this study with respect to Igbo perception of their place in the ecosystem, premised on the tale-song, Awanjenje. First, the tale-song is used to project Igbo ecological ethics that sees the environment as an embodiment of varying species that interact with each other, for the benefit of all. All species, animate or inanimate, such as plants, birds, fire, animals and humans are all interlinked in a metaphysical sense. The tale-song starts from, and involves elements such as the barber (human), ant, fire, cocoyam, house fly, tortoise, snake, rabbit, trees, monkey, shell/egg, hawk,

falcon, and the weather. It is inclusive of domestic animals, animals that live underground, such as ant and rabbit, animals that live on the ground, such as snake and tortoise, animals that live on trees, such as monkey, and birds of the air. Thus various components of the abiotic and biotic elements are involved in this ecological network. The chain of events in this story underpins their connectedness to one another, despite their intrinsic differences. It is noteworthy that biological difference is not social or cultural difference; that two species are different by nature does not mean that they have nothing in common. The Igbo proverb, *oke soro ngwere maa mmiri, mmiri koo ngwere, o ga-ako oke* 'if rat joins lizard to play in the rain, if lizard's body dries, will rat's body dry?' is used to suggest that, though two animals may not share the same nature, nevertheless they interact in the social space. Ekwealor (2012:92) states that, the concept of "complementary dualism in African epistemology" stresses that one species does not live in isolation, but species are in some sense related to other species, and hence, there is no distinction between man and the environment. The Igbo idea of *ndu mmiri ndu azu* 'life of water, life of fish' is used to establish a symbiotic relationship between two different environmental elements, *mmiri* 'sea/water' and *azu* 'fish'. In the understanding of the Igbo, there is no difference between the sea and the fish; the two elements are inter-dependent. The life of the fish is water, and the life of the sea is fish; the two cannot be separated without the extinction of one or both. The fact is that, as far as the ecosystem is concerned, fish is as important as the sea; fish receives its nourishment from the sea, while the sea is boosted and evaluated by the presence of fish. Notably, the fact that, all species are involved in a war of attrition for survival, due to scarce resources, does not negate the idea of connectedness; the point is that all species share the same ecological space and therefore are condemned to share resources, even if they have to compete for them.

The second outcome of this inquiry is the idea of respect for habitats; all animals in the jungle live and thrive in their unique habitats without interfering with the habitat of other animals. This is evidenced in the explanation provided by each animal during the interrogation by the Assembly *a no m nwa nga m no* 'I was quietly in my place'. This response underscores the understanding shared by the animals about mutual co-existence, or the idea of 'live and let live' in the ecological space. The Igbo emphasize the idea of mutual co-existence with a prominent epithet: *egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwaa ya* 'may the kite perch, and may the eagle perch; the one that says that the other will not perch, may its wings break'. Igbo employ this proverb to stress mutual co-existence, even in cases where the status of those in the relationship is lopsided. The eagle, seen as the king of all birds, represents nobility and prestige against the kite which is a common bird. The understanding is that mutual co-existence is not conditional and does not depend on status of the parties involved. The emphasis is on the common humanity, hence all species are admonished to allow other species to exist, without encroaching or intruding into their spaces. In the tale-song, it was intrusion into other species' spaces or habitats that led to the socio-ecological cataclysm, and when the Assembly of animals gathered, a major concern of theirs was delineating why one animal should intrude into another's habitat. It is in this context that human invasion into the private habitats of other species would be properly interpreted. A practice such as bush burning is an intrusion into the animal world, plant world, and even an assault on the ozone layer, with all its adverse implications on earth life. Humans engage in this practice based on the illusion that they are in control of the world, and therefore free to do as they wish with earthly resources. The possession of knowledge and technology by humans should not be a means of subduing or exterminating other species, but a means of preserving and enhancing the life and existence of all species in

the ecosystem. The reality is that, animals are as much entitled to live in their wild habitats as humans, and therefore should be allowed to thrive, as long as they are not intruding into human space. If humans understand the mystical exchange between man/animals and plants or vegetation, they will find more compelling reasons to maintain the principle of live and let live in the ecosystem. The fact is that, all species have intrinsic value, and therefore allowed to thrive for the benefit of all.

A third result of this study is the approach adopted by the animals to investigate the immediate and remote cause of the environmental disaster that afflicted them. First, all animals were summoned to a meeting, reminiscent of the United Nations general assembly on climate change. The environmental problem was seen by all as a common challenge and a threat posed to each species in the ecosystem. The traditional Igbo idea of dealing with ecological issues is that, all persons, big and small, must be involved. This is on account of the fact that, all are vulnerable in the existential threat from an abused environment. In pristine Igbo world, cases of drought, famine, erosion, hurricanes, etc are seen as communal problems and it is the *umunna* 'kinsmen' that assemble to tackle them. There was a high level of understanding among the Igbo about the effect of the environment on human life that necessitated the all-inclusive approach to addressing it. In contemporary times, this is no longer the case, as most people are more engrossed in their existential pursuits than in dealing with environmental challenges. In poor, developing African polities citizens are so challenged and plagued by unemployment, poor housing conditions, stifling inflation, malnutrition, and other social deprivations that they pay little or no attention to environmental issues that concern them. Incidentally, and ironically, poor citizens who constitute the majority of the population are the ones directly affected by ecological degradation. The truth is

that, matters of the environment are matters that concern all in the polity, state and citizens, and requires a generic and holistic approach towards providing solution. Second is expedition of time in the matter; it was seen by the animals as an emergency that should be promptly addressed, to avoid compounding the problem. As soon as obu 'falcon' reacted and the weather changed, all the animals were summoned and they all assembled to address the issue. Traditional Igbo approach to ecological issues is to declare a state of emergency in the community. Such an approach implies deploying all resources, especially time towards providing solution to the crises. In contemporary times, the state would be more willing to declare a state of emergency as a result of insecurity or a putsch, than on issues of environmental devastation. It is customary for states in Sub-Saharan Africa to spend time and resources organizing seminars and symposia where environmental experts deliver speeches, than tackle the problem, at its budding stage. Meetings are important, but what is more important is timely deployment of resources to solve the problem. It is not perceived as a crisis that demands urgent attention. The truth is that environmental insecurity is as much a threat to life and existence of citizens as political insecurity, and therefore requires immediate response from the state. The difference is that, whereas political insecurity is obvious and overt, environmental insecurity is subtle and covert. Terrorists and bandits wielding AK47 rifles elicit fear in the eyes of citizens than ocean surge, desert encroachment, ozone depletion, oil spillage into aquatic systems, improper refuse disposal, etc.

Conclusion

This study has focused on Igbo perception of the ecosystem as reflected in a tale-song, *Awanjenje*. The tale is a narrative that involved quite a number of animals in a chain of events that ultimately led to climate change in the community, providing the

need for a holistic action to handle the crises. It is evident that, climate change or environmental degradation have their root in simple human activities. Going by the tale-song, it was a joke that sparked off the chain reaction that negatively impacted the environment. This study holds that, economic growth that tampers with natural habitats can create huge costs to humanity in the long run which may exceed the earlier short-term economic gains of the development. On the contrary, the social, health and spiritual benefits of preservation of natural habitats result in a balanced society where nature and technology cooperate to preserve life of all species.

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Chapter Three

IGBO-AFRICAN MARKET DAYS AND THE CONSERVATION OF THE ECO-SYSTEM

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1977-202X

Executive Summary

Among the most powerful religious and social elements in Igbo religion, history and culture are the Igbo market days. These market days include- Eke, Orié, Afo and Nkwo. Thus, the English calendar which has 7 days in a week, 30 days in a month, 4 weeks in a month, 52 weeks in a year, 12 months in a year and 365 days in a year differs from the Igbo calendar which has 4 days in a week, 7 weeks in a month, 28 days in a month, 13 months in a year, 91 weeks in a year, and 364 days in a year. Also observable is that the four-day market days are not only observed in Igboland but in other parts of Southern and Northern Nigeria like Edo, Calabar, Igala, Ogoni (Gokana), Ahoada, Emuoha, Ikwerre, Etche, Ogba/Ndoni, Abua/Odual, Ogoja, which border the Igboland, however, these market days come under different names to suit the local dialects of the people concerned. While there are a few papers written on Igbo sacred days, there is hardly literature that discusses its relationship with the eco-system or its ecological relevance. This research, therefore, focused on how Igbo traditional societies through these days worked towards the preservation of the environment through the promulgation of taboos. The taboos for each of the days had a way of preventing particular activities that had exploitative consequences on the eco-system. The scope of

this study is the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria and Western Africa, who as far back as the beginning of their history knew the consequences of environmental degradation and the need to preserve it. The phenomenological approach was employed for the collection of data, while the hermeneutical and analytical methods of investigation were used for the evaluation of data. This paper shows that the Igbo-African indigenous beliefs, taboos, sanctions and knowledge have contributed hugely to the checking of the abuse of the environment.

Keywords: Sacred, Market, Days, Igbo, African, Anthroposophy, Eco-system, Conservation

Introduction

Particular days among the African people are considered sacred, not on account of themselves but because the supernatural reveals himself in them. Boyle (1981) defines the sacred as the opposite of the profane. Mckenzie (1995) uses holiness and sacredness interchangeably. He further identifies the holy with the numinous, the mysterious quality of the divine, which is tremendous (fear) and at the same time fascinating (attracts). Hornby (1989) sees the sacred as something connected with religion, and for Haladus (1997), it is a relation between an objective and transcendent reality and a man. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, Okeke (2008) avers that the terms sacred and profane throw light on the attitude the people adopt towards the world and material things. Thus, Robertson (1971) thinks that "The sacred is to be treated with a certain specific attitude of respect" (p. 55).

What makes days sacred in Igbo-African ontology is the spirit that is related to the particular days. Basden (1966) writes that: "these trees are not worshipped themselves, the Ibo pagan does not bow down to the wood and stones. It is the spirit dwelling

within them that supplicatory and intercessory prayers are said” (p. 40). This research focuses on the four market days in Igbo-African ontology with the particular interest of understanding how these days through taboos contributed to the conservation of the environment in traditional African societies. For the purpose of this study, the phenomenological approach will be employed for the collection of data, while the hermeneutical and analytical methods of investigation will be used for the evaluation of the data at hand.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework to be used for this study is the African Religious-Based Conservation Theory, which has been developed by Kanu Anthony. The theoretical framework is based on the nature of the Igbo-African universe. It is a universe that consists of the spiritual and physical realms, however, created by one and same Supreme Being called *Chukwu*. He controls, sustains and upholds the universe. This also explains why he is called *Osebuluwa* (the sustainer of the universe). Because of the connection of the physical and spiritual realms of reality connected to through *Chukwu*, the Igbo-African perceives the world around him in terms of religion (Kanu 2015). According to Adu-Gyamfi (2011):

The implication of this outlook is that everything in the universe, both visible and invisible, is religiously interpreted. Thus, the social, economic and political institutions and aspirations are closely linked to the people’s assumptions, beliefs and interpretations of the universe- God, humankind, society and nature. (p. 146).

The implication of the religious based perception of the universe is a religious based conservation theory. Since the physical and spiritual realms are understood as dependent on each other, the sacred and the mundane are not dichotomized. It is within such

a context that Market Days are understood in terms of the spiritual, and associatable with spiritual beings. It is believed that it is the spirit beings that control the physical universe, and that the physical realm of reality is the arena where spiritual forces or spirit beings display their power (Ezeanya 1969; Gyekye 1987). Thus, no human activity can be achieved successfully without settling or appealing first to the spiritual world (Assimeng 1981; Asante 1995). With the association of these days with sacred beings, taboos associated with them are given due respect, and thus the purpose of the taboo achievable. The African Religious-Based Conservation Theory, therefore, holds that nature deserve respect not exploitation because they are sacred personalities. They are not just natural realities but are the abodes of the sacred (Kanu 2015).

The Origin of Igbo Market Days

These market days according to Kanu (2015) were introduced into Igboland during the reign of *Eze Nriji* (1300-1390 BCE). He was visited by four strangers who arrived his palace pretending to be deaf and dumb. Each of them carried a basket, not greeting the Eze, or responding to his greetings. Even when the kola nut was presented to them, they said no word. When they went to bed at night, the soothsayer of the Eze sent a rat to disturb them. When the rat was nibbling at Eke's basket, Oye called Eke by his name and told him that a rat was trying to get into his basket. Eke woke up and ran away. And gradually the rat went from one basket to another and in this way they revealed the names of one another by trying to alert the other to the presence of the rat.

The next morning, the Eze went to them with the kola nut and called them each by their names: *Eke, Oye, Afo, Nkwo*. At this, they were astonished and asked for water to wash their hands and faces. After eating the kola, they gave the king four earthen pots

to keep at the front of the Nri shrine, with each pot facing the sun. Eke who was their spokesperson introduced himself and the others as messengers from *Chukwu*, and said to the Eze that the first pot belongs to him, the second to *Oye*, the third to *Afo*, and the fourth to *Nkwo*. These pots he said were gifts from Chukwu and that the king and his people should observe these names as market days during which they should be buying and selling. Since then, these market days have been used in Igbo-land to count Izu- days, Onwa- Months, and Aro- year. He further instructed that these names be given to their male children: Okeke, Nweke, Okoye, Nwoye, Okafor, Okonkwo and Nwankwo. To their female children the names: Mgbeke, Mgboye, Mgbafor, Mgbankwor should be given. At noon, these men shone like angels. The news was spread throughout Igbo-land and these market days have been observed since then.

The Igbo Market days

The word market is derived from the Greek and Latin word “mercatus” which means the market place. Generally, a market is a specific and authorized place where people assemble at regular intervals to buy or sell goods and services (Good 1970). It has existed long before the advent of Europeans to Africa. In the contention of Scott (1970), a market as a public gathering or buyers and sellers at an appointed place and at regular intervals for the purpose of doing business under specified conditions. Kotler (1967) goes further to define markets as “all persons or business units who buy or may be induced to buy a product or service” (p. 6). While Shaw (1912) included a discussion on demand in the concept of market, Coutant (1936) links markets to the creation of needs.

Among the most powerful religious and social elements in Igbo religion, history and culture are the Igbo market days. These market days include- *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*. Thus, the english

calendar which has 7 days in a week, 30 days in a month, 4 weeks in a month, 52 weeks in a year, 12 months in a year and 365 days in a year, the Igbo calendar has 4 days in a week, 7 weeks in a month, 28 days in a month, 13 months in a year, 91 weeks in a year, and 364 days in a year. These four days represent the four cardinal points.

Eke ----- East
Orie----- West
Afo----- North
Nkwo----- South

Together, these days make up *Izu nta* (four days), and when doubled *Izu ukwu* (eight days) which is the complete round of the native week of eight days among the Igbo. There are particular deities that are worshipped on different market days. Some streams or rivers are not fetched during particular market days, for such days are considered sacred to the deity that owns or inhabits the stream or river. On days like *Eke*, there are communities that do not allow their members to go to the farm (Kanu 2015).

a. Eke

Eke market day is regarded as *Isi Mbido Ahia* (the beginning of the market days or market). It is also referred to as *diokpara ubosi* (the first son of the week). Among the people of Arondizuogu, there is a market dedicated to this day called *Eke Market*. It is a general market that is was instituted for all Ndizuogu people, and thus it is called *Eke Ndi'zuogu* but located in *Ndi Aniche*, the center of *Iheme* community. On this day, *Ndi Aniche* people do not bury the dead as a form of respect to the day. There is also an economic dimension to it- so that it doesn't distract their market or the economic activity of the day. The *Eke* day is also a day for oath taking. In some Igbo communities, those who die on *Eke* day are considered guilty, and thus a special sacrifice is offered for

cleansing, to avoid calamity upon the family or community. Marriage ceremonies are also not allowed on this day, even if it is only about the introduction of the male couple to the family. It is considered a sacred day to be honored by everyone; and sometimes associated with Eke- python, a sacred animal among the Igbo and at other times Eke- the creator God. This last perspective is however not a popular one.

There is an anthropological dimension to Eke day, and this is seen in the names that the Igbo give to their children:

Nweke: the child of *Eke*

Okeke: the share of *Eke* or the young man of *Eke*

Okemma: the beauty of *Eke*

Mgbeke: the daughter of *Eke*

These names are given to persons who were born on Eke day or to persons who are dedicated to the spirit of Eke.

b. *Orie*

Orie is understood as *Ada Ubosi* (the first daughter of the week). As a market day, it is the day when the opening of farming season is done or declared by the Arodizuogu people of Igbo land. If there is a major celebration, it is fixed for *Orie* day. This is because people go to the market on *Eke* so as to prepare for the celebration on *Orie*, and also given that major celebrations have been cancelled on *Eke* day. It is from this perspective that we understand better why Ikeji and New Yam Festivals are celebrated on *Orie* day among the people of Arondizuogu. However, even though it is a day for celebrations, the people where the *Orie* market is located might have several taboos to be respected on this day. For instance, among the Arondizuogu people, *Orie* market is domiciled in Ndi Ejezie, and on this day, they do not fix or attend meetings.

Among the Uturu people of Igbo land, *Orie* is a day with several obligations attached. As a holy day of obligation, the Ututu

farmer rests from farming on this day and feasts together with his family. Also traditional marriage ceremonies in Uturu are not scheduled on *Orie* day. A married Uturu woman does not have the right to pass the night of an *Orie* day outside her matrimonial home without the permission of her husband. A woman or man cannot divorce her husband or his wife on an *Orie* day.

The anthropological dimension of *Orie* is seen in the names that the Igbo give to their children:

Nworie: the child of *Orie*

Okorie: the share of *Orie* or the young man of *Orie*

Okoye: the share of *Orie* or the young man of *Orie*

Orieji: the yam of *Orie*

These names are given to persons who were born on *Orie* day or to persons who are dedicated to the spirit of *Orie*.

c. *Afo*

Afo is understood among the Igbo as *Osote Diokpara* (second son). It is the day of merriment and masquerade displays. It is also a day of commerce and socializing with peers, friends and to hold meetings of all kinds. Among the Arondizuogu people, it is situated and dominated by *Ndi Awa*, however people from other towns come to sell their goods there too.

The anthropological dimension of *Afo* is seen in the names that the Igbo give to their children:

Okorafo: the young man of *Afo*

Nwafo: the child of *Afo*

Mgbafo: the daughter of *Afo*

Okrafo: the young man of *Afo*

These names are given to persons who were born on *Afo* day or to persons who are dedicated to the spirit of *Afo*.

d. *Nkwo*

Nkwo is referred to as the *Isote Ada Ubosi* (the second daughter). Generally, those who die on *Nkwo* day are considered to be

righteous. It is a day when many celebrations or feasts among the Igbo begin. Among the Arondizuogu people, the Nkwo market is specifically dominated by and located in *Ndi Akaeme*. However, people from other towns come to sell their goods there too. On this day, Ndi Akaeme women do not go for burial. This law was put in place to avoid a situation where their market would be empty on that day. Those who are directly involved might go but not every woman.

Nwankwo: the child of *Nkwo*

Okonkwo: the young man of *Nkwo*

Osunkwo: he that is dedicated to *Nkwo*

Mgbankwo: a young lady of *Nkwo*

These names are given to persons who were born on *Nkwo* day or to persons who are dedicated to the spirit of *Nkwo*.

In traditional Igbo societies, there were two kinds of trades the local and the long distance trade. The above discussion on market days were shaped by local distance trades which dealt principally on food and agricultural product (palm oil and palm kernels), products of smiths, sculptors, potters, cloth weavers and so on, that served the commercial needs and interests of the neighbouring communities. During long distance trades, the Igbo left their communities and moved into other regions or continents or states. The items exchanged in the market satisfied the needs of the people beyond the subsistence level. The trade commodities were food items, slaves, horses, products of smiths, cloth weavers, sculptors, etc. This kind of trade was already in existence long before the entity called Nigeria was formally created.

African traders like King Jaja of Opobo and Nana of Itsekiri Kingdom were already part of the international trade, and successfully so long before the creation of Nigeria (Rotimi and Ogen, 2008). According to Ekundara (1973), slave trade and export of palm oil and other products such as cocoa, groundnuts,

etc, characterized the foreign trade going during the traditional market era. The Nri and Aro people were the two major communities that were involved in a conspicuous manner in long-distance trade. They traded with Europe, which began with the arrival of the Portuguese traders in the Bight of Biafra in the Fifteenth Century. The archaeological sites at Igbo-Ukwu among others reveal long distance trade in copper, bronze, objects of high quality and distinctive design, beads, weaving, pottery works as well as regional trade in salt, cloths, beads, etc. The discussion on Igbo market days and trade goes far below the capacity of the long distance trade. It was and is still a local affair.

Ecological Significance of Market Days

Sacred market days among the Igbo people have ecological significance, and the achievement of these significances is based on the association of these days with particular spirits. The nature of these spirits and the taboos associated with them to a great extent affects the particular demands of the particular days or what the days abhor. In the main, a lot of the activities that particular sacred days abhor contribute to the protection or preservation of the environment or the eco-system.

For instance, there were particular days that it was required, depending on the nature of the community that no one should go fishing from a particular water body. The advantage of this is that it allowed the water body to regenerate or rebuild itself from the use it had experienced during the other days. This was done on the basis of the relationship of the water body with a particular deity; if the particular day is devoted to the particular deity, keeping away from the water body becomes a way of honoring the deity in question. At the spiritual level, it is taken that the particular deity is having time with his or her children, which include the fish and other water animals in the water body. This might sound unscientific to many, but those who

went against the law were either drowned or got sick afterwards (Adu-Gyamfi 2011). There were some fish that were not eaten at all even if it were outside the days during which fishing was forbidden. These species were referred to as the children of the sea or river goddess. There were also particular festivals or seasons during which fishing was forbidden. This had a way of preserving the animals in the water body.

There were days when hunting was forbidden completely. As already observed, this depends on the nature of the deity that is being honored on that particular day and what it forbids. What keeping away from hunting on these particular days did was to slow down the destruction of the ecosystem through the loss of these animals. In the case of sacred animals, it was such that they were not killed at all. Killing them, as in the case of a python, a person is required to bury them as if they were human beings.

Conclusion

Local people in time past have developed a variety of methods to manage their resources or to regulate their interactions with their natural environment, and these methods are not entirely out of use even in the modern time (Appiah-Opoku 2007). This for some scholars dates back to the creation stories of these local communities (Berkes et al 2000; Turner et al 2000; Shastri et al 2002). As already studied above, one of such traditional ecological knowledge systems among the Igbo local people are the sacred days. Sacred days play fundamental roles at various levels of the life of the Igbo traditional communities: at the socio-cultural, economic, religious and political levels in the wise use of earth's resources in such a manner that is friendly and sustainable, thus contributing to natural resources sustainability and conservation. This was achievable because of the relationships of these days to the deities. While the gods provide protection for the traditional people, the people were bound to

keep the taboos that were associated with these days. These taboos were prime factors in the guidance of the conduct of the community in relation to the exploitation of the environment.

This management of earth's resources in terms of ecosystem diversity were sometimes done for economic reasons (Usher 2000; Thomas 2003); at other times for the preservation of the future generation (Smith and Wishnie 2000). With the incursion of modernity, many of the rites and rituals associated with these sacred days among other sacred personalities are gradually dying off. This is worsened by the fact that many young people are not interested in the rites and rituals associated with these days; in most cases, they refer to them as superstitions. With the weakening of the values of these days, the consequence is that its ecological relevance begins to die.

This work, therefore, has brought out the salient aspect of conservation borne out of the taboo system associated with the sacred days in Igbo traditional societies. It submits that religious beliefs and practices such as the belief in sacred days can affect the way our environment is understood, utilized and preserved. This points to the fact that religious perspectives and practices have played significant roles in the preservation of the ecosystem and can still be useful. It also calls for the restudying of indigenous religious beliefs of the African people so as to understand the rationale behind the taboos; it asserts that society needs to utilize indigenous knowledge in her relationship with indigenous people, especially as it relates to the preservation of the environment; traditional leaders who are the custodians of African traditional values should be involved in the process of environmental preservation among indigenous people; the government should draw up strategies for the preservation of the ecosystem in such a manner that the indigenous knowledge systems are supported and employed.

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Chapter Four

IKENGA IN AFRICAN BELIEF SYSTEM AND ECO-SPIRITUALITY

Jude I. Onebunne, PhD

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

juno.anyi@gmail.com

Executive Summary

Ikenga is a sculpture in African-Igbo society that symbolises man's prowess and achievements. Though not a god, it is seen as a man's personal *chi*, often his personal destiny and is believed to have a role to play in the actualizing of a man's dream. *Ikenga* has a great significance to the ancient African-Igbo and is considered sacred and peculiar to individuals. Eco-spirituality is a term which considers and covers the sacredness of the ecosystem and the strive towards its sustainability. It has been a long imprinted culture (though with a different term) in the African-Igbo society. Using the method of critical analysis the researcher found out that *Ikenga* in an African cultural belief system has a lot of significance in the appreciation of sustainable values of eco-spirituality. This significant importance is, therefore, suggested for functional resuscitation of many of the African-Igbo value systems as society thrives to preserve the ecosystem.

Keywords: *Ikenga, Igbo, Africa, Africa Belief System, Eco-Spirituality, Sculpture.*

Introduction

The problem of ecological crisis is inseparably linked with the progress in technologies in the contemporary Western society. In

the previous few centuries and particularly in the past few decades of the world history, the fruits of technological progress in the modern Western society have been transmitted to various parts of the globe. The result of this transmission of the goods and services of technologies has brought an enormous and abrupt change that is negatively influencing the human environment. The changes are beyond the capacity of ecosystem to adjust or sustain. For a long time now, the resultant effect of climatic and ecological changes has been the deterioration of human environment, explosion of human population, and drastic disharmony within the eco-system

The African and the *Igbo* people especially are known for traditional religious practices that are ecologically friendly. However, their environmental friendliness has been weakened by the coming of Christianity and western ideas. Traditionally the *Igbo* nation and her people were environmentalists, but this was greatly weakened after the intrusion of western hegemony. They now have heinous practices that had unspeakable effects on preserving the environment. The *Igbo* people hold that there is a causal connection between the moral conditions of the community and the physical environment. The fundamental attitude to land is a religious one and is based on the fear of mystical sanction by the ancestors.. Traditional African religions view land and its resources as communal property that belongs to the living, dead and generations to follow and this believe is ably represented by the *Igbo* people with the presence of the *Ikeng*. Not just the *Igbo* the Shona people of also hold the environment as sacred. Mhaka (2015) argues that Shona beliefs can be tapped into for purposes of increasing agricultural production in the contemporary society. According to Mhaka (2015) Shona indigenous knowledge hinges on the holistic philosophy which views man as part of the environment. This philosophy directly links to the *Igbo* people and Africans as a

whole, encourages people to use natural resources sustainably and it discourages people from damaging the environment. The values of the Igbo as valuably represented and guided by the *Ikenga* would be critically examined in the course of this study

African-Igbo Belief System

Africans perceived the cosmos as a rigid and hierarchical pyramid, with every form of life, in descending order, serving the one above it: man- animal, animal- plant, etc. The setting was anthropocentric, meaning that all created things were purely for the benefit of humans. That is to say, Greek philosophy championed the notion that human beings are superior to all other created beings. By implication, Greek philosophy legitimized the destruction of the natural environment since the inception of Industrial Revolution. The dualism of body and soul, matter and spirit means that material is at the service of the spiritual and the aim of this material life is simply to prepare one for the life to come. The resultant effect of this idea is the exploitation of 'nature' and humanity via the dominance of scientific theories of the twentieth century's. By Igbo philosophy is meant the "understanding, frame-of-mind, reason and perceptions, undergirding the manner in which the Igbo people reason, conceive ideas, think, act, and utter words, and behave in different events of life (Kanu 2015; 2013).

According to some great African scholars, the notion of the universe (Igbo cosmology) and the Igbo idea of human person (Igbo philosophical anthropology) is full of hope and freedom and moves with the dignity of the human person and the respect for the universe and all therein. The worth of life in the idea of an individual is the worth of life at the centre of the universe. Igbo thought pattern revolves around the value of life. Life occupies a central position in the thought of an African person. "When anything happens to life, a *carpe diem* Africa will go

every length to restore the equilibrium. The cosmos in Igbo thought includes all forms of life (animal, plant, water, land, etc.). This life emphasizes interconnectedness and personal responsibilities towards each other. The Igbo thought referred to this interconnectedness of the human family as solidarity. Unity of the whole creation best expresses the Igbo philosophy of life. In the Igbo idea of the universe, the universe is perceived as a holistic reality. No fixed dichotomy exists between nature and human beings, the sacred and the secular, the terrestrial, water existents, those living in trees, etc. Igbo people are very religious. They move with this sense of religion into their farms, market places, business centres, rivers, mountains, hills, name them. Aboriginal Igbo people show a sense of connectedness with nature's divine powers, and as such, go after a model of harmony and balance in their interaction with the environment. In as such, go after a model of harmony and balance in their interaction with the environment. In Igbo philosophy of life, there is no room for exploitation of nature, this is further emphasized in the life of an Igbo man as he grows. The spiritual assigning of the *Ikenga* which reminds a young mind of his values and obligations to the mother earth as he strives to succeed in life further enumerates the Igbo mans value for his environment. *Ikenga*, in the African believe system as it relates to the environment is a symbol of mans authority and a reminder of the fact that he must succeed even as he respects the cultures and sacred values of the Igbo environment, it puts a man in charge of his immediate environment as a lord, that ensures its(the ecology) protection in his(man) quest to make a living. The igbo man would always respect the ecosystem in order not to go against his chi (i.e his *Ikenga*).

In the worldview of Igbo people subsists the idea of holistic cosmology. Human beings and non-human beings, that is, other created things complement and aid one another in

accordance with the notion of subsidiary. In this thought pattern is found mingling, intermingling and co-mingling of the fates of humanity and that of other created beings in the universe. In the Igbo worldview, there is a slim demarcation between the sacred and the secular. The context is experienced in the context of the secular – both build an inseparable unity. This salutary manner of understanding the world of nature/creation by the Igbo people must be taken seriously in the issues of ecology in Africa. The fact is understood again by reference to the holy and sacred. In Igbo religious worldviews, the earth and all nature is sacred and energized with the spiritual forces. The Igbo religious views find the presence of the spirits throughout all of nature and the cosmos this spirits they have assigned special trees and animals which they believe guides their daily life and activities. Especially important is the spirits of the ancestors, who bring many blessings, fertility, health and life to the human community and is represented by the *Ikenga* which is assigned to every young teenage boy as he advances into adulthood. This made the earth/nature no longer the object of manipulation by industrialists or economic forces. This worldview enables them to take in hand their own destiny and bring about communities which are truly humane.

What is deducible from the above excerpt is the idea of community. In this community, every human being is highly valued and their life is also unqualifiedly guarded. Derivatively, the lives of non-human beings such as animals, plants, hills, rocks, mountains, rivers, oceans, etc., forming part of the universe, equally have right for care, respect, protection and preservation. That is why it is considered an act of gross injustice the uncontrolled appetite for the exploitation of the natural resources and the unreflective destruction of the life forms. In Igbo thought system, human persons see themselves as connected to nature, the carved *Ikenga* is an embodiment of both

human and animal features and is a highly valued item in the Igbo land. The Igbo sees themselves as a knot in the wider cosmic arrangement, which includes the Mother Earth and all therein in terms of plants, animals, air, sun, seas, stars, the moon etc. This idea forms the bedrock of indigenous Igbo world outlook.

Eco-spirituality

Ecology is the science of the mutual relationship of organisms to their environment. It is the relationship of living things to one another and their environment or the study of such relationships. Spirituality means attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people's lives and help them reach out towards super-sensible realities. Spirituality includes several interrelated levels of reference such as the level of lived experience, which means the attitudes and behaviours of human beings which are typically influenced by their-ultimate values, and therefore their-spirituality.

Eco-spirituality expresses the joining of spirituality with ecological perspectives. There are numerous types, traditions, expressions, and understandings of eco-spirituality. It does not refer to any one set of beliefs, but to a range of ethical or moral, religious, spiritual, or agnostic beliefs, tendencies, or actions that relate to ecological concerns. Eco-spirituality has evolved since the 1960s and is currently part of popular culture in North America. The connection between spirituality and the Earth has deep and historical roots in many religious traditions and in particular with those that have remained in tune with the rhythms and limits of the Earth, such as some indigenous traditions around the world.

Eco-spirituality has many meanings, the first referring to a thirst for connection between spirituality and the Earth, given the extent of and the general lack of religious responses to the

ecological crisis. There is a recognition that the ecological crisis threatens all life on Earth, and it is fundamentally a moral, spiritual, and religious problem.

Since the early 1970s there has been a global, public, and political consciousness of the need for ethics and religions to be consistent with ecological and social liberation, noting, as does Steven Rockefeller (1992), that there are many diverse cultural paths joining in this awareness. Discussions have been increasingly cross-cultural and interreligious. Organizations such as the United Nations, the World Wildlife Fund, World Conservation Strategy, and numerous religious groups have been involved in interdisciplinary work aimed at developing religious and spiritual responses to the ecological crisis that are connected to political decision-making. From the initiatives of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions hosted a Religion and Ecology Project involving ten conferences since 1996, bringing together scholars and environmentalists from Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Jainism, Hinduism, indigenous traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This work is entering a phase of discussions with the United Nations.

Eco-spirituality is also a term that can be applied to the work in cosmology and particularly that of Thomas Berry, a cultural historian of religions. Berry's work in scientific and religious cosmologies-stories about the origin of the world that provide orientation, guidance, and meaning to life-has done much to revive a sense of the sacredness of life, the Earth, and all the processes of the universe. He offers a comprehensive context for rethinking our current situation and for understanding ourselves as part of a larger evolutionary whole that is both spiritual and material.

There are several elements within eco-spirituality, and priorities are divergent. One challenges the belief that humans are the centre of life, or anthropocentrism. Some propose a bio centric approach wherein the intrinsic value of animals, plants, rivers, and mountains has a priority over their instrumental value as resources for humans.

Ubuntu and Egbe Bere Ugo Bere (EBUB) in Eco-spirituality

Though the concept of *ubuntu* has gained tremendous prominence in recent years, it is difficult to define. As noted by Mawere (2012), this difficult to define *ubuntu* is mainly because the concept is elastic and pragmatic as it is used in almost all the spheres of Bantu worldviews. Current definitions tend to focus on human-to-human relationships but *ubuntu* also includes human to community and human to society relationships. This means that *ubuntu* exists not only at individual level but at community, country and societal levels. Broodryk (2012) defines *ubuntu* as an ancient African worldview which is based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values which ensure happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of the family. Those who abide by the *ubuntu* ethic are called *abantu* or *vanhu* in Shona. Mkize (2003) further argues that *ubuntu* means qualities such as warmth, empathy, understanding, communication, interaction, participation, reciprocation, harmony, a shared worldview and co-operation. Bennett and Patrick (2011) posit that *ubuntu* implies a collective personhood in which an individual becomes a person through other people. As a philosophy, it is allergic to any form of discrimination (Museka & Madondo, 2012). Museka and Madondo (2012) further argue that it is a way of living that contributes positively to the welfare of all members who make up the universe. *Ubuntu* is also seen as an effort to help people in the spirit of service, to show respect to others and to be honest and trustworthy. The

concept has originated from the *Nguni* tribes of South Africa, and it has equivalents among other Bantu languages. For example, the word *hunhu* is used among the Shona. Lately, the *ubuntu* philosophy has taken a centre stage in jurisprudence, management, health in Africa and the African Diaspora.

The *Egbe bere Ugo bere* concept of the traditional Igbo society, often represented by the acronym *EBUB* is literally translated: let the Kite perch, let the Eagle perch, meaning live and lets live can be typically mirrored through the concept of *ubuntu*. It's a relational concept which does not only limit itself to people's relationship with each other but extends to cover peoples' relationship with their environment. In the Igbo society where the concept of *EBUB* sprigged from, perching becomes the locus operandi for the kite and Eagle. Naturally the kite and the Eagle do not fly nor live together. However, they are permitted to perch together and this act of perching we see a relationship of respect and regard, which is possible because they belong to a common world of animals and operate within one human world. The *EBUB* is an Igbo proverb which has a deeper meaning like every other proverbs. It is a principle of justice and in most cases is used by the Igbo man as he attests to his *Ikenga* (chi and ancestors) of his loyalty to the long existing relationship amongst human.

This philosophy can directly be compared to the symbolic *Ikenga* and the notion behind it. The *Ikenga* is a representative of all the Igbo man holds dear to him and is believed to directly guide his relations with his fellow men and environments. The *Ikenga* gives the *Igbo's* a spirit of responsibility to human and nature and as well, encourages them to uphold the legacies of people before them as they imprint solid footsteps for the little ones coming after them. The *Igbo* people believe that if they don't interfere in

your progress then by divine will you won't be able to spoil theirs using the sacred *Ikenga* as their divine symbol.

The philosophy of *ubuntu* and *EBUB* just as the symbolic *Ikenga* plays a critical role in environmental conservation. This is further buttressed by the fact that according to the *ubuntu* philosophy, the community is important and individual needs are secondary to family and community needs. Likewise, the Igbo *EBUB* proverb which is often said in front of the *Ikenga* as a prayer to ones chi, values humans relationship with his fellow man and the environment, presenting it as a prerequisite for success. In essence all three, (*ubuntu*, *EBUB*, *Ikenga*) holds that ones existence and progress depends solely on the existence of the other living things in its environment and his relationship with them. If a person's behaviour is deemed to benefit the community, then one is deemed to be human. If a person's behaviour endangered the whole community such behaviour is meant to be chastised.

The Shona just like the *Igbo* people of Nigeria, in upholding the values portrayed by the *Ikenga* therefore strived to avoid behaviours that brings problems to the community. Such behaviours include environmental degradation or pollution as the whole community would be punished by God or the guardian spirits. Punishment that affected the whole community came in the form of droughts, hailstorms, locusts or worms. People therefore showed their *Ubuntu* by being friendly to the environment as their philosophical responsibility to the community; likewise the *Igbo* tribe upholds the *EBUB* proverb by allowing a fair play amongst each other as well as shows respect to their *Ikenga* which they see as directly respecting the spirit of nature. The *Ubuntu*, *EBUB* and *Ikenga* values were not limited to fellow human beings but extended to flora and fauna. A person with good *unhu* and a respected *Ikenga* upon which his

hope of progress lies would therefore not recklessly cut down trees. *Egbe bere Ugo bere*, is therefore implying that we all exist in a world (human, animal and the ecosystem at large), With the *Egbe* and *Ugo* representing the different aspect of the ecosystem which might not necessarily be of a common specie but is joined by the singular fact of belongingness.

The Symbolismic Significance of *Ikenga* in African society

Ikenga is a personal embodiment of human endeavour, achievement, success, and victory. *Ikenga* is grounded in the belief that the power for a man to accomplish things is in his right hand. It also governs over industry, farming, Chinua Achebe's celebrated novel *Arrow of God* examines the cultural complexities of the Igbo people in colonial Nigeria. Set in the early decades of the twentieth century, the book intimately addresses many nuances of Igbo beliefs, customs, and rituals, particularly in the context of British colonial rule, which was rapidly expanding in Nigeria in that era. The fateful interaction between two characters in the novel, *Akukalia* and *Ebo*, is one such instance of a close look at a crucial aspect of Igbo belief. Following a serious altercation, *Akukalia* insults *Ebo* by breaking *Ebo's ikenga*. Devastated by the loss, *Ebo* promptly grabs his gun and kills *Akukalia*. Despite *Ebo's* grave offense, the village elders cannot punish him, because under no circumstances does anyone in Igbo society have the right to defame, much less destroy, a man's *Ikenga*. This tragic incident described by Achebe, himself an Igbo, demonstrates the crucial role of *Ikenga* in Igbo cosmology.

An Igbo man's right hand is the hand of accomplishment because it is the primary agent of action, confronting and overcoming life's challenges. Carved out of wood and anywhere from a few inches to about two feet tall, an *Ikenga* symbolizes its owner's right hand. When an Igbo male comes of age, he may ritually be offered an *Ikenga*, which becomes not only his proud possession

to be preserved and honoured for the rest of his life, but is also an integral part of his identity as a unique individual. Signifying the owner's potential for success and his control of his own fate, the object embodies his *chi*, his *ndichie* (ancestors) and *ike* (power).

In short, the man's *Ikenga* becomes the essence of his individuality. Yet at the same time, it also serves as an unequivocal marker of his commitment to his society and environment at large. Though such practice is much less frequently than men, women may also possess *Ikenga*. It is believed by its owners to bring wealth and fortune as well as protection.

***Ikenga* and Eco-spirituality**

Having critically examined the African belief system as it relates to the ecosystem, as well as the *Ikenga* and its significance in an *Igbo* community. It is therefore important that we take a quality walk down the relational importance of the *Ikenga* as a symbol of authority of the *Igbo* people to the African eco spirituality at large.

From time immemorial the *Igbo* people have been known for their prowess in the different works of life, they are one of the most respected ethnic group in Nigeria and has made a name in trade worldwide. Before the invasion of the white men the *Igbo* people were notably an autonomous community without any known king. This brought about a popular *Igbo* saying; (*igbo enwe eze*) "Igbo tribe has no king". That notwithstanding they maintained a unanimous order both with each other and the environment, this order has been visibly noted to be as a result of the culture and practices of this unique *Igbo* people.

Ikenga is a piece of wood carved out of sacred *Orji* or *Ogirisi* tree which are prone to termite infestation. To the *Igbo* man the *Ikenga* is a priceless possession. A story was once carried about an *Igbo* man who ran during the Biafra war, leaving all his possession while holding onto just his *Ikenga*. To the *Igbo* man nature is alive and reacts to all human being according to how they treat it, the man who ran with just his *Ikenga* during the war believes that his *Ikenga* is a connector between his destiny, the nature and his personal *chi*. This believe further implies that as long as he holds his *Ikenga* which signifies his good relationship with the mother earth he would surely succeed no matter where he finds himself. The *Igbo* people have high regards for the nature which they believe gave birth to all living things they themselves inclusive and therefore empowers every house with a physical reminder of these values, "the *Ikenga*". The *Ikenga* is believed to be a personal guidance and regulator of ones personal activity towards his fellow humans and most importantly the ecology, doing anything contrary to the natural environment is a direct provocation of ones *ikenga* in the *Igbo* tradition and this brings about failure in one's life. The *ikenga* which has been colonized by the brutish today and advertised in their prestigious museums is a symbol of African long and beautiful relationship with the ecosystem. In the quest for resuscitating the eco spirituality of the world ecology Africans should be at the fore front as they know from experience what it entails to maintain a good eco-spirituality.

Conclusion

For most African communities and the *Igbo* people in particular, all aspects of nature, plants and wildlife and water bodies are under the mystical tutelage of ancestral spirits and guardian animals. People are therefore mandated to use natural resources sustainably on behalf of these owners – spiritual beings. The *Ikenga* thus represents a symbol for this believe in relation to a

mans success in life. It therefore compels them to uphold their eco-spirituality for bright and progressive future. The *Igbo* people have a rich indigenous knowledge system which if used wisely may help in environmental conservation. However, it must be noted that this Afro centric perspective has its own weaknesses just like any other school of thought.

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Chapter Five

SACRED TREES/PLANTS: THE GREENING OF IGBO-AFRICAN RELIGION

Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State
ikee_mario@yahoo.com
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-1977-202X

Executive Summary

Ecological issues as a matter of concern have gradually moved beyond the parameters of the public domain, in terms of issues for the government to handle to matters of religious concerns. This development is evident in the writings and teachings of the Popes over recent years; the writings of various religious groups and bodies such as the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Alliance of Religions and Conservation, etc. These have emerged because the environmental challenges are far beyond what should be left alone to the government to respond to. This development has been of help in terms of the achievement of results given that four persons out of every five in the world have some religious affiliation. This paper begins by pointing out the seriousness of ecological crisis in the world and how it connects to every religion for the finding of ways for the sustainability of the universe. While there are a few papers written on sacred trees in Igbo traditional societies, there is hardly literature that discusses its relationship with the eco-system or its ecological relevance. This article, therefore, distinguishes itself as it focused on African religious reality, which are sacred trees. Discussions on the connection between the environment and religion have focused on the other religions with little or no connection with

the African religion. Sacred trees in African traditional religious world are a fundamental religious reality which shows how the traditional African has attended to the care that his or her immediate environment requires. The scope of this study is the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria and Western Africa. The phenomenological approach was employed for the collection of data, while the hermeneutical and analytical methods of investigation were used for the evaluation of the data at hand. This paper shows that the Igbo-African indigenous beliefs, taboos, sanctions and knowledge have contributed hugely to the preservation of the ecosystem.

Keywords: Sacred, Trees, Plants, Igbo, African, Anthroposophy, Eco-system, Conservation

Introduction

During the last 60 years, ecological issues as a matter of concern have moved beyond the parameters of the public domain, in terms of issues for the government to handle to matters of religious concerns. This development is evident in the writings and teachings of the Popes over recent years (Paul VI 1971; Paul II 1991, 1990; Benedict XVI 2009, 2010; Francis 2015). As Chaplin (2016) observes, this development is also evident in the writings of various religious groups and bodies such as the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Alliance of Religions and Conservation, etc. These have emerged because environmental challenges are far beyond what should be left alone to the government to respond to.

This development has been of help in terms of the achievement of results given that four persons out of every five in the world have some religious affiliations. Thus, Dasgupta and Ramanathan (2014) aver that: "Finding ways to develop a sustainable relationship with nature requires not only

engagement of scientists and political leaders, but also moral leadership that religious institutions are in a position to offer” (p. 1457). Several researches by individuals (Oelschlaeger 1994; Northcott 2013; Khalid F 2013; Izzi Dien 2013; Halpert 2012) and religious bodies and movements (Cornwall Alliance 2009; Lausanne Movement 2012; Global Buddhist Climate Change Collective 2015; Evangelical Environmental Network 2006; Islamic International Climate Change Symposium 2015) have further affirmed the relationship between religion and the environment.

This paper begins by pointing out the seriousness of ecological crisis in the world and how it connects to every religion for the finding of a way for the sustainability of the universe. However, this article distinguishes itself as it focuses on the African religious reality of sacred trees. Discussions over the year on the connection between the environment and religion have focused on the other religions with little or no reference to the African religion. Sacred trees in African traditional religious world are a fundamental religious reality which is employed to express how the African over the years have cared for his/her immediate environment.

Theoretical Framework

This research is based on the *Igwebuike* Conservation Theory, which has been developed by Kanu Anthony. It holds that reality is interconnected and interrelated. *Igwe bu ike* is an Igbo proverb and also a typical Igbo name. Beyond the linguistic expression of *Igwebuike* lies a deeper meaning, where *Igwebuike* is understood as providing an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations (Kanu 2016a; 2021). Literally, *Igwe* is a noun which means number or multitude, usually a large number or population. The number or population in perspective are entities with ontological identities

and significances, however, part of an existential order in which every entity is in relation to the other. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is*. *Ike* is a noun, which means *strength* or *power* (Kanu 2016b&c). *Igwe*, *bu* and *Ike* put together, means 'number is strength' or 'number is power' (Kanu 2017a). However, beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuike*, it means *otu obi* (one heart and one soul) – *cor unum et anima una*. Beyond the literal understanding of *Igwebuike*, it concatenates Igbo forms, symbolism, signs, media, meaning, anthropologies, universal cosmic truths, functions, semantic powers, physics, phenomena, faculties, and Igbo environmentalities (2017b&c).

The *Igwebuike* conservation theory, therefore, holds that reality is interconnected and interrelated. The exploitation and mismanagement of any dimension of reality will, therefore, have consequences on the entirety of reality. The theory is based on the very nature of the African universe or world which consists of both the physical and spiritual dimensions. Although they are different realms, they depend on each other and have their meanings only within the context of complementarity. Still within this context of dependence and complementarity, the traditional African society ensured the protection of dimensions such as sacred trees or forests, knowing fully well that the protection of these will ensure the protection of other dimensions of life. The tree was thus, not looked at as an entirely independent reality from the human person or the spiritual world. It was seen as the part of the whole of which the human person constitutes a part.

The Spiritual world and the Sacred Trees

Sacred trees/plants emerged in traditional societies as a result of their connection with a web of spiritual relationships with their biophysical environment. They were the first temples of the gods, places of worship, and thus revered (Hughes and

Chandran 1998). According to Frese and Gray (1995), sacred trees:

Are a form of nature that represent life and the sacred continuity of the spiritual, cosmic and physical worlds. A tree is usually used to symbolize a deity or other sacred beings, or it may stand for what is sacred in general... Trees represent certain deities or ancestors, serve as mediators or as a link to the religious realm, and are associated with cultural beliefs in heave or the afterlife (p. 26).

Beyond the spiritual, Eliade (1958 and 1959) and Dafni (2006) aver that these sacred trees symbolize life, youth, immortality, wisdom, etc. They expressed what the spiritual man and woman considered real and sacred. Gupta (1980) adds that they were worshipped not only because of this but also because of their long life and the protection that they offered the human person. Thus, when the Igbo reverence sacred trees, it is not just because they have spiritual relevance but also because they symbolize life. *Ndu*- life among the Igbo occupies a very important place. This explains why the Igbo will say: *Ndukaku* (Life is better than wealth); *Nduka* (Life is greater); *Ndubisi* (Life is first); *Ndulue* (May life continue), etc. Thus, Ede (1985) observes they also possess human attributes, for instance, appetites, vitues and vicas. These human attributes are confered on them because they are understood as a part of the human family. And as a part of the human family that is highly religious, they are also vessels for the manifestation of spiritual beings (Mbiti 1970; Nwala, 1985; Nnabuchi 1987:Adibe, 2008).

Sacred Forests

Sacred forests were areas set aside by the Igbo ancestors as sacred sites and strictly protected by customary laws, beliefs and enforced taboos. They are not just limited to the Igbo world but are found all over the world including Ethiopia, Japan, Morocco,

India, Ghana, etc. (Cardelus et al 2013; Hughes and Chandran 1997; Malhotra et al 2007; Bhagwat 2009 and Manikandan et al 2011). These forests, remain storehouse of the life gas oxygen in Igbo traditional societies. They also improve the soil stability and act as soil binder, thus preventing erosion. Among the Igbo, they were regarded as abodes of the spirits and deities and places for worship, sacrifice, etc. Examples of these forests or bushes include: *Ofia Udike* (dedicated to *Udike*); *Ofia Aro* (dedicated to *Aro* deity); in Abatete, *Ofia Omaliko* (dedicated to *Omaliko* deity); in Nnobi, *Ofia Idemili* (dedicated to *Idemili* deity). Umunnachi, there is *Ofia Okpimodu* (dedicated to *Okpimodu* deity). And because spirits dwell in them, these sacred places possess great power and are respected (Kanu 2015). Therefore, it's forbidden to go inside these woods, cut them down or collect its fruits. Due to the lack of human disturbance monkeys and other animals often live in these forests. These animals are also considered sacred.

Sacred Trees

The sacred trees and plants to be discussed include: alligator pepper, *ogirisi*, *oha*, yam, kola nut, *omu* and palm wine, and are considered sacred because of their relationships with spiritual forces.

a. Ose Oji (Aligator Pepper)

Ose oji is understood among the Igbo as a warrior. This is why the Igbo say that the alligator pepper “Is a warrior and it is not opened before the eyes of a person but behind a person”. Before it is opened, a person will take his hand behind and opens it before bringing it forward. It is also understood as a dispeller of evil. No wonder, the Igbo would rub it on their body as a repellent for whatever is evil or anything that is not worthy or holy. This explains why when an Igbo gets to a place where he or she does not trust the people or where he or she suspects that

charms are going to be used against him or her, the person will take seven seeds of alligator pepper and throw it on the ground and say:

“*Ose oji*, you don’t go for a battle that ends in shame”

It is believed by the Igbo that evil spirits like *ose oji*. So when they see *ose oji* they will abandon the person that they would have harmed and concentrate on the *ose oji*.

b. Akpu (Silk Coton)

It is an Igbo sacred tree that has as its botanical name *Ceiba Petandra* (Okonkwo et al., 2006) or *Bombas Buonopozense* (Adibe, 2008). It is regarded as the abode of the spirits, and because of the large expanse of its roots, trunk and branches, the Igbo refer to it as a tree of fertility and prosperity. This explain why those seeking the fruit of the womb or prosperity go to offer sacrifice by its stem. Nwaubani (2018) refers to it as a path to the unseen world in Igbo ontology.

c. Ofo (Detranium macrocapun)

It is prominent among the Igbo for its use for staff of justice or authority of a family, village or town. It is a symbol of justice, sincerity and truthfulness. It is generally forbidden to cut or place a knife against a living Ofo tree or use its branches for firewood. It serves as a connection between the living and the ancestors and the spirit world. It is also the moveable shrine of most Igbo communities.

d. Achi

Achi is a mystical tree among the Igbo that is the home of spiritual forces or spirits, especially the ancestors. As the abode of the spirits, it is highly respected among the Igbo and cannot be cut down without carrying out the appropriate rituals. It is also used for cooking soup.

e. Ogirisi

It is used for making the boundaries of land in the past. Once a land is bought or shared among the members of a family, each person would take *ogirisi* and plant at the agreed boundary between him and the next person. This has helped to curtail conflicts between members of the same family or owners of land. It is such that even today when a person buys a land, one still finds *ogirisi* used by the original owners to signify the boundary of their land. Thus, whenever there are conflicts the presence of the *ogirisi* is used to argue for the original boundary of the piece of land.

The *ogirisi* is also used during worship. Just as you call on the ancestors to come and take kola nut or *nzu*, they can also be invited to take their share of *ogirisi* leaves. It is used for sacrifices and also as a base for the *ofo* to stand on. The *ofo* is not placed on the ground and where it is difficult to get a base for it, the *ogirisi* leaves are used. However, in a case where a person does not have an *ofo*, he can go into the bush and cut four stems of *Ogirisi*, which can be used instead of an *ofo*.

During sacrifices to the ancestors during Ikeji festival called *Ihu mmuo* (literarily meaning 'in front of the spirit'), the *ogirisi* is also used as a base from where the ancestors are called upon. It forms a kind of a temporary altar for the person after which it is disposed.

It is also used as a purifying agent. For instance, if a person dies and is buried, in Igbo traditional societies those who buried the person are believed to have had contact with the dead, to purify themselves of that association, *ogirisi* leaves are cut and soaked in water which they will use to wash their hands and feet.

f. Udara (Chrysophyllum Albidum)

It is a tree used by Igbo traditional mystics to establish contact with the spiritual world. It is also a fruit prescribed for women who are seeking for the fruit of the womb; it, therefore, symbolizes fertility. It is called Mother, and many go to its stem to offer sacrifices. It must not be cut without following the appropriate ritual of appeasing the deity of fertility.

g. Oha

The oha and ogirisi are two stems that are used during *Iru Agwu*, which has got to do with the pacification of spirits that cause harm in person's life. It is used because it is believed to possess spiritual powers. It is also a choice leaf for making of soup during major festivals like the Ikeji festival among the Arondizuogu people. It is believed to be the soup that the ancestors enjoy most. This also helps us to understand better why it is a choice leaf for soup during the Ikeji festival and other festivals that unite both the living and the dead.

h. Ji (Yam)

The history of the emergence of yam is traced to the Nri myth. When Eri needed food from Chukwu, he was asked to sacrifice his first son and daughter. Where they were buried emerged crops. Where the son was buried emerged yam and where the daughter was buried emerged cocoyam. This is why the Igbo celebrate yam because it is not only a crop but life, it is the *diokpara* of Eri that is being celebrated. This also explains why yam is respected among the Igbo people and the choice requirement for sacrifices. When it is offered as a sacrifice, it is offered as life and God's gift to the human person.

Yam is called *Isi Mbido* or *Isi* (which can be translated as the head or the beginning). Yam is the head of everything that is planted by the Igbo. It is the only crop that is celebrated in a season, not

even the palm tree that has great economic value among the Igbo is celebrated as such. Every Igbo community has a time during the year for celebrating the yam.

i. Oji (Kola nut)

The kola nut is a mystical tree among the Igbo used for rituals and sacrificwes. It is understood in many quarters as the food of the gods. The kola nut for the Igbo is not just the biannual crop grown and stored in sacks and baskets. It is a food that must be eaten with relish; it commands adoration and many accolades and must be attended to with deserving feast. It unites the living and dead, and symbolizes a feast of togetherness, love and trust. The Kola nut is a symbol of Life *ndu*, this is why the Igbo say: "He that brings kola brings life" (Kanu 2014). Uchendu (1965) refers to the kola nut as "the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality. It always comes first. 'It is the king'" (p.74). And because of the important place it occupies, presenting the kola is very ceremonial. The ceremony begins with the presentation of the kola nut to the guests through the next ranking male after which it is returned to the host (Uchendu 1964). It is usually presented alongside white chalk (*nzu*), alligator pepper, garden egg, bitter kola, groundnut butter (*Okwa ose*) in a wooden dish (*Okwa oji*). As the heart beat of the Igbo culture and tradition, the Igbo Kola nut is used for several purposes, which include: welcoming a visitor; opening a prayer; for rites, rituals and ceremonies food and nutrition; Commerce; Cleansing; Flavoring; Oath-taking, covenant and settlement of disputes; Divination and prophecy; Sacrifice and worship; Receiving a new day and for Medical and mystical purposes.

j. Omu (Palm Branches)

Omu symbolizes peace. For instance when a person wants to show that he or she is for peace the person would carry the *Omu*. It also symbolizes that there is danger. For instance, when a land

is contentious, one of the parties can decide to place an *Omu* to indicate the need for no body to go there or take possession of it until the owner is determined. More recently, in places where there are potholes that could pose serious danger to travellers, those living around there or by the road side would cut an *omu* and place it at the spot where the pothole is. Also in towns where you have burials, and thus a large number of people moving from one side of the road to another, they usually place the *Omu* on the middle of the road to let drivers know the need to slow down to avoid running over road crossers.

k. *Ube (Dacryodes Edulis)*

The *Ube* tree among the Igbo possesses a spiritual personality. It is not considered an ordinary tree. This explains why the *Dibia* (medicine man) will always prescribe it for carving of *Ikenga*, *Agwu*, masquerade masks, royal stools and drums used for religious purposes (Kramer, 2006). Its importance among the Igbo is not only because of its religious purpose, it is also used for medicines of many kinds, notable are its antimicrobial and antioxidant capacities (Conrad and Uche, 2013). Conrad (2014) observes that in some parts of Igbo land like *Amichi* village, when a man discovers that his wife is into adultery, he sends her home with a keg of wine stuffed with *Ube* leaves at the mouth of the keg, which signifies that he does not intend to continue with the marriage.

l. *Oboshi (Baphia nitida)*

Oboshi belongs to the class of mystical trees among the Igbo. It is believed to attract spirits, and thus, it is treated with great respect and also located in shrines where spirits are invoked. It was used greatly by medicine men in traditional Igbo society.

m. *Anuneebe*

Anuneebe is an Igbo word that for a mystical, magical and spiritual tree that literarily means “no bird perches on it”. It is a favorite tree among medicine men and women for its various powers, especially to transform reality from one form to another.

n. *Ngwu (Albizia Adcantifolio)*

Ngwu is one of the mystical trees among the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria, and the home of several spirits (Adibe, 2008). It is also the symbol of *Agwu* deity, magic and mystical power. As a result of the sacred place it occupies, it must not be cut down or used as firewood (Oha 2019). It also offers protection to those that live around it and as land boundaries, given that it is perennial plant.

o. *Ubulu or Uburu*

Uburu or *Ubulu* is a totemic tree which which is highly revered among the Igbo because of its relationship with the ancestors and spirits. It symbolizes life and longevity.

p. *Omu Nkwu (Palm Leaves)*

It symbolizes the presence of ancestral spirits and *Ala* deity in their mediatorial roles as peace makers, for seclusion, and as power brokers. It could be used for all Igbo traditional sacred rituals, even without the priests officiating (Adibe, 2008).

Ecological significance of Sacred Trees/Plants

Societies no matter how primitive, have their own philosophies that underly and guide their definition of life and reality, and thus determines their actions and interactions with fellow human beings and nature. These distinctive philosophies is at the heart of the distinctions that is found from one society to the other. The philosophy of the Igbo traditional society, which is complementary in character is what determines the Igbo

relationship with trees, groves, lands, animals, rivers and even public places. Thus, Onyeocha (1997) holds that the African society and world is one of active engagements and symbiotic relationship ensuring harmony between the human beings and nature, a totality of free, continuous, inclusive and interdependence. This also explains the special names given to particular trees, places and objects (Obianika et al 2015). With the special place that trees occupy among the Igbo, it cannot but play a fundamental role or have a fundamental place in ecological discussions.

The belief in trees, plants and forests as sacred among the Igbo-African people have several ecological consequences, especially, given that ecological crisis has become a matter of global concern. Because of their sacredness, they served various ecological purposes on the basis of the taboos that guided human actions in relation to them. There were no tree planting campaign announcements among traditional Igbo people, but some particular events and times went with the planting of some trees. For instance, when a land is given to someone, he demarcates it by planting the *Ogirisi* around it. During the rite of *Iru Agwu*, the *Oha* and *Ogirisi* are two stems that are positioned in such a manner that they grow into trees. The person concerned is bound to water them and ensure that they don't die. When a lady is married into a man's house, she comes with her *Chi*, which is symbolized in the *Oha* which she will plant in some corner of the house. It is used because it is believed to possess spiritual powers.

An important ecological significance of sacred trees is the understanding of the natural environment, including trees, forests and plants as a living phenomenon. It is not just a tree, but sacred personalities as a result of the spirits that inhabit them and thus are given respect. The ecological significance of this

understanding is that it makes human persons to treat the trees and forests with the respect that their sacred personalities deserve.

Going beyond the spiritual implications, forests were cultural environmental management systems that served the important purpose of conserving nature, and thus, save the environment. No wonder, there was never a time in the traditional society when the Igbo forefathers died of air pollution. These forests demonstrate the sense of ecology of the Igbo ancestors. The understanding of trees and plants as a part of an eco-system, of which its destruction will have consequences on the health of the human inhabitants of the universe brings in the idea of a wholeness in ecological discourses. The human person in traditional Igbo-African societies understood the trees and forests as a part of himself or herself and so to treat them without respect is to treat oneself without respect and to exploit them will mean waging war against oneself as there are future consequences. As a part of humanity, they were not only respected but interacted with in various capacities.

The trees and forests were protected through taboos. Freud (1975) explains that taboo is from the Polynesian word '*tapu*', which had the meaning of the sacred, consecrated, dangerous, forbidden, etc. Kanu (2015) avers that it is similar to the *sacer* in the Greek, *Kadesh* in Hebrew, *Nso* in Igbo language of Nigeria and *mmusu* in Akan of Ghana. Historically, taboo was a sacred term for a set of cultic or religious prohibitions instituted by traditional religious authorities as instruments for moral motivation, guidance, and objectivity for protecting the sanctity of their shrines and the wellbeing of their worshipping communities. Eyisi (2006) defines it as "actions or behaviours that are in disagreement with culture, tradition and or the belief of a people or the community" (p. 4). The same perspective was

articulated by Uche (2009) when he defined taboos as “anything which is forbidden or disapproved of for religious reasons or by social custom” (p. 239). Given the nature of the African society which is religious, taboos are religious and its violation often linked to the ontological order of the universe, as it can upset the relationship between God and man. Eliade (1976) maintains that “The elements or origins of taboos are always the same: certain things or persons or places belong to different order of being and, therefore, any contact with them would produce an upheaval at the ontological level which might prove fatal” (p. 17). To violate a taboo, among the Igbo is to depart from the norm- *omenani* over which *Ala* the earth goddess presides. They have a strong community dimension. Dauglas (2009) avers that “Taboos depend on a form of community-wide complicity” (p. xii).

These taboos were the ecological guardians that played major roles in the conservation of the trees and forests (Adu-Gyamfi 2011; Johannes 1978, 1982, 1984; Chapman 1985, 1987; Gadgil 1987). In relation to trees and forests, there were taboos prohibiting: clearing of sacred forests or bushes, felling of sacred trees without permission, sell of lands, etc., and violating them incurred not only the wrath of the community but of the ancestors. The importance of these taboos lie in the fact that the trees and cedars most times protected were not plenty in the forest, and thus the restrictions through taboos saved them from extinction. This was a way of preserving these plants for the future generation who are not supposed to be deprived of these rare plants.

Conclusion

Igbo traditional societies were characterized by their close relationship with nature and its resources; and it is from this background that sacred trees take their place. The connection between religion and the understanding of nature contributed

immensely to the preservation of the ecosystem. However, modernization, mechanization and globalization in recent years, have transformed the Igbo society and weakened traditional indigenous values in terms of both cultural and biological integrity. Changes in social beliefs and cultural practices are major factors contributing to the degradation of the ecosystem.

This work has shown how African traditional religion and socio-cultural practices like sacred trees have contributed towards the management and conservation of natural resources through ascription to the invisible powers of nature. At the heart of the success of this traditional knowledge system is the relationship between these trees and supernatural beings and the use of taboos to enforce their adherence. Looking at the present condition of the African environment, this work, therefore, argues that there is the need to revive ancient institutional heritage for the sustainability of the environment.

It is, therefore, recommended that indigenous religious beliefs of the African people should be restudied within the context of respect for particular the experience of the African rather than dismissing them as fetish. There is need to go beyond the taboos which look unserious for many to understand the rationale behind the taboos; society should work towards the utilization of indigenous knowledge in her relationship with indigenous people, especially as it relates to the preservation of the environment. This is very important as indigenous groups adapt to their natural environment in ways that conserve both their ecosystems and themselves as an integrated social ecological system; traditional leaders who are the custodians of African traditional values should be involved in the process of environmental preservation among indigenous people; the government should draw up strategies for the preservation of the ecosystem in such a manner that the indigenous knowledge

systems are supported and employed; there is need for legislative protection to traditional or indigenous methods of conservation of the environment. This must also be ensured that it is implemented; there is need for a scientific study and documentation of indigenous ecological knowledge systems. In fact, this should also be incorporated into the curriculum of primary and secondary schools so that people get used to it.

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Chapter Six

SACRED OBJECTS AND IGBO ECOSPIRITUALITY

Nwanchor Otubo Edwin, PhD
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Dept. of Religion and Human Relations
Anambra State
revedwinnwanchor@gmail.com

Executive Summary

The Igbo deities are not only associated with nature and natural objects but are also depicted with material objects from nature. The need to depict the gods in material object symbols-sculpted or natural- may be connected with the sophistication of Igbo phenomenological mind. Achebe argues that the Igbo have a natural proclivity to transcribe abstract or spiritual concepts in tangible, visual forms. Phenomenology relates basically to the human mental capacity to make visible what is “hidden” in the spirit world, and to “see” or discover the hidden dimension of physical things. The Igbo believe that the spiritual world can assume physically just as the physical can shed its materiality. This perhaps is the philosophical basis for symbolizing the gods with material objects. Therefore, Igbo phenomenological thought pertains to the peoples tendency to make the invisible visible and the historic historical through art and a variety of other symbolic forms. The intangible elements of the Igbo worldview are perceived through the optics of tangible things, hence the ecospirituality of the Igbo belief system. This piece will, therefore, study Igbo sacred objects in relation to eco-spirituality. For the purpose of the study, the phenomenological method of inquiry will be patronized.

Keywords: Sacred Objects, Igboland, Africa, Eco-spirituality, Ecosystem

Introduction

Man lives in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God. Mans understanding of God is strongly coloured by his understanding of the universe of which man himself is part. The invisible world is symbolized or manifested by the visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature. The invisible world presses hard upon the visible one. As the Igbo extend their conceptualization beyond persons to the environment, the continued application of the principle of duality provides recognition that there are also deities which are the complementary or twin elements of the ontological phenomena of thought, action and nature.

The Igbo gods or deities are spirit beings; they are conceived of and worshipped in physical ways. Man as a physical creature, encounters the gods through the medium of nature and the material objects of nature. The probable idea that comes to mind regarding the material aspect of Igbo religion is that it is the product of the ecosystem, or rather a product of the environment. The ecology of Igboland has left its imprint on the people's religion. The Igbo religion basically revolves around natural elements from the Igbo ecosystem- sky, sun, thunder, waterbodies, land, hill, trees and animals. Again, while the gods bear names that are akin to natural elements, the rituals celebrate the seasons and other rhythms of natural life.

The Impact of Ecology on Igbo Traditional Religion

The impact of ecology can be seen and felt through the ecological necessity in the vast materiality of religion in Igboland. Parrinder (1974) observed that in West Africa, religion appears material at first sight. Belief in many gods and their identification with

material objects or elements of nature seems consequent upon the vitality of nature in this rain-forest zone. Men fear the forces of nature and try to propitiate them. This is in contrast to the Central and Southern Africa whose peoples, Parrinder says, "have not developed belief in nature gods" (p. 43). Most West African deities have natural elements or material objects that are associated with them and also serve as their temples or medium of interaction with devotees.

In Igboland, *Ani* deity is associated with land; and as the Earth Mother, she is symbolized with a sculpted woman with a child or children on her. *Amadioha* in Umunneoha or *Kamalu* in Ngwa area is associated with thunder. River goddesses are associated with particular rivers or streams that are also known by the same name as the goddesses (Arinze, 2008). For example, *Iyi-oku* in Awhum or *Imoka* in Awka are names of goddesses that are associated with certain rivers. Forest goddesses are associated with particular sacred forests like *Offia* awoke and *Nte ophina* in Ikwo of Ebonyi state. The shrines for the river goddesses are located beside the streams or they may have a pot or bowl of water in the vicinity of the shrines. Deities associated with hills are often located near particular hills, as in the case of the defunct *Ugwu-ezeama* deity in Imezi Owa and *Uto* deity of Ugwu-uto in Nsude.

Spirits and gods are also associated with trees and animals, and often take their names and significance from the names and significances of those natural elements. In other words, the importance of a particular natural object would highlight the importance the people attach to the deity associated with it. The scarcity of water in the semi-arid zone of Ojebe-Ogene can explain the importance of *Iyi-oku* both as a stream and a goddess of Awhum. Similarly, according to Ezechi (2018) the importance of land to the farmers may also explain the important place of

Ani deity in Igboland. Some other deities may be associated with man or woman life- birth, death, healing, feeding, protection, etc. For example, *Akwari* is associated to procreation (Metuh, 1999) while *Agwu* is linked with healing (Ejizu, 2002) and *Fiajioku* with feeding- especially with yam, the king of Igbo agricultural products (Afigbo, 1981). Every natural object has a spirit or god associated with it. The people also find in those natural objects an easy contact point for interacting with the spirits and gods. The African Traditional Religion holds that the objects which the spirits inhabit are not permanent habitat for the spirits. The spirits are separate and separable from the objects they are habited in.

The Material Character of Igbo Gods

The outcome of the above study on the impact of ecology on Igbo religion is that the deities are spirit-beings but they are manifest in material things. They are also prone to be represented in man-made images or objects. It is misleading to take these material things or material forces as Igbo deities *de facto*. Parrinder (1974) establishes the fact that spirits in African religions are other than the material things or the energy in things. They are supernatural agents that can inhabit or make their abode in material things- hills, rivers, rocks and trees. Spirits manifest in material things in order to come into communication with humans. But it is not all spirits that are gods. Parrinder suggests that those spirits that become gods are necessarily personified, that is, made tangible. In his words, “some of them are personified as gods in animistic fashion, but they are still potent forces in human life” (p. 23).

The distinctive difference between gods and mere spirits in African religion could be based on whether or not the people are wont to personify such a spirit being. For some writers on African religions, the concept of “personification” implies attributing personhood to objects or forces of nature such as the

sun, rivers, trees and animals; thereby regarding them as if they were intelligent beings (Kanu 2015; Arinze, 2008; Hackett, 1998; MacGaffey, 1990; Mbiti, 2011; Metuh, 1999). Their perception of spirits as personified natural forces relates to Muller's naturism, in which case natural forces are described as performing actions in manners only proper to humans (see Durkheim, 1995). But Muller himself presents spirits derives in this manner as illusion because, they are assumed the products of the error of misappropriated language.

For Parrinder, however, to personify a natural element is not merely to attribute personhood to it. It particularly involves translating that imaginary "person" into a tangible entity through material symbolization. Parrinder seems to highlight the distinctive character of the gods by pointing out that they are often personified in tangible images. He cited the Earth spirit as an example of a widely acclaimed deity among the Africans, particularly the Igbo. This is unlike the Tallensi of northern Ghana who do not personify the Earth as a goddess, some others do. In particular, he says, "the Igbo of Nigeria makes images of Mother Earth with a child in her arms, like an Italian Madonna" (p. 23). Hence, it seems that for him, to personify a spirit is to represent it with images some natural objects, especially man-made images and objects.

The images made for deities are veritable shrines for them as they have become their contact-points with votaries or worshippers. Parrinder in the words of Ezechi (2018) indicates that gods generally have their own temples; and by natural consequence, they normally have attendant priests. The dedication of a specific temple and attendant priest indicates stability of cult and makes organized worship the essential character of a god or deity in Igbo religious setting. Granted this observation by Parrinder, it can be assumed that non deified

spirit do not enjoy permanent cult. The validity of this theory can be verified with the *Ogbanje* spirit in Igboland. Like the deities, *Ogbanje* spirits receive sacrifices from votaries seeking to avert their rage and anger. They may also be pacified or decorated with material images such as dolls and or other man made images. They have no designated temple or place of worship, and no specific priest. Therefore, unlike the deities, their worships are sporadic and occasional, arising as need not as a cult.

Indeed, not all spirits are perceived by Africans to be gods; not all are even deserving of worship (Ekeke & Ekeopara, 2010; Nwoga, 1984a). According to Nwoga, "it is not automatic that every spirit is a god" (p. 34). He perceives in Igbo thought three forms of realities- the physical (matter), the spiritual (spirit) and the conceptual (god). Since the gods are mere conceptual entities, he surmises, anything can be a god if the people conceive it as such. Thus Nwoga stated that,

Spirits may be gods just as physical material objects may be gods. It is by an act of conceptualization and activation that a god is realized. When an object, material or spiritual, is said to be or appreciated to be, or acts as, a god, then it may be a god (p. 34).

It is worthy of note that he sees the gods as products of human "act of conceptualization". In other words, for him, deity is a mere fabrication of the human mind. Whatever a man declares as god is god- whether it is spirit or matter. In that case, the existence of deity would be imaginary, not a reality. Ezechi noted that Nwoga does not say how this mentally fabricated or conceptual entity is activated- whether by man's act of sacrifice or his will-power. At any rate, he gives man the credit of bringing gods into existence. But once conceived, each god or deity would have a physical as well as a spiritual aspect- what Nwoga calls

the twin elements of deities. The visible element would be man's tangible way of identifying the invisible being. For example, the sky god is associated by the human mind with the sky just as Idemili would be both a river and the spirit inhabiting it. It can then be deduced that, for Nwoga, gods or deities must have a physical manifestation to aid their worship and interaction with devotees. It then follows that the physical manifestation with spiritual presence signifies the realities of human relationship and worship of the spirit-beings.

By and large, a deity is a spirit that deserves the peoples worship and it is indeed worshipped. For that reason, also, deities need physical representation or manifestation. The nature of man demands that his interaction with spiritual beings need occur in material form. The image, shrine or temple, the totems and other material ritual forms associated with deities make worship easy as a human phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the non manifestation of a deity would be tantamount to its non existence. And non existing deities cannot be worshipped by the Africans or the Igbo.

The Root of Igbo Rituals and Ecospirituality

Igbo traditional rituals evolve from peoples experiences in their world, from their encounter with environmental perturbations. Therefore, they necessarily manifest a profoundly material character. Rituals are the physical or material aspect of religion. They translate the intellectual elements of the people's faith to the cultural level of meaning.

What is ritual?

Ritual can be used to describe behaviours in a wide range of fields. For example, the routine morning offerings of an African elder, early morning public worship in Igboland might all qualify as ritual. In all these cases, the idea of a pattern or a

repetitive behaviour-pattern is highlighted. Thus technically, ritual refers to prescribed or established method of doing things. From a religious perspective, Turner (1967) defines ritual as “prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (p. 19). He is criticized for limiting the scope of ritual to religion (Enekwe,1987; Goody, 1977).Enekwe particularly argues that since ritual basically refers to formalized activity, there is no intrinsic exclusion of “those other rituals that are non-religious, but are concerned with specialized parts of the social/cultural background”(p. 25). Kelleher (2003) recalls the social nature of ritual in general, that it is a function of the dynamics of the social process, “the interplay between two different needs, the need for structure or social order and the need to experience the more basic human bonding that is prior to any order”(p. 906). Therefore, it may be rewarding for proper understanding of ritual to recognize that it is a multi-disciplinary concept.

Rappaport (1999) views ritual as a man’s adaptive response to environmental perturbations. Every environment presents its inhabitants with natural challenges. It bears peculiar social and natural event that affect human conditions. Rappaport suggests that in responding to environmental realities, societies, indeed every living system, naturally develop by repeated performance or experience, an established manner of surviving in their world, a formal way of doing things. In other words, ritual emerges often as a result of people’s effort to cope with their respective environment. It involves moving from improvising ways of surviving to evolving permanent physiological structures. Or, as Rappaport puts it, ritual entails “short-term reversible changes of state and longer-term irreversible changes in structure” (p. 6). In any case, the repetition of action or manner of response-whether it is mental or physical behaviour-before a given

problem would in time become normal for the people, and so stylize as their established and prescribed system of approaching such problem. Ritual as an adaptation process may manifest in terms of fixed mind-set, belief system, cultures, philosophy of life, behaviour pattern, observances, taboos, and customs or even settlement patterns noticeable in various societies.

For example, in the event of soil degradation, people may decide to enhance yam production by reducing the number of crops planted in the same farm with yam. However, in the long run, this caution may evolve into a sacred observance and custom in which case it is now regarded as offensive to the gods to plant particular crop in a yam farm. It is basically done for the survival of the people in the face of ecological challenges. Most of Igbo traditional rituals could be explained in this way - land observances, agricultural rituals, sex taboos, and even masquerade rituals. They probably evolved from simple but temporary precautionary practices to complex and permanent behaviour-patterns or ways of life. They are efforts of the people to adapt to the situations of their environment.

Ritual is the normal way of doing things within a cultural setting- a way of worshipping a deity, of breaking kola nut, of praying, of handing a daughter over in marriage. Rappaport recognizes, like Turner, the idea of "formal act" or "specific form of action" as a significant feature of ritual. But he curiously argues that the formal actions or rituals are not necessarily associated with physical efficacy. In his words, "formal action of ritual is not instrumental in any ordinary sense nor produce a practical result on the external world" (p. 46). The assertion is questionable because among worshippers in Igbo traditional religion, ritual is thought to produce desired physical result. For example, the masquerade ritual assures the traditional Igbo of material blessings from the gods- children, enough rain, good harvest,

protection (Aniako 1978; Enekwe 1981, 1987; Okeke & Okechukwu 1978; Okafor 1995; Onyehalu 1987). Thus, contrary to Rappaport's view, ritual has material efficacy. Among other things, it “reduces anxiety by making people believe that what has been desired has been effected or will be fulfilled” (Enekwe, 1987, p. 25). It equally gives the people confidence and the feeling of control over unpredictable phenomena, (Tauli-Corpuz 2001). For Ray (1976), ritual acts are instrumental in the sense that “they not only say what reality is but they also shape the word to conform with its reality” (p. 17).

As a matter of fact, many non African religions view their rituals as producing desired effects *ex opera operato*, that is, by virtue of their physical performance with requisite conditions. The efficacy of any ritual does not depend on the person who performed it but rather depends on the adherence to the procedural steps demanded by the ritual. Ritual as a religious matter is determined by the peculiarity of a particular religion. The ritual in African Traditional Religion cannot follow the same ritual pattern. It is the differences in ritual processes in different religions that differentiate one religion from the other. Rituals bear the language of different religion. The Priest of any religion performs the ritual acts according to and with the requirements of the religion. Durkheim (1995) in Ezechi (2018) also sees the efficacy of religious rituals to be associated with the action as performed. He recalls the need in some traditional societies to observe specific formulas for religious events in order to produce desired effects. With particular note on Jewish rituals, he observes that during their Feast of Tabernacles the people stirred the air by shaking willow branches in a certain rhythm to make rain to fall. Thus, according to him, it is the people’s belief that “the rite produced the desired result automatically, provided it was correctly performed” (p. 33). Then he observes further that:

it is this, by the way, that explains the primary importance that nearly all cults give to the physical aspect of ceremonies. This religious formalism (...) arises from the fact that, having in and of themselves the source of their efficacy, the formulas to be pronounced and the movements to be executed would lose efficacy if they were not exactly the same as those that had already proved successful (p. 33).

In the light of this formalism, Durkheim defines ritual (which he interchanges with rite) as “rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things” (p. 38). For the purpose of this work, ritual is understood as a habitual ceremony or activity expressing the people’s worldview and embodying their communal response to existential realities both in the contexts of spiritual and the physical realities. Put the other way, ritual is the people’s traditional activity expressed in their physical and spiritual realities as embodied in their world view.

Ritual Evolution and Ecospirituality among the Igbo

The fact that rituals evolve from ecosystem, and that there is an interaction between people and their environment has been noted by scholars (Grimes, 1995; Kelleher, 1999). It evolves in the process of man’s effort to survive within a given environment, against ecological perturbations. It becomes quite logical that rituals not only naturally derive from the environment but they are also coloured by that environment. And, they are coloured in accordance with environmental traits. For example, the fact that Igbo live in the rain-forest zone of West Africa has implications for their vast association with natural elements that form the ecospirituality or the environmental friendly relations with these natural factors- land, sun, water, trees or wood, etc. The importance of ecology or the environment in the evolution of Igbo culture in general is noted by scholars (Afigbo, 1975a; Jones,

1961). Afigbo points to the ecological or ecospirituality factor, especially *Ani*, the Earth, in understanding Igbo religion and rituals. The *Ani*, he says, occupies a prominent place in the people's religious worship and when provoked,

Could cause the harvests to fail and men to die prematurely- to the Igbo two of the worst disasters imaginable. It imposed innumerable laws and taboos to guide conduct between man and man, as between man and itself. The transgression of any of these rules known as *omenala* was promptly punished (pp. 42-43).

The significance of agriculture to traditional Igbo economy seems to account for the importance of land. The Igbo also have the earth goddess or *Ani* for man's spiritual and sacrificial purposes. Land is used for buildings, constructions and infrastructural developments. Sequel to this is the high population density of this rain-forest zone, which induces land scarcity. Thus, the *sacralization* or deification of land in Igboland may have resulted as an inevitable backwash (Kalu, 2003). In some places, Kalu observes:

Decorative shrines are built for the goddess. In other places, with plentiful expanse of agricultural land, a non-descript mound may serve. But in all she guards customs and morality. She arbitrates disputes because a false oath in her shrine could be dangerous (p. 35).

But the avowed scarcity of land is worsened- especially in northern Igboland- by soil erosion and degradation caused, perhaps, by long-time habitation and cultivation of the geographical zone (Afigbo, 1981; Allison, 1962; Hartle, 1967; Ijoma, 2002). It has been suggested that the northern part of Igbo is the first to be occupied among all parts of modern Igboland (Afigbo, 1975a, 1981). Quoting Hartle, Ezechi (2018) reiterated that the occupation of this part of Igboland is dated as far back as the Neolithic age or 3rd Century BC (Hartle, 1967). The implication of long habitation and cultivation of this area is the

replacement of the vegetal cover, which characterized it as a rain forest, with semi-savanna forest or grass land (Afigbo, 1975a).

A Brief look at other Sacred Objects

Trees

Trees form a great part of the forces of nature with huge religious significance for the traditional Igbo. Some of the commonest trees with religious sacred importance to the Igbo include; *Ofo* tree, *Oji* or *Iroko* tree, the kola nut tree, *Akpu* tree, *Ogirisi* tree, *Oha* tree, *Ogbu* tree, *Ngwu* tree as well as *Aja-ezi* tree, *Okwe*, and so forth. Some trees like Palm tree have economic values while some others are herbal (Ifesieh, 1989). To be sure every tree or plant is believed to possess some power or force that can affect man positively or negatively. Some trees are used in marking or identifying the shrine of some deities. Such trees like *Akpu*, *Aja-ezi*, *Ogirisi* and *Oha* are also known to be quick survivors. Some trees are associated with particular spirits and are usually found in their shrines or sacred places. Some other categories of trees, perhaps due to their sizes or the power they exude are regarded as great trees- *Oke osisi*- and they are viewed as embodiments of spirits. *Ofo* is another tree with great religious sacredness and significance among the Igbo. As a ritual object, *Ofo* symbolizes for the Igbo a general concept of justice and propriety (Bentor, 1988). Bentor also observes that it primarily functions as a proof of innocence.

In a society where everything is believed to have indwelling spirit of its own, the great trees tend to acquire personality status like human beings. The activities of the indwelling spirits are viewed as performed by the trees.

Animals

Animals are an important class of nature that features prominently in the sacredness of world religions. In the ancient Celtic religion, gods were named after beasts- like the goddess *Epona* whose name means Horse, whose icon includes a horse. In Igboland, different communities and families hold different animals as sacred. The animals may merely be assumed to have some affinity with the clan or to be the manifestation of some local deities. For example, *Agu-owulu*, the Leopard is related to *Omabe* spirit (Aniakor, 1978). Sometimes, the animals are treated as property of some deities. In Awka, the Monkey is sacred to *Imoka* deity and it is never to be killed or eaten by the indigenes. The python, *eke*, is not to be killed in many Igbo communities because it belongs to the deity *Idemili* (Achebe, 1982; Ifesieh, 1989).

Arts/Carved Objects

Spirits as the key objects of artistic representation in the traditional religion, are overly conceived in anthropomorphic terms. It seems that man cannot properly conceive the spirit world without forging a representation of it and as Lacroix (1990) points out, "his representation necessarily takes on a human form" (p.94). Ezechi (2018) equips most of the effigies of Igbo deities whether in public or private shrines, have human appearances. Divinized elements of nature like the earth, thunder and other spirit forces and ancestral personages are captured by religious artists in human morphology. Most traditional Igbo sculptures are wood works - varieties of masks, *Ikenga* figures, sacred stools or *okposi* and so forth. The fact is that most products of Igbo traditional art appear crude, ugly, and childish and may not fit into modern or western idea of art.

Conclusion

In addition to the earth, other terrestrial elements of nature or sacred objects that feature prominently in traditional religious symbolism include – trees, hills, water bodies, animals and especially man. Nature in general, Mbiti (2011) affirms, serves for the manifestation or depiction of God or divinity. Most African tribes associate God or the spiritual world with human nature as well as with animals, trees, even stones and water bodies. The African, especially the Igbo say that the universe is a religious entity. Nature is filled with religious sacred objects of significance man gives life where natural objects and phenomena have no biological life. God therefore is seen in and behind these objects and phenomena; they are his creation, they manifest him, they symbolize his being and presence.

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Chapter Seven

AFRICAN MYTHS AND THE ENVIRONMENT: A LOOK AT SOME MYTHS AND TOTEMS AMONG THE TIV OF CENTRAL NIGERIA

Terngu S. Nomishan

*Department of Archaeology and Museum Studies,
Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria
terngu.nomishan@fulokoja.edu.ng
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8275-3134>*

Executive Summary

Myths are specific accounts of gods or super-human beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience. Myths are also accounts of the origin of societies and institutions not necessarily subject to rationalization. A totem on the other hand is an animal, a plant or any other natural object believed to be ancestrally related to a tribe, clan, family or group of people as a tutelary spirit. The aim of this chapter is to critically examine the existence and significance of African myths/totems in their association with the environment in Tiv society. Emphasis is particularly on the Ikyalem (green snake) myth and totemic beliefs such as dog meat, Ibohough (*Gardenia erubescens*), Ivervese (*Typlops punctatus*) and several others - associated with the cultural history of the Tiv of Central Nigeria. The nature, types and reasons for the formulation of myths, and how the environment pave the way for a meaningful existence of myths in Tivland is also examined. This research is timely and most importantly problem solving, because of the fast disappearance of the knowledge of myths and totems in Tiv society. Data for this

research has been collected through In-Depth Interviews, key informants and Focus Group Discussion with elders, traditional heads and other people with good knowledge of myths and totemic beliefs in Tiv society. In addition to this, secondary data were also acquired from existing literatures to collaborate oral information.

Keywords: African myths, Environment, Culture, History, Tiv, Totem, Nigeria

Introduction

For us to meaningfully discuss the entanglement between myths and the environment in Tivland, it is paramount to first understand the meanings of myth and the environment. This will enable us to appreciate the influence these two terms exert on each other to produce a vibrant culture. There exist myths and totems in Tiv history and culture, particular the story of the *Ikyaren* (green snake). Many historical and philosophical writings about the Tiv usually make mention of the story of *Ikyaren*, stressing how it saved the early Tiv people from perishing (see Gbor, 1978; Makar, 1975; Gundu, 1999; Aboh, 2005; Ndera, 2009, 2013; Dzurgba, 2012; Nomishan, 2021). This story is given in a later part of this chapter.

What, therefore, is the meaning of myth and the environment? A myth is a story which is believed to be true and has its origin in the far distant past history of a people (Jaja, 2012; Kanu 2015a). Myths are specific accounts of gods or super-human beings involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in a time that is unspecified but which is understood as existing apart from ordinary human experience (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). Myths are also accounts of the origin of societies and institutions not necessarily subject to rationalization but often used by historians and philosophers in their quest to study African

history (Jaja, 2012; Kanu 2015b). The main characters in myths are usually non-humans, such as gods, demigods, and other supernatural figures (Jacqueline and Roud, 2003).

Human beings in their nature cannot live without myths because there are always certain unanswered questions that influence the formulation of myths in the society. These myths are then used to answer such questions, though not completely reflecting realities in such societies; they aid historians and philosophers amongst other intellectuals to reconstruct cultural histories of different groups.

The place of myths in various traditions and cultural environments differs from one another. This is because the environmental provisions that permit the formulation of myths in one society or the other are hardly the same. For example the formulation of *Ikyalem* myth and other totems of the Tiv people (which is the main focus of this chapter) were possible because of the presence of thing like the river, forest, animals and birds etc. in the environment of their formulation.

In the words of Jaja (2012) myths

“generally contain three kinds of stories namely, stories of origin, explanatory stories and didactic stories. Each of these stories is meant to explain a particular phenomenon. Myth is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery but living chronicles in the minds of Africans. They contain and express the history, the culture and the inner experience of the African himself. Africans use myths to explain how things came to be through the efforts of a supernatural being. It is concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do”.

There are basically 12 major types of myths. These include; Myths of origin, Myths of eschatology and destruction, Messianic and millenarian myths, Myths of culture heroes and soteriological myths, Myths of time and eternity, Myths of providence and destiny, Myths of rebirth and renewal, Myths of memory and forgetting, Myths of high beings and celestial gods, Myths concerning founders of religions and other religious figures, Myths of kings and ascetics, and Myths of transformation (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). The *Ikyalem* myth and other totems of the Tiv are closely related to many types of myths listed immediate above.

Away from the concept of myth, is that of the environment. The environment is refers to as the sum total of the conditions within which organisms live; it is the result of interaction between non-living and living parameters (Barrow, 1993). It connotes everything that surrounds or affects an organism during its life time such as people, place and things. This can either be natural or man-made. The environment can basically be classified into 3 broad types; biotic, abiotic and cultural environment.

The Biotic elements refer to the biological component of the ecosystem, consisting of population of plants, animals and micro-organisms in complex communities. While the 'Abiotic' which do not involve living organisms, include the flow of energy necessary to maintain any organism, the physical factor that affect it and the supply of molecules required for life to function. This is in addition to other physical factors like climate, temperature, precipitation (rain, snow, dew, etc.), soil type (sandy or clay, dry or wet, fertile or infertile). Lastly, Cultural environment represent stages of development that human beings have attained in the path towards progress which after all, models or determine what an established way of life becomes).

Following influences from religious understanding, economic pressures and fundamental knowledge of nature, humans turn to view their place in the society from different angles. Based on this diversity of backgrounds, different cultures turn to value the natural world in different ways.

Generally, the continued interaction between humans and their environments after a long passage of time - resulting to a conscious advancement of the society, humans turn to transformed the environment to function in their favour and serve their cultural, social, economic and political interests. These interactions enable humans to also formulate myths necessary to give answers to certain unanswered questions regarding their origins, histories and culture.

Myths amongst the Tiv People

The major mythological account associated with the history of the Tiv and their environment is the story of the *Ikyalem*.

The Ikyalem Myth

The *Ikyalem* myth amongst the Tiv is associated with the migratory history of the Tiv people. The oral traditions of the Tiv account that they “had many conflicts and wars with their neighbours in Congo (where they settled before their initial movement). As the Tiv were brave and difficult to be defeated, all their neighbours ganged up against them and planned to wipe out the Tiv through a surprise attack. Consequently, because the Tiv were a religious and prayerful family, some elements amongst their neighbours leaked the plan and the Tiv got to know of the planned attack” (Aboh, 2005, cited from Nomishan, 2020, p. 29).

This led to the beginning of movement by the Tiv from Congo. “This meant that they had to cross River Congo which was almost an impossible task. Thus, a mysterious snake called *Ikyalem* (green snake) formed a bridge across the River Congo to help all the members of The Tiv family cross the river” (Nomishan, 2020, p. 29). This mythological act has singlehandedly ensured that the Tiv do not intentionally kill the *Ikyalem*, and forbid anyone from carrying out the act in Tivland (Makar, 1975; Gundu, 1999; Aboh, 2005; Ndera, 2009, 2013; Dzurgba, 2012; Ndera, 2013; Nomishan, 2021).

The oral traditions of the Tiv account that this mysterious action of the *Ikyalem* enabled the Tiv people to proceed on their journey through many forests and later succeeded in reaching a place called “Swem”. The Tiv people to this day regard the Swem as their ancestral homeland (Nomishan, 2020). However, according to Nomishan (2020, p.29-30);

the exact location of Swem has been a matter of controversy amongst scholars. Akiga (1939) claimed that Swem is a hill in the Iyon area of Ikyurav-Ya in south-eastern Tivland and that he visited Swem in 1934. Bohannan and Bohannan (1954) also claimed Swem is actually the Ngol-Kedju hill located in the Bamenda highlands, south-western Cameroon. Makar (1975) concluded from the oral traditions he collected amongst the Tiv that, Swem is located in Nyiev-Ya in the present Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State. He noted that Swem is a mountain that is about 36 miles southwest of the compound of Mr Yaro Gusa the District Head of Nyiev-ya. Gbor (1978) and Orkar (1979) were not specific in their location of Swem, but saw Swem as a hill located on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, southeast of the present Tivland.

For Dzugba (2007:26) Swem is located at the source of Katsina-Ala River in North-western Cameroon". Dzugba further stressed that "Swem is located in the Akwaya Subdivision or Local Government Area". It is in a range of mountains in the area which stands taller amongst all the others. The hill is also referred to as Swem by the Akwaya people who include the Iyon, Ugbe, and Utange amongst others. These Cameroonian groups also claim to be Tiv and their kith and kins reside in Nigeria in Moon District, Kwande Local Government Area of Benue State (see Akiga, 1939; Gbor, 1974; Makar, 1975, 1994; Gundu, 1999; Aboh, 2005; Dzugba, 2007; and Ndera, 2009, 2013).

It is from the Swem area that the Tiv people later migrated into the Middle Benue Valley following trigger forces such persistent attacks from tribes like *Bafum* who were already occupying the Swem area before the arrival of the Tiv people, population explosion and the need for wider/suitable land for the production of sufficient food to keep the growing population. The Tiv have since been living in the Middle Benue Valley for over 500 to 600 years ago.

The myth of *Ikyalem* is told from generations to generations, ensuring that no Tiv son endangers the green snake intentionally. This snake is on the other hand harmless to the Tiv sons and daughters. It is the most common snake often seen in the Tivland. It can be seen in settlements, compounds and sometimes on the roof of thatched houses. And wherever the *Ikyakem* is identified, it is allowed to wilfully move away without any harm.

Totemic Beliefs

As noted earlier, a totem is an animal, a plant or any other natural object believed to be ancestrally related to a tribe, clan, family or group of people as a tutelary spirit (Mariko, 1981). In other words, a totem is a natural thing (animal or plant) believed by a particular society to have spiritual significance and adopted as an emblem. There are several totemic beliefs amongst the Tiv people. These totems include;

- i. Dog Meat: the Tiv people have right from time immemorial forbidden the consumption of dog meat by all member of the Tiv society (Gurumyen *et al.*, 2020). This is because of a mystical believe that whenever a Tiv person eat dog meat (whether intentionally or unintentionally), he or she is bound to experience unfamiliar health conditions. Therefore, if it is eaten in error, at the instance of any knowledge about it, the person in question immediately approaches a commissioned traditionalist for cleansing to avert the calamities that are bound to befall him or her. If it is not cleansed, the person in question will suffer certain health challenges and cannot carry his or her child. If it is a man that eats dog meat, his wife will be having miscarriages until the family is cleansed. And if it is a woman that eats dog meat she will have difficulty conceiving, and when she eventually conceived, the fetus will be mysteriously expelled from the womb. This will continue as many times as she conceives until she is cleansed.
- ii. *Ibohough* (*Gardenia erubescens*): this is a tree that is believed to have mystical powers to protect humans from being attacked by elephants (Dagba *et al.*, 2013). It is believed that whenever a human person hides under the *Ibohough* or is holding its branch, elephants become handicap in attacking him or her.

- iii. *Kpikyegh (Psorospermum corymbiferum)*: there is an ancient believe amongst the Tiv people that whenever the *Kpikyegh* tree is used as fuel or firewood, it will mysteriously cause the death of all the fowls (chickens) in the house where it is used. The Tiv people therefore, deploy a good knowledge of their environment in the selection of wood for fuel to prevent any associated calamity.
- iv. *Ikyor (Cricetomys gambianus)*: the Tiv people have a long existing believe that whenever the animal called *Ikyor* is seen walking in the daytime, particularly around settlements, it is a sign of bad omen. Some people believe that such action by the *Ikyor* is an indication that a member of the family may eventually die in the nearest future.
- v. *Ivervese (Typllops punctatus)*: this is a snake that usually has difficulty of seen in the day time except during the night. Thus, the Tiv people do not approve of the consumption of its meat by a pregnant woman. The Tiv believe that whenever a pregnant woman consumes the *Ivervese* meat, her new born baby will have sight defect especially during the day time. The child will only be able to see clearly at night.
- vi. *Hur (Annona senegalensis)*: *Hur* is a tree that is believed amongst the Tiv to have mystical powers of preventing snake bites. It is further believed that even when a person is bitten by a snake, the application of leaves obtain from *Hur* is capable of curing the poison from the bites.
- vii. *Ivungu (Bubo poensis)*: The Tiv people believe that the *Ivungu* is a witch bird and do not approve of its consumption. The Tiv also believe that whoever throws stones at this bird may eventually die in the nearest future. Therefore, no one in Tivland throw stones at the *Ivungu*.

The above discussed totemic beliefs are a selected few amongst many others that are in existence in Tiv society.

Discussion and Conclusion

Historically, all societies developed ways of explaining past and the present issues of difficult understanding. As noted earlier, all African groups have a history and most of their historical traditions incorporate myths and totems that are used to provide answers to very difficult questions concerning their origin and identity. The formulation of these myths and totems is also made possible by the provisions of the natural environment in any given location. The Tiv society is not left out, as it is abundantly endowed with natural, cultural and human resources that combine together to form mystical and totemic beliefs.

Myths and totemic beliefs are a common part of the Tiv society. While some of this myths and totems still have some levels of relevance in Tivland, others are largely losing relevance, especially in the contemporary Tiv society. It is believed that several people continue to suffer from mysterious diseases and situations in Tivland without solution. This is because most of the people who suffer diseases purported to have been caused by mystical animals, plants or sites in the environment refuses to follow the traditional means of getting remedy and prefer to seek remedy from medical centres. This also interprets the influence of Christianity and modernization on the Tiv society.

Further, all the myths and totemic beliefs discussed above are either animal-based or plant-based. The *Ikyalem* is a snake (animal-based), dog meat (animal-based), *Ibohough* (plant-based), *Kpikyegh* (plant-based), *Kpikyegh* (animal-based), *Ivervese* (animal-based), *Hur* (plant-based). This means that all the myths and totems discussed above have everything to do with the environment of their formulation. The environment is generally their enabler, and what guarantees their existence. Animals live and feed on others animal and plants found in the environment. And the plants exist with support from the environmental

resources like the sun, soil, moisture, nutrients, and dead organisms etc.

Therefore, this chapter reveal how the interaction or entanglement between the environment and organisms that live in it pave the way for cultural formation and development of identity. In this case, their entanglement ensures the formulation of myths and totemic beliefs that assist the Tiv people to give answers to difficult questions regarding their origin, migration, identity and development. The existence of myths and totemic beliefs in Tiv society also ensured that consciousness exist in the ways of living. This also helps the Tiv society to maintain high cultural morals amongst Tiv people especially the youths.

Knowledge of these myths and totems is given to the young generations by their elders (particular grandparents). In the historical days, grandparents used gather their young ones in the evening to share with them stories about these myths and totems before going to bed especially in weekends. As a kid, I was told the story of God and of the origin of life. The history of the Patriarch of all the Tiv people was also told to me by my grandparents on several occasions. The evening interaction with my grandparents ensured that I had good knowledge of the importance of the *Ikyalem* in the cultural history and identity of all the Tiv people. This teaching ensures that the young ones gained a good knowledge of their origin, identity and cultural history. The teaching also guarantees the young ones knowledge about their environment and its provisions, and how to relate with it or manipulate it.

This also ensures that the environment as well as the myths and totems are well protected by the people around them (Cox, 2000; Venkataraman, 2000). People in all locations of the Tivland take

possession of their environment and jealously protect it to prevent unwarranted trespassing and harm. All lands in Tiv society have a cultural attachment from one group or the other. This explains how the Tiv people interact very well with their environment to guarantee continuous survival.

However, modernization has greatly affected this traditional way of teaching the young generations about their origin, identity, history, culture and traditions; which also help to inculcate moral values into the young ones. Nowadays, parents disregard this all-important culture of influencing the young ones to learn good African values. This is done especially by parents living in towns and cities. Most parents in this category neglect the importance of teaching their children cultural history, African values and moral upbringing; replacing this all-important part of African life style with those of foreign societies. There is therefore, a growing belief that this recent attitude of most parents is what is causing many young people to be wayward and indulging in social vices.

Thus, this chapter calls for attitudinal change amongst parents to allow the young generations benefit from sound African values and proper upbringing. In addition to this, the government and all other stakeholders in African studies should consider the obvious option of introducing archaeology or heritage studies in primary and secondary schools in order to avail the young generations with the opportunity to gain sound African teachings (norms, values, good morals, proper upbringing and respect for elders, amongst others).

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List of Oral Informants

S/No	Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Date	Type of Information
1	Msean Ibyunde	58	M	District Head	07/01/2019	Tradition of origin
2	Apolo Jiki	76	M	Farmer/hunter	07/01/2019	General information
3	Mbazan Num	74	F	Farmer	07/01/2019	Settlement history
4	Atsemblee Aswe	62	M	Farmer	11/01/2019	Settlement history
5	Verashe Tsegba	56	F	Farmer	11/01/2019	General information
6	Ijor Tyozaa	88	M	Elder	11/01/2019	Myths/Totems
7	Geoffrey Nomishan	54	M	Teacher	12/01/2019	Myths/Totems
8	Terfa Ibyunde	74	M	Farmer	12/01/2019	Myths/Totems
9	Iorundu Agashua	89	M	Farmer	27/03/2019	Tradition of origin
10	Elizabeth Aondohemba	42	F	Farmer	27/03/2019	General information
11	Ahungwa Ijande	96	M	Farmer	27/03/2019	Tradition of origin
12	Abraham Kavgva	48	M	Village Head	28/03/2019	Myths/Totems

Chapter Eight

TOTEMISM IN IGBO-AFRICAN SOCIETY AND THE PRESERVATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM

Ejikemeuwa J. O. NDUBISI, PhD

*Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies
Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, Nigeria
ejikon4u@yahoo.com*

Executive Summary

The reality of totemism is a fact that cannot be denied in African world. It has to do with the veneration of some natural objects, namely, animals, plants and other physical objects. Totems are believed to have some spiritual or supernatural powers. In this regard, the mishandling or killing of totemic animals is considered a taboo in most African cultures. Belief in totems is a common practice in the traditional African society. African people have deep sense of reverence for either their personal or group totems. This study focuses on Igbo society. Therefore, employing the philosophical methods of hermeneutics and critical analysis, the study argues that totems in themselves have no inherent powers and as such, belief in them can best be regarded as irrational and superstitious. However, it further concludes from a functional perspective that totemism has some significance in the area of preservation and maintenance of the ecosystem. In this regard, it recommends that both the government and nongovernmental agencies should ensure that this functional aspect of totemism is sustained.

Keywords: Totemism, African, Igbo Society, Ecosystem, Preservation

Introduction

The traditional Africa is characterized by deep respect and reverence for some selected animals, trees and places. These animals, trees and places are considered to be sacred. The idea of the sacred in African society is as old as the African. Faced with the puzzles, wonders and mysteries in nature, the African had no choice than to consider certain objects and plants as sacred. These objects and places are seen from the perspective of the divine. And as such, they are not to be toyed with; they are given special reverence especially as objects of worship. "The sacred", in the understanding of Roberston, "is to be treated with a certain specific attitude of respect."¹ Africans believe that spirits inhabit the sacred objects and places. This understanding also gave rise to the reality of totems in African ontology. For sure, belief in totems is an existential fact among African people. Certain trees, animals, places and individuals are regarded as totems. They are seen as sacred objects that symbolize something real for the people that entertain such belief. Totems are also believed to possess some spiritual and supernatural powers. The thrust of this study is to expose the belief and practice of totemism in Africa and also to ascertain the significance of such belief and practice in preservation of the ecosystem with particular reference to Igbo society.

A Brief Understanding of Totems

Generally, the notion of totem is associated with the idea of kinship between certain animals, animate or inanimate beings and a particular individual or group of individuals in a given society. It shows that there is a spiritual link between a totemic object and the person or persons concerned. The concept, totem, is derived from the Ojibwa² word *ototeman* which simply means a brother – sister blood tie. The grammatical root *ote* actually signifies a blood relationship between brothers and sisters who have the same mother and who, according to custom, may not

marry each other.³ The Dictionary of Beliefs and Religion sees totems as objects that serve as a representation of a society or person, and from which the members of that society are thought to descend. This implies that totems are symbolic in nature. Various scholars have varied views on the concept of totem. In the understanding of Burton as cited in Nwashindu and Ihediwa, "totems are used to designate those things whose names the clan or family bears or reveres."⁴ In this sense, the kind of name of a person or a particular clan or community can be traced to their totems.

Amirthalingam observes that "totemism denotes a mystical or ritual relationship among members of a specific social group and a specie, of animals or plants."⁵ Theoderson sees the notion of totems as a kind of spiritual bond that exists between a particular animal and a tribe which accounts for the wellbeing of the people.⁶ One thing to note from the various views of scholars is that totemism is an expression of a relationship that exists between particular human beings and their natural environment. This relationship could be between the people and a particular animal, plant or place. For the simple fact of the relationship that exists between a totemic group and the totem, there is a deep reverence for the totemic being. There are rules and regulations to ensure the protection, preservation and reverence of the totemic beings. In most African societies, it is a taboo and a violation of cultural and spiritual life to hurt, mishandle or kill a totemic animal. Totems are handled with utmost respect and care. "Totemism implies respect for and prohibition against the killing and eating of the totemic animals or plants. Underlying this practice is the belief that the members of the group are descendants from a common totemic ancestor and thus are related."⁷ Nwashindu and Ihediwa noted that a survey of Igboland shows the ubiquity of totemic laws, deification of animals and trees, sanctions and retributive actions

guiding men, animals and trees.⁸ The point here is that totems are very much respected by the totemic group. This deep respect may also stem from the belief that totems protect the totemic group from enemies and dangers.

The Practice of Totemism in Africa

The reality of totems or the belief in totems is not something that is new to the African. Africa is well known for the belief and practice of totemism. The African people believe that the human person can be related in two ways. First, a person can have blood relationship. This type of relationship shows that the persons in question have the same father or mother. This is a type of relationship that can be traced by blood. The second understanding of relationship is the totemic relationship. This means that the people in question share the same totems. This can be seen from the perspective of a clan, village or a whole community or even people from different communities with the same totemic being. So human relationship in African perspective can be consanguineous or totemic.

Without mincing words, belief and practice of totemism is a well-known fact in African thought and culture. The world of the African is not only the world of human beings alone; it includes both living and nonliving things. This position is amplified by Onwubiko: "Ideologically speaking, the African world is a world of inanimate, animate and spiritual beings. The African is conscious of the influence of each category of these beings in the universe. Their existence, for the African, is reality; so also is the fact that they interact as co-existent beings in the universe."⁹ Totemism in Africa constitutes part of the cherished cultural values of the African people – the metaphysics of the African people. The nature of this study will not allow us to expose everything about the belief and practice of totemism in Africa.

However, in line with the nature of this paper, we shall focus on totemism in Igbo society.

Totemism in Igbo Worldview

The Igbo people are an ethnic group native to the present day southeast and south-south Nigeria. Igbo people constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa.¹⁰ As one of the ethnic groups in Africa, there are many totemic animals and plants in Igboland. These animals and plants are seen as sacred and as such, are accorded deep reverence. Below are some of the totemic animals and plants in some parts of Igboland:

Python: A python is a large reptile found in many communities of the Igbo cultural area. Some clans and communities see python as a totem. Among those communities are Idemili, Enugwu Ukwu, Abagana, Nnewi, Ogidi, Oguta, Mgbidi, Njaba, Urualla, Awo-Omamma, etc. In these communities, python is very much revered and cared for. Nwashindu and Ihediswa observed that “deification of python is a common heritage and religion in Idemili area of Anambra state”¹¹ In the communities that have python as a totem, it is a taboo to hurt or kill a python. If consciously or unconsciously one kills a python, the person is expected to carry out burial rites for the python as if it is a human being. This view is in line with the submission of Adibe as cited in I. A. Kanu: “No one makes the mistakes of killing it [python] voluntarily or involuntarily. When it is done accidentally, it is buried with the appropriate religious rituals and rites accorded to it. If it is killed knowingly, it is considered an abomination.”¹²

Monkey: This is another totemic animal in Igboland. The people of Awka in Anambra state do not joke with monkey. It is a taboo to hurt or kill a monkey in Awka. It is believed among the people that monkeys possess some spiritual and supernatural powers and they were quite instrumental to Awka people in the time of

war. Following the instrumentality of the black monkeys in helping Awka people defeat their enemies, there is an annual Imoka festival in Awka which is linked to the myth of the black monkey. Also brown monkeys are seen as totems in Ezioha in Mgbowo community of Enugu state. The people “are forbidden to harm, eat or kill a specie of brown monkey called Utobo. It is the family’s belief that Utobo are representatives of the kindred, and bear a direct link between the living and the dead.”¹³ Among the people of Akpugoeze in Enugu state, monkeys are also seen as totems. They are regarded as sacred and no one dares challenge them. Any attempt to hunt or kill a monkey in Akpugoeze is seen as abomination.

Ram: This is another totemic animal in some parts of Igboland. The people of Umuanya Nwoko kindred of Itungwa in Abia state regard ram as a totemic animal. Every member of the community is forbidden from hurting, killing or eating ram. The people can have rams as domestic animals but they are not allowed to eat it. Anyone who eats the meat of a ram automatically falls sick which will certainly lead to the person’s death.

Tortoise and Crocodile: These reptiles are regarded as totemic animals in Agulu community of Anambra state. Also most communities in riverine Ogbaru local government area of Anambra state treat tortoise and crocodile as sacred animals.

Tiger: This is an animal that is generally dreaded by people. But in Umulelu in Obingwa of Abia state, tiger is a sacred animal. It is not harmful to the people. As a totemic animal among the people, tiger is neither eaten nor killed among the people of Umulelu. Oral history has it that some members of the community transformed themselves occasionally into tigers and performed some assignments as tigers and later changed back to human beings. There is a close tie between the people and tiger.

There is a story of a man who quarreled with his wife; but when the wife, out of annoyance, parked her baggage to go back to her father's house, the husband did not resist. But no sooner had she left his house than the husband transformed into a tiger and pounced on her along the road and in the process, the woman, out of fear, changed her mind and returned to her husband's house. It is a taboo to shoot, harm or kill a tiger among the people of Umulelu.

It is important to note at this point that there are many totemic animals in Africa generally and Igboland in particular. The above are simply highlighted as a foundation for this study. We have also to note that totemism in African is not all about animals; there are some plants and trees that are regarded as totemic in Igbo - African world, namely, *ogilisi, akpu, ofo, udala, ngwu, oji*, etc.¹⁴ F. C. Ogbalu opines that "some species of plants are held sacred or are actually worshiped or sacrifices offered to them. Example of such trees held sacred in some places are *Akpu* (silk-cotton tree), *Iroko, Ngwu, Ofo, Ogirisi*, etc. Such plants are used in offering worship to the idols"¹⁵

Totemism in Africa vis-à-vis the Ecosystem

There is no doubt about the belief and practice of totemism among the African people. It is part of the everyday experience of the Traditional African. In the Traditional African Society, no one ever toyed with totems of a given community. This practice has some relevance in the preservation of the ecosystem. Generally, ecosystem is understood as the conglomeration of all the organisms and their physical environment. It is also seen as the interrelationship that exists between living beings and the environment. It has been argued that "an ecosystem can be categorized into its abiotic constituents, including minerals, climate, soil, water, sunlight, and all other nonliving elements,

and its biotic constituents, consisting of all living members”¹⁶ Ecosystem comprises both the living and the nonliving.

Experience has shown that belief and practice of totemism does not have the original meaning and understanding in our contemporary society as against what existed in the Traditional Africa society. I. A. Kanu submits that the influence of western education, cross-cultural influence, Christianity and Islamic influence has actually brought about a decline in the original way and manner our people accorded reverence to totems in Igbo – African ontology. He noted that some totemic animals are being killed while totemic plants are being cut down for economic purposes.¹⁷ However, one can say without mincing words that belief in totems can have some significance in the areas of ecology. This explains the relationship between the practice of totemism and the ecosystem. In this regard, E. S. Sibiri argues:

It is apparent that though the practice of totemism by the indigenous people of its kinds may not have taken a concerted efforts to attach its much significance to the prevention of species’ extinctions (animal or plant) which in turn stand to promote environmental conservation; yet its importance to avert indiscriminate killing, harm and eating up of totemic animals and plants among others which have no totemic values have considerably unveiled the significance of the practice to environmental preservation.¹⁸

There is no gainsaying the fact that the belief and practice of totemism can foster the growth and preservation of totemic animals and plants in the areas where they are considered as sacred. It is an existential truism that animals relax, procreate and survive more in the areas where they are not treated with hostility. The friendly expression makes it possible for the different species of the animal to multiply within the totemic

community. In this regard, one can say that the preservation of totemic animals and plants is a way of maintaining the ecosystem. It is the responsibility of every person within the totemic society to care and feed the totemic animal. This is a traditional way of environmental conservation. This is actually what is needed in our contemporary society. Chemhuru and Masaka as cited in Chakanaka Zinyemba are of the view that the belief and practice of totemism have been institutional wildlife conservation measures to preserve various animal species so that they could be saved from extinction due unchecked hunting.¹⁹ Experience has shown that some animals are going into extinction. This explains the place of the practice of totemism in the preservation of these animals and invariably maintaining the ecological order. E. A. Sibiri maintains: "totemism can lead to environmental protection due to the fact that many tribes have multiple totems and it is a taboo to eliminate them, thus prevent species' extinction."²⁰

Concluding Reflections

The belief and practice of totemism in Africa has to do with the culture and tradition of the African people. However, the idea that totemic beings possess some spiritual and supernatural powers can best be described as superstitious. The claim cannot stand before the *Court of Reason*. The researcher witnessed in a community where python was regarded as a totem but was killed by a man in that community. The man was asked to carry out the burial rites as demanded by their custom or else he will be visited with strange sickness and die. The man refused and till today he is still hale and hearty. There are instances of this kind in many other places as experience has shown. In this regard, one can say that the acclaimed basis for totemic practice by most communities may not have rational backing. It is simply a matter of belief without any rational justification for its claim.

On another note, this paper submits that the basis for the belief and practice of totemism can only be viewed from its ecological significance. There is need for people to be encouraged to preserve animals and plants. Indiscriminate hunting and cutting of trees should be highly frowned at. Forest reserves and game villages should be encouraged by both government and non-governmental organizations. Governments in Africa should step up their lukewarm attitude in this regard. The media should also be involved in sensitizing our people about the need for preservation of animals and plants in order to maintain the ecosystem. The federal and state ministries of culture and tourism should set up monitoring agencies to ensure the protection of animal rights. There should be stringent penalty for those that violate the rights of animals and forest reserve.

In sum, this paper submits that totems have no inherent spiritual and supernatural powers in themselves. The belief and practice of totemism in Africa can only be encouraged on the basis of its significant roles in maintaining the ecosystem and also bringing about revenue generation through tourist activities.

Endnotes

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Chapter Nine

EARTH GODDESS (ALA) AS THE PARAGON OF EQUITY IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Anyanwu Princewill Uzochukwu

Department of Igbo

Federal College of Education, Yola

Adamawa State

uzofcey@gmail.com; panyanwu@fceyola.edu.ng

Executive Summary

This piece studied *Ala* deity in relation to the need for a balance between the worlds of the living and the dead. It argued that “Ala” maintains equilibrium between the land of the living and the land of the dead by harmonizing the activities of human, animals, plants and other deities on the surface of the earth and the ancestral spirits, myriad of disembodied spirits and other personified forces beneath the earth to live peacefully with one another and to help each other to actualise its purpose on earth. The phenomenological method of inquiry was employed during the course of this research.

Keywords: Goddess, Gods, Land, Living, Dead, Spirits, Earth, Sky

Introduction

Igbo people believed that the World is made up of three planets: the Sky (Igwe), the Earth (Ala mmadu) and the land of the Spirits (Ala mmuo). That the Supreme Being (Chukwu) dwells in the Sky with the host of powerful deities and primordial beings such as the Sun god (Anyanwu), the god of thunder (Amadioha) and the Sky god (Igwe). The earth (Ala) is among the primordial deities in the ontology of creation which comprises both the land

of the living which is the surface of the earth and the land of the dead which is inside the ground; the earth (Ala) is also seen as a deity which controls all the activities of man on earth and beneath the earth. The Earth surface is seen as the abode of human beings, the earth deity (Ala), minor divinities such as manmade deities such as Ubiniukpabị of Arochukwu, Alaogbaga of Chokoneze Mbaise etc. and personified nature forces such as water deity, deities which inhabits in trees and mountains. The land of the spirit (Ala mmụọ) is populated with ancestral spirits, myriad of disembodied spirits and other personified forces of which some are benevolent and some are malevolent to human activity (Kanu 2015a).

Igbo also believed in Supreme God (Chukwu) as the creator and the controller of all the activities of these three planets of the world; and also believed in deities (chi) as the messengers and mediators of the Supreme God. Deities are created by God and are not equal with the Supreme God, but rather are His subordinates.

Deities came into existence through the limitation of human knowledge on what is encountered on daily bases such as death, sickness, drought, earthquake, war etc. which made man to keep wondering the reason behind these misfortunes. This fear of unknown made the Igbo man to turn to the search of deities as a means of finding solution to the unknown.

Earth goddess (Ala) is among the foremost Igbo pantheon whom they believed to be one of the primordial deities in the ontology of creation. Ala involves the surface of the earth (Ala mmadu) and beneath the earth (Ala mmụọ), and the former inhabits human and the later inhabits spirits. Earth goddess (Ala) which is also in charge of fertility, agriculture, morality and instrument of security and revealing of crimes. Most villages and

communities in Igbo land have a place of worship for the Earth goddess, where they present sacrifices to appease the. They also offer sacrifice to 'Ala' during planting, first fruit and harvest season for thanksgiving.

Anyanwu (2017) asserts that "Chukwu" the Supreme Being heads the sky deities which include *Anyanwu, Amadioha Igwe, Onwa*, etc. While *Ala*, the earth goddess rules the myriads of terrestrial spirits such as deities associated with rivers, hills, caves, trees, and others created by human intellect and will. Earth goddess (*Ala*) is also in charge of the land of the spirit (*Ala mmuo*) and all the activities that go around in the land of the spirit. She is the queen mother of other deities on earth because they depend on her for their survival and existence.

The Shrine of Earth goddess (Ala)

Shrines are places where deities are consulted and worshiped. Shrine as place of worship for the Earth goddess (*Ala*), is where her worshipers consult her for different purposes. Most times, the name given to the *Ala* deity shrine, differ from one Community to the other, depending on the perception of such Community. Most names given to such shrine bears the prefix or suffix of "ala" to indicate that such shrine is specifically for the Earth goddess. Examples of such names given to the Earth goddess (*Ala*) include: *Onwala, Ihuala, Alaogbaga, Alankwala, Alaukwogbe, dgz*. One can consult the Earth goddess anywhere he is without going to its shrine because, it is believed that the Earth goddess is the land one stands on, build houses, farm crops and bury the dead; so anywhere one is, it is believed to be standing on the Earth goddess and can consult her from that point.

The construction of the shrine of Earth goddess (Ala) is a joint venture that co-involves all the members of the community. Within the exigencies of labour and financial contributions, the community makes sure that the best architectural designs are expended; thus, one that reflects the strength of such a community (as reposing on the power of its gods). Just as the shrine of Earth goddess varies from one community to the other, the architectural features and attributes that symbolise the specific powers and strengths, vary from one community to another. However, certain basic similarities are exemplified.

Cole (1982) observes that among the Qrlx in the central Igbo land, the shrine of *Ala* deity is localised in some fifty to sixty meters from the tangent of the village square, characterised most often by a rectangular house of about ten by twelve square meters, and structured in the way that it provides a focal spatial orientation to the square. The shrine architecture is equally rectangular in form; with two sides of semi-paramedic walls towering vertically as beam raster, giving a slanting form to the thatched roofs, which harmonizing structurally with the triangular side views. The walls are most often embellished with fanciful motifs that are similar with the relief carved panels that project the overall emblematic image of the community. In some areas, the shrine of the Earth goddess is surrounded by the sacred trees, whose large leaves and shades induce the aura of the sacred presence of the place. One always found around the shrine house items people used for sacrifice such as drinks, particles of food items, money, life goats and chickens, bones of animals used for sacrifice et cetera.

Earth goddess (Ala) as the Queen Mother

“Ala” the earth goddess is the wife to the thunder deity (Amadioha,). She is also the mother of all the deities in Igbo land. The earth goddess is seen as the mother of both human and

spirits in Igbo community because of her feminine characteristics of human mother. As human mother becomes pregnant and gives birth, it is also believed by Igbo people that during reincarnation, the land of the spirit “ala mmụọ” is where human being is originally formed. It is where human before they were born on earth takes decision on the type of life to exhibit on earth and the type of family or person to reincarnate into. It is said that within this time, “Ala” is pregnant. It is believed that “Ala mmụọ” is the womb where she received people back into her womb when they die.

Earth goddess (Ala) in her feminine characteristics nurtures, protects and guides her children as human mother nurtures, protects and guides her own children. Her symbol is a statue of a woman breastfeeding her child. Earth goddess (Ala) is the fertile soil where plants and crops grow which becomes the food for human and other animals. She protects and guides her people by providing enabling environment to leave peacefully with one another and the spirits. As the human mother always wants her children to leave a moral life, so the Earth goddess (Ala) is the maker of laws called “Omenala” and the crusader of morality. She is the moral judge who judges human actions and she decides what is right and wrong. Crimes and taboos on earth are seen as sin against Ala the Earth goddess and it must be appeased for peace to rain in the community.

Earth goddess (Ala) is the controller of other deities and other deities are seen as her subordinate. Such deities that are subordinate to Earth goddess include: water deity (mmụọ mmiri), god of agriculture (Ahjanjoku), Agwu deity, gods inhabiting in rocks (Okwute), trees (Osisi) and other gods created by human intellect. These deities act by the command of

Earth goddess to answer the request of whosoever consults them.

Every community in Igbo land has a designated place of worship for Earth goddess (Ala) where they presents sacrifices and also ask for her favour. Earth goddess has a chief priest, in some places, the priest usually a woman.

Spiritual messengers of Earth goddess (Ala) is community based. Every community in Igbo land has a sacred animal which is often linked with the name of such community or village, they do not kill or eat such animal because it is sacred to them and the messenger of Earth goddess. The Ala messengers could be the Tortoise (Mbe), Python (Eke), Monkey (Enwe), or any animal Ala deity of such community has chosen as its messenger. Any time such animal visited a person, it is believed that it is the Earth goddess (Ala) who visited, and must have a message she wants to pass across. In this situation, the person or the community will find out what the message is all about by visiting a diviner (Dibia Afa) who, after consulting Ala deity, will tell the person or the Community the reason for her visitation and what to do to maintain good relationship between the queen mother 'Ala' and the inhabitant of both the land of human and the land of the spirits.

Earth goddess (Ala) as the goddess of fertility and prosperity

Ala the earth goddess is seen as the sustainer of life and the god of multiplication. She multiplies anything presented to her. She is connected to crop, prosperity and human fertility. She was often referred to as the archetype of all forms of maternity (Eboh, 2003).

Rituals and sacrifices dedicated to the Earth goddess were performed before planting and after harvest to ensure a plentiful

harvest and show appreciation. Communities also organized annual festival where they present sacrifice of first fruit to Earth goddess (Ala) for being with them throughout the planting season. Some Villages or Communities call this festival “Ahiajoku” while others call it “Iri Ji”. It was believed that such sacrifices would in turn bring them an abundance of crops and many children.

During the time of drought or other agricultural misfortunes, the people undertake ritual processes meant to examine how they may have disobeyed Earth goddess and caused her to withhold her blessings and at the same time appease her with sacrifices for healthy crops and abundant harvest.

As a benevolence deity, barren women go to her for the fruit of womb. After presentation of rituals and sacrifice as directed by the chief priest of the Earth goddess, the woman may be pregnant and have children. Sacrifices are always presented to her for general prosperity in every sphere of human endeavor.

Earth goddess (Ala) as the goddess of morality

Earth goddess (Ala) is the chief custodian of morality, who guides the activities of both the living and the dead, to live in harmony with one another and provide an acceptable law which makes them to live morally within the community. These established laws called “Omenala” guides the affairs of both the living and the dead and maintain equilibrium in their activities. In this way, the man is guided by the Earth goddess not to steal crops from his neighbour’s farm, the breadfruit tree beside the road not to fall on a passerby, the chicken not to drink its eggs and the spirit of the dead not to disturb the family members after a burial rite is completed. In this way, the law “Omenala” guides

both the living and the dead to live morally and peacefully with one another within the community.

Earth goddess (Ala) who is in charge of “Omenala”, taboos and crimes among Igbo communities are against the standard of Ala which is called “Nsọ Ala”. Earth goddess (Ala) enacted punishments against those who committed a crime by breaking the moral law “Omenala”. Such crimes include murder, theft, rape, kidnapping, adultery and incest etc. Crimes are seen as causing imbalance and disharmony both in the land of the living and in the land of the dead. Catastrophic disasters such as famine, drought or flooding are seen as punishment for crimes committed by human. Oriji (2011) asserts that immorality is seen to disturb the ritual equilibrium of the Igbo community which could potentially bring harm to the entire society. However, the reaction from Earth goddess (Ala) could attract consequences to the entire community or an individual, hence the need for ritual purifications to appease “Ala” in order to revive harmony between her and the inhabitant of the earth. On the other hand, Eboh (2003) states that if the earth goddess is not defiled through abomination (aru), then the community will be economically and politically progressive.

People who committed any of those crimes are expected to die a shameful death and those who died a shameful death were not afforded a befitting burial which essentially ended their life cycle since without funeral rites a person will not reincarnate. The fear of being punished by “Ala” is the driving force in the maintenance of high level of morality in the community by doing what is right, and morally good and averting sacrilegious acts.

Earth goddess (Ala) as a security force and crime control

Man’s nature is influenced by his desires for survival, dominance and control over his environment. This leads to issue of conflict

among them. Such conflict could attain the dangerous dimension of taking of life, physical and spiritual injury, material destruction and natural disasters. The need, therefore, for conflict resolution of these prevalent issues, to avoid destructions and mistrust among people and to ensure peace, security of life and properties, the community employs Earth goddess (Ala) as the security agent (Anyanwu, 2017).

One of the essential services rendered by “Ala” is to secure the life and property of its worshipers. The strength in Earth goddess (Ala) has given the community that owns it assurance that nothing would harm their lives and properties. What determines the life and strength of every community is its unity and common force as centred on the strength of its local deity. Thus, the centred and the animating force of the community is reposed at the strength and fame of “Ala”, who is in charge of laws and customs “Omenala” of the community. No community is complete without the shrine of the “Ala”. A community that has a powerful god is respected by other neighbouring communities. Ugwueye (2007) observed that the purpose of establishing “Ala” in various communities is mainly for protection. However, according to Essien (2011), because of the awe deity creates in the minds of the people, many people in Annang land have shunned or avoided embarking on any criminal act.

Earth goddess (Ala) as agent of human security has the capacity to cover both physical and spiritual realms; because activities in spiritual realm (Ala mmụọ) affect the physical, and the activities on physical realm (Ala mmadụ) affect spiritual realm. Turaki (1999) describes this view further by saying “Everything in life can be influenced by and responds to the world of spirits. Whatever happens in the physical realm has direct bearing on the spiritual world”.

One can consult “Ala” for security anytime and anywhere without going to its shrine. For example, in case of loss of item or destruction of property, the person will invoke or consult “Ala” by saying “*elu lee aka m, ala lee aka m*” whosoever that did this evil to me, “Ala” visit the person or group with your wrath. By just saying this, the person has consulted “Ala” to take charge of the situation. Earth goddess (Ala) must visit those that committed such atrocity with its wrath. Here, it is advised for one to check well before consulting “Ala” in case of any loss, because if what is said to be lost is within the house of the owner, or with his or her children, the wrath of “Ala” will be upon whosoever that committed the evil without minding whether the person who committed the crime relates to the owner of the property or not.

Again, an Igbo man or woman may secure his or her property from theft by wrapping a handful of sand and place it on any of his property. The reason for doing this is to prevent people from stealing the item. Here, the person has invited the Earth goddess (Ala) to keep watch over the property. The sand represents the earth deity ‘Ala’. Ugwueye (2007, p.37) adds that “a handful of sand from “Adqrq” grove could be wrapped in a piece of cloth and placed on valuable property. The power of “Adqrq” in the wrapped sand protects the property from being stolen or it punishes whoever does so.”

One can also consult “Ala” with the help of its chief priest, who produces powerful device or powerful bonds which hinders the enemy from both physical and spiritual realms (Ala mmadu na Ala mmuo) from taking away lives, causing physical or spiritual injuries or material destructions. With the help of a Priest, (Ala) is consulted to solve both personal, social and community problems. Sometimes, “Ala” without consultations take vengeance on anybody who offends her.

Earth goddess (Ala) exposes wicked acts and fish out the culprit, thereby making community members to shun or avoid any criminal activity. "Ala" chief priest can perform 'Ebi' ordeal to unveil secrets or fish out culprits in a community to resolve difficult controversies in a community.

Earth goddess (Ala) is seen as the highest court of appeal in Igbo theocratic system of governance. Any time there is confusion in the course of handling land dispute by the community or cases of murder, poisoning, or stealing, either of the parties involved in the dispute would be required to take an oath with "Ala" to prove ownership or innocence. If after one year of the oath taking, the oath taker survives and did not die, the land automatically belongs to him or the person has proven innocence of the allegation leveled against him or her.

Parties involved in a dispute, could also consult "Ala", which after divination by the chief priest would reveal the owner of the property. Apart from divination and consultation of Earth goddess (Ala) by parties for any dispute, "Ala" may be used for covenant (Igba ndu). Igbo people believe that the earth goddess, 'Ala', would always rise at any time in defense of the oppressed or any form of corrupt practice on the land.

Interaction between the land of the living (Ala mmadu) and the land of spirit (Ala mmuo)

Igbo people believed that the Earth (Ala) is divided into two equal parts. The first is the land of the living, which is the earth surface that inhabits human, animals and plants; and the second is the land of the dead, which inhabits ancestral spirits, myriad of disembodied spirits and other personified forces of which some are benevolent and malevolent to human activity. All human challenges or favour on the land of the living (Ala

mmadu) have direct connection to the land of the spirit (Ala mmuo), but Ala deity controls and maintains equilibrium to both on the land of the living and in the land of the dead.

It is believed that life on earth started from the land of the dead and must be supported by its forces. For example, it is only when a seed of plant or its root is planted or enters inside the ground that they were able to germinate and produce its replica. It is also believed that before a woman gets pregnant, the spirit of the unborn baby is formed in the land of the dead (Ala mmuo) where the unborn baby decides its destiny and the type of family and person to reincarnate to, before entering into the woman's womb as pregnancy. And when the person dies, he or she will also be buried and the body will return to the sand of the earth, its spirit will move into the land of the spirit either to retain or change its destiny and reincarnate into human again on the land of the living.

Remember, before one reincarnates into human again, he or she must have lived a good life on earth, died a peaceful death, and given a complete funeral rites. If not, may face punishment of non-acceptance in the land of the spirit, which sometimes make its spirit to hover on the surface of the earth, interrupting and disturbing the activities of human. The spirit of the dead will either be asking for the completion of its funeral rite so that the spirit will be accepted in the land of the spirit or the spirit will continue to hover on the surface of the earth because of its non-acceptance in the land of the spirit due to the evil the person committed while on earth.

The immediate family of the deceased stands the risk of death if they have not given a complete burial rite to their dead relative, but participated in another person's burial either by partaking in the goat or cow killed for such person's burial rite or bought any

of these animals for someone's burial rite. The spirit of the dead relative may kill the person or cause a terrible sickness that will eventually kill the person if remedy is not provided fast.

From time to time, man journeys from the land of the living to the land of the dead through dreams. During such dreams, one is allowed to see the state of things concerning the person's life or its relative which is yet to manifest or have started manifesting in the real life of such individual or group. Remember we said earlier that whatever favour or challenge one faces on the land of the living (Ala mmadu) started from the land of the dead (Ala mmuo). So, through dreams one moves to the land of the dead where good and bad omen started before manifesting into the land of the living. For example, when one had a dog bite or dangerous animal pursuing such person in the dream, such person should expect a downfall if nothing is done. One can avert such looming danger through prayer or by evoking "Ala" through its priest to avert the catastrophe. Also, when one eats in the dream, it is food poisoning in the realm of life which has the capacity to inflict in the person's physical body sickness that would torment the person pending when counter spiritual forces are sent to the land of the spirit to destroy the efficacy of the pending danger.

Any time man is having challenges of life from the land of the spirit, he must send a stronger forces to the land of the spirit through the help of the priest of "Ala" which will destroy the efficacy of the forces from the land of the spirit. This only happens when the man has appeased Ala deity for its wrong doing. But if the hands of the man are pure, (Ala" will preserve the person's life without any appeasement and invitation from the man or its family.

Conclusion

Ala as a deity is one of the primordial deities created by God as His subordinate and messenger on earth which is in charge of all the activities of man both in the land of living and the land of the dead. Earth goddess (Ala) is the queen mother of every life on earth and in charge of fertility, agriculture, morality, used as an instrument for security and crime control. "Ala" maintains equity with the activities that goes around the surface of the earth and beneath the earth. "Ala" controls the myriads of terrestrial spirits such as deities associated with rivers, hills, caves, trees, and other deities created by human intellect and will.

Earth goddess (Ala) is benevolent and at the same time malevolent, she is believed to be in charge of fertility as she gives children and fertilises our crops for bountiful harvest and general prosperity in life. She gives protections to man and also a source of crime control. Out of being punished by "Ala", made man to live moral life with his neighbour. "Ala" as malevolent punishes any one that goes against her rules without mercy.

Earth goddess (Ala) is worshiped till today by both the Igbo Christians and the pagans anywhere in the world either knowingly or unknowingly. Because "Ala" is everywhere and can be consulted from any place, Igbo man always consult her anytime he or she is in difficulty or facing the challenges of unknown. They do this when they pour libation on the ground to ask "Ala" to take charge of the situation. When they keep a rapped handful of sand on any property of theirs, this means that they have evoked the power of "Ala" to protect such property. In the case of any misfortune, they may call the help of "Ala" to take charge by saying "*Elu lee aka m, Ala lee aka m*" and ask for "Ala" to punish whosoever that causes such misfortune. There is a popular song that Igbo people sing even in the church which says: "*Elu na Ala megide onye si na ogaghị adiri mu na mma*".

Anyone who sings this song is evoking the power of “Ala” to be against that person who is against him. Even in our churches nowadays, men of God request their members to come to church with the handful of sand from their family for prayers. This is either requesting “Ala” to favour them or be against to whosoever that plans evil against them.

Indeed, “Ala” maintains equilibrium between the land of the living and the land of the dead by harmonizing the activities of human, animals, plants and other deities on the surface of the earth and the ancestral spirits, myriad of disembodied spirits and other personified forces beneath the earth to live peacefully with one another and to help each other to actualise its purpose on earth.

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Chapter Ten

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND ORTHODOX MEDICINE: TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND FINDING A SYNTHESIS

Osawu Tunde

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Jos

osawutunde1@gmail.com

Executive Summary

The “intrusion” of modern medicine into Africa’s health care services has created a competitive environment with the indigenous medical service. The competitiveness and complementarity which exist between the orthodox and native medicines in contemporary Africa have in many ways provided better health services to Africans. It has continued to receive increasing acceptance in Nigeria and among many other African nations despite the ground breaking improvements recorded in the field of orthodox medicine. Evidence of this is a wide proof of its efficacy by its practitioners and patronisers and the recent call by the African Union to give priority to research on African traditional medicine. This paper attempts to bring to fore the efficacy of Traditional Medicine and its immense contributions and progress made so far in health care delivery in Nigeria. As a priority, it investigates into why Traditional Medicine is still finding it difficult to match up with the rapid improvements of orthodox medicine. It will conclude by attempting to bridge these wide gaps between these two forms of medicines by investigating into their methodological approach. This paper will recommend that whatever feat Traditional medicine may achieve, as far as its viable findings are still esoteric, personal,

and devoid of any theorization without elements of objectivity and impersonalization, African Medicine will continue to remain miles away from Orthodox Medicine. Much will be gained and many lives saved if adequate attention is given to this long existing medical philosophy.

Keywords: Traditional Medicine, Orthodox Medicine, Challenges, Africa.

Introduction

Our natural environment has not promised us a life of longevity. To survive in this existence requires our ability to manipulate the ecosystems for our survival. In other words, it is a life of the survival of the fittest. To Africans, south of the Sahara, one of the means by which this survival was achieved before colonialism and neo-colonialism was the use of traditional health care service. Those who acquired the knowledge of the traditional medicine and health service had the monopoly of the trade. (Segun 2007:71).

Traditional Medicine (TM) is the oldest form of health care in the world and is used in the prevention and treatment of physical and mental illness. Different societies historically developed various useful healing methods to combat a variety of health and life threatening diseases. TM is also variously known as complementary and alternative Medicine (CAM). Traditional medicine is a method of healing founded on its own concept of health and diseases. Knowledge of TM is passed on orally from generation to generation and the healing process is jealously guarded in certain families. In Africa, healers are addressed as *Babalawos*, among the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria; *Abia ibok* among the ibibio community of Nigeria; *Boka* among the Hausa speaking people of Nigeria; *Dibia* among the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria; and *Sangoma* or *Nyanga* among south

Africans (Cook, 2009:101). Unfortunately, advancement in science and technology in the treatment of diseases (orthodox Medicine) has led to the neglect of traditional medicine all over the years. For instance, Pamplona Rogers (2001:5) observes that "After a period of brilliant scientific development in which therapy science-the science of healing-has built all its hopes on the basis of sophisticated laboratories and highly technological devices, the interest in nature's simple remedies is quickly growing. It is not only an interest in plant, but also in water (hydrotherapy) and in medicinal use of mud and clay (geo-therapy)". In consonance, Ubrurhe (2003:1) submits that "the twenty-first century is witnessing serious efforts to discover the active principles in African medicinal plants. This urge has become more rigorous with the scientific findings that diseases are becoming more resistant to systematic medicines especially antibiotics. In the United States of America for instance, the number of days a patient is expected to stay in hospital for medical treatment has been increased by 3-5 days because of their induced side effects. This, no doubt, has caused much concern to different world governments, especially those of the industrialized countries. This concern is manifest in the recent movement away from the use of synthetic medicine to galenical and the use of medicinal plants which form about 90% of the traditional medicine."

Before the advent of western orthodox methods of medication in Nigeria, the efficacy of traditional medicine was not in doubt as virtually every old person in the village set-up used to possess some knowledge of medicinal herb for the treatment of diseases. This is because the traditional medicine was the only one available to the people. Even today, in the midst of western orthodox medicine, traditional medicine still persists and it is fast finding its place within the health care delivery system in

Nigeria. It was only when the ailment was considered mysterious or chronic that a professional medical expert was consulted. Alluding to the unique place traditional medicine holds in African communities, Abdullahi cited in Iyere (2008:51) states that:

The development and promotion of traditional medicine has become imperative in view of the fact that about 85% of our people depend on it and its huge potentials not only in improved healthcare delivery but also as a source of job and wealth creation and national economic growth and development. This is reorganized and supported by both the World Health Organization (WHO) and African Union (AU).

As a patroniser of registered traditional medicine for over ten years, I have been fascinated with the efficacy of traditional medicine in the treatment of some ailments. I therefore feel persuaded to express my convictions about the place of traditional medicine in contemporary Africa.

The Concept of African Traditional Medicine

The western medical approach is regarded as pills, tablets, capsules and so on, for the treatment and prevention of diseases. Constantly, in Africa, the concept of medicine has a sort of personality, a potent, and a living force. Hence, Kenneth cited in Iyere (2008:52) says: “Subjectively, *hale* (medicine in Ashanti) is something more than the mere object itself. It represents a special kind of supernatural power or quality which becomes attached to objects through the influence of *ingewo* (God) because a connection with *ingewo* is implicit in the notion of *hale*”.

Sofowora (1984:21) defines traditional medicine as the “total combination of knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in the diagnosing, preventing or eliminating a physical, mental or social disease and which may rely exclusively on past

experience and observation handed down from generation verbally or in writing." The above definitions further give credence to the fact that African traditional medicine is the act of curing man's disharmony with himself, another person, nature and environment. They are plants that can be used to heal, kill, secure power, health, fertility, personality or moral reforms. An eminent scholar in African Traditional Religion in his own contribution, Dime (1995: 21) maintains that: "African traditional medicine represents the sum total of the person's medical knowledge and practices based on practical experiences and observation which have been handed down from one generation to another." Writing on the significant place of African medieval system, Ubrurhe (2003:15) asserts that African medicine can only be properly understood in its complete cultural context since the way in which people respond to illness or misfortune in any culture is related to the whole religious and philosophical framework in which they perceive existence. In summary, African traditional medicine is the use of some leaves, roots, barks, parts of animals, rocks and mystical substance for the prevention and cure of animals.

Aspects of African Traditional Medicine

There is no universally agreed classification of African traditional medicine but here we shall adopt that of Professor Byarahanga-Akiki (in Adamo 2005:19-20) cited in Iyere (2008:53). According to him, aspects of traditional medicine are herbal medicine, ritual medicine and mystical medicine. Herbal medicine encompasses the use of plant leaves, roots, barks, seeds, flowers, juices, oil and other parts of medicinal plants. These parts are usually used for the treatment of biological diseases such as malaria, stomach ache, head ache, asthma, strike, typhoid fever, cholera, arthritis, diarrhoea, high blood pressure, sexually transmitted diseases,

infertility, dysentery, impotency, pneumonia and a host of ailments.

Ritual medicine has to do with the performance of some prescribed sacrifices, eating of some specified food items and the giving of other prescribed materials to the traditional priest (Arinze 1970: 75-76). Social, psychological and psychosomatic ailments are treated with ritual medicine. Some of the ritual objects often used are goats, cows, sheep, snakes, bones, oil, rocks, eggs and a host of other items. Worth noting is the fact that a patient being treated sometimes has to observe certain prescribed taboos, and non-compliance may lead to his/her death. For example, a patient who is being treated of spiritual attacks is not allowed to eat the meat of the animal used for sacrifice to bring about his/her cure. Equally, among the Igala people of Kogi State and Weppa-Wanno people of Edo State, if a man's wife is involved in adultery and it is discovered through sickness of either of them, they are not expected to eat the meat of the sacrifice for treatment. It is believed that if they do they will die mysteriously (Ocheni 2009; Emeka 2009).

Mystical medicine involves the use of special words (or incantations). Such words according to the belief of traditional Africans are capable of healing both the body and soul of a sick person. Incantations and the language of *ifa* divination are used in this type of medicine. Hence, Dime (1995:69) defines incantation as "a formula of words written or delivered orally in poetic form to conjure up mystical forces into a medicine or for the purpose of enchantment; the use of spells over a thing, a situation, a person." Incantation is mostly used in the treatment of conditions believed to have spiritual origin or connection.

African Concept of Health, Disease and Healing

Health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity but the presence of something positive (Keyes 2005: 539). In African perspective, health “involves the integration of the physical, spiritual and the psychological elements in man. Hence, an African will choose good health before wealth and fame. This is because with good health he would be able to contribute meaningfully to the development of his family and the community at large. One who is sickly is considered to be anti-progressive; he is believed to retard the progress of the family and the community. This is why an African person goes to any length to seek for self-preservation. Thus Africans’ understanding of diseases is different from the western conception which is the malfunctioning of the body as a result of bacterial infection or some biological and chemical reactions in the body.

Ubrurhe identifies three types of disease in West Africa, namely, natural, supernatural, and spiritual diseases. Natural diseases have to do with the abnormal functioning of the body system. One or more organs of one’s body sometimes develop some malfunction which results in one falling ill. Such diseases are usually treated with physical remedies but when they fail to cure, spiritual remedies are used on the patients. This assertion further asserts that the failure of physical remedies prescribed for treating empirical ailment enables people to believe that witchcrafts or bad magic is at the background. From the perspective of the Urhobo belief, naturally caused diseases are fertile ground for supernatural and psychiatric agencies to operate, especially when they defile physical medications.

Supernatural diseases, in African context, it is perceived as an interruption in one’s relationship with one’s ancestors, divinities,

and the community. This situation can be caused by not paying due respect to the ancestors, failure to accord a befitting second burial to one's dead parents, stealing, adultery, incest and murder. These offences are believed to bring various ailments to the offenders, and only traditional medicine can cure them. Spiritual disease[s] are those caused by the machinations of witches, sorcerers and enemies. Witches are believed to have spiritual powers which they use in attacking their victims. As the witches devour the spiritual body of their victims, so the mortal frame weakens as the blood is sucked away spiritually. (Parinder 1974:126; Kanu 2015)

Simply put, healing is the regaining of health after sicknesses treated. But in African context healing is the restoration of the whole person physically, socially, spiritually mentally and psychologically. Hence the traditional medicine practitioners treat not only the physical illness of a patient but also the spiritual to bring about total healing. Mbiti (1969) supports this view when he says:

First and foremost, medicine men are concerned with sickness, diseases and misfortune. In African societies these are generally believed to be caused by ill-will or ill-action of one person against another, normally through the agency of witchcraft and magic. The medicine man therefore has to discover the cause of the sickness, find out who the criminal is, diagnose the nature of the disease, apply the right treatment and supply a means of preventing the misfortune from reoccurring again. ... The medicine man applies both physical and spiritual (or psychological) treatment which assures the sufferer that all is and will be well.

It thus follows that the traditional healers see his/her patient as a complete whole, and not in parts, in line with the healer's holistic concept of health, diseases and healing and care of the

community. In fact, sometimes they contribute more to the health care delivery system of their people better than modern medical agencies. This is why Mbiti further asserts that: "The medicine men symbolize the hope of society: hope of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when harm or impurities have been contracted. Medicine men are the friends, pastors, psychiatrists and doctors of traditional African villages and communities." It is important at this point to cite examples of traditional methods employed by traditional practitioners for healing. Perhaps a very popular method today is that used in bone setting. In Nigeria, like in many other African countries, traditional bone-setters (traditional orthopaedics) are found in many towns and villages. They are so good in their art that they get patients on daily basis. The fact is that most of the said patients are often referred to them from hospitals. Writing on bone-setting among the Uzo (Ijaw) Mume (2000:10) cited in Iyere (2008: 53) maintains that:

Among the Uzo (ijaw) who probably originated bone-setting treatment in Nigeria, the leg of a chicken is fractured and treated at the same time as treating a human fracture. It is believed that when the chicken is able to walk again the patient's fracture will have healed sufficiently for him to try walking with the bad leg.

It will be interesting to note that some bone-setters may treat severe cases that hospitals may find difficult to treat. Also, before the advent of modern methods of treating snake bite, African practitioners had already discovered local herbs for its treatment and prevention. In fact, some local methods of treating snake bite are more efficacious than orthodox medicine.

African Traditional Medicine and Orthodox Medicine: Finding a Synthesis

In spite of the promising succour which African traditional medicine portends to bring to mankind, it is not without its own difficulties or loopholes. One might be tempted here to ask why African medicine which combines both the religious and empirical method at proffering solutions to the problems of humanity has not been able to invent or compete at least in the same ratio with their western counterpart. Many scholars have condemned the Method of African traditional medicine as being mystically and religiously inclined, superstitious, more practical than theoretical, Isolatory than community driven, esoteric, and so on. Of course, these are not empty condemnations. They have some iota of truths. Many have therefore inferred that the method of African medicine is misleading, and therefore such a science is at best a pseudo-science. Some hold that the achievements of Africa in the world of medical practices have minimal success compared to what is obtainable in the west. Observing this backwardness and concerned about the progress of African medicine, Asouzou writes: "When one persistently asks why scientific inquiry within the African context-at least to our time has not kept pace, quantitatively and qualitatively with what is obtainable elsewhere, a lot of reasons could be adduced to explain away the obvious, especially as this touches the sensitive issues relating the pride of an average Africa."

Just as (Asouzou 122) has pointed out above, many factors could be said to have impeded the growth of African science. Among some of the critiques of Traditional African medicine are:

(a) *The Problem of Mysticism*

It is true that traditional African medicine in particular employs the combination of empirical and the mystic-religious method. Many African scholars have claimed that this has often resulted

in the inability of the practitioners to offer rational justification to his claims. To support this claim, for example how can one give a causal and rational explanation to the practice of traditional orthopaedic Doctors? They are known to use hens and cockerels as the contact points in setting the fractured bones of female or male human victims as the case may be. What they do is to simply break the particular joint or part of the limbs of the hen or cockerel, which correspond to the human victim's problematic area and then apply medication while massaging those points. As soon as the hen or cockerel is healed the human victim is correspondingly healed. This practice raises critical questions scientifically.

One fascinating and mind bugging question that comes to mind here is, how can one explain the law of causality between the human person and the hen or chicken, how does the medication on the limb of a hen or cockerel transmit to that of the human victims without any physical contact? What is the relationship between the hen or cockerel and the human victim? Could there be any kind of energy or force that moves in between the animal victim and the human victim? The traditional African doctor may not be able to explain or justify this in the light of the rationality of modern medicine or science. Ojong went further by asserting that this inability to explain such a phenomenon is one peculiar problem of traditional African medicine.

This is exactly where one of the problems of traditional African medicine lies: the problem of making a conscious effort of explaining the relationship between natural phenomena or if they cannot, accepting having met a dead end, without attributing it to supernatural beings. It is very common to hear traditional African medical practitioners say that it is the ancestors or deities that gave them the idea to do this or that; and

that is all. They make no conscious effort to research further into such knowledge claims and scientific feats without much reference to such spirits or deities. The corollary of this is that they tend to be esoteric in their knowledge claims about the operations of nature, perhaps in order not to annoy the spirits, which they claim reveal this knowledge to them. Knowledge thus becomes personalized rather than impersonal: such knowledge claims becoming accessible only to the “initiates” who would rather die with such knowledge than divulge it to others. We would agree with (Gyekye1997: 21-25) that “such attitude results in the stagnation in the progress of science in Africa.”

(b) *The Problem of Secrecy*

Another problem which is serving as a cog in the wheel of the process of African method of science is that it is characteristically seen as been too *secretive*. Akpan (2010:15) argues that apart from the mystic-religious influences, some scientists do refuse to divulge their discoveries to other fellow scientists for the reason that others may hijack their discoveries and they would then lose both the credibility and the economic gains that may accrue from such discovery. This limitation is the tenacious continuity of practices and beliefs that lack openness and flexibility to necessary or constructive changes. A good example is the herbal medical practice. It is observed that the practitioners of such herbal medicine are expected to pass on their knowledge of traditional herbs to some carefully selected members of their family. Assuming this contention of selective transfer is true, then it means a lot of knowledge in the process of the transfer must have been lost in transit. However, the reason generally advanced for this age long, exclusive right by individuals to knowledge was the need to protect (against) the widespread and uncontrolled use of this knowledge. This work contends that this method adopted by the African scientist is not scientific and thus

amounts to what we call personalization of knowledge which renders African science to be reduced as nothing but a local personal affair. A good example to buttress this loophole of secrecy and its attendant consequence to the growth of African science is the case of Abalaka's case which still remains fresh in our memories. Abalaka claimed sometimes ago to have discovered a cure for HIV/AIDS syndrome but could not present or make its finding public for scientific and peer confirmation. Another recent similar example is the case of the Gambian president who also claimed to have cured some patients who had HIV/AIDS in varying degrees using his secret concoction of boiled herbs. When he first announced that he had found a natural remedy to the cure of AIDS, it generated lots of controversies especially among western medical experts who claimed he was giving false hope to the sick. But the question here is, if such wonderful and credible findings are not given elaborate and coherent theoretical explanation, how can others in the field acknowledge the efficacy of such discoveries? This is why it could be held that African scientists are lacking behind in terms of contributing to theoretical science. Personal claims of having cured so and so persons without submitting the products to objective test only attract more scepticism than acceptance. The implication here is that communication and exposure of a scientist's findings or discoveries to other scientists is not only important but would make African science to progress beyond its present level. The failure to publicize knowledge claims and submit such claims to others' test and criticism could never allow for a coherent theoretical framework to emerge. This means that scientist would rather be satisfied working as isolated individuals than as members of "a scientific community" as is the case in the Western world. As Ozumba opines, such a situation would make exchange of scientific ideas difficult, if not impossible. The implication is that African science will still

wallow in the stagnant waters, miles behind Western science. African scientist should publish their findings in accordance with scientific norms and let it be peer-reviewed. If their claim are found out to be scientifically sound and accepted, they may be on the path of a major scientific breakthrough. Secrecy is not scientific.

(c) *Too Humanistic in Nature*

Another possible reason which we could ascribe to the slow growth of African Traditional Medicine is the fact that it is *Humanistic in nature*. Most practitioner's time and energy are devoted to matters which personally affect humans such as disease, mental illness, social affairs, etc. while less interest are shown in mechanistic manipulation of inanimate objects which makes it difficult to access the record of African medical practitioners. Hence, Asouzu seems to be influenced by the empirical criterion for scientific enquiries to be observed when he stated thus:

...that whose mode of operation is not physically and empirically accessible and demonstrable is ascribed or allowed to fall within the religion of the mysterious or even the unknown. This is not the attitude of science, which has as its point of departure not mystery as in explicable mythological reality, but mystery as limitation set by human imperfection and non-rationality of adequate method.

It should be noted here that Asouzu was criticizing African attitude of lack of conscious effort to separate myths from traditional medicine. Thus, he frowned against the method of traditional African medicine for leaving natural phenomena to be explained through the use of dynamic force in the form of a personal god, spirit or other agencies responsible for explanation of the reality of things.

The point is that if modern medicine is something that is characteristically public, impersonal and objective, then the African scientist should move beyond the present level of personalization and esotericization of knowledge. The African scientist should imbibe the attitude of free enquiry and openness of mind to criticism. He must stop venerating deities and spirits whose activities he cannot justify in relation to his scientific endeavours. If, however, the deities and spirits are relevant in the workings of nature, which the scientist strives to explore, then the African scientist must always be prepared to explain, and give coherent theoretical conclusions which will be open for all to see.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this paper, attempts have been made to highlight the conception of traditional medicine, its categorization and some of the negative and positive roles its practitioners play in their communities. The fact remains that the efficacy of traditional medicine in the treatment of diseases is not in doubt; hence efforts are made by various African governments to promote it. The World Health Organization (WHO) in many fora has encouraged research into traditional medicine as alternative medication for new disease resistant to orthodox drugs. There is great prospect, therefore, for traditional medicine particularly in Africa. It is on record that over 70% of Africans depend on traditional medicine, a further proof of its efficacy. No doubt, if African traditional medicine is given full recognition by African government, the health care delivery system and the economy of Africa will greatly improve. If we are going to achieve reasonable goals in health service, the present wave of social and political instability must stop. Above all, there must be a political will for all of us to work together. Once the will is there, there is bound to be success. Without good health, there cannot be productivity and progress.

Hence traditional medicine practitioners and orthodox medical personnel in Africa should form a strong professional body with branches in their various local governments. His body, recognised by government and supported by law, would help to check unhealthy practices of its members and provide a holistic health care delivery to our people. Intensive research should be carried out in our tertiary institutions on medicinal plants, and modalities for their uses and preservation should be worked out. Nigerian universities should be encouraged morally and financially to carry out research works in traditional medicine so as to document the valuable wealth of knowledge of traditional medicine practitioners, especially those in the rural areas. If this is not done, this valuable knowledge will go into extinction. It will also make considerable contribution to the healthcare delivery system of Nigeria if traditional medicine is incorporated into the curriculum for the training of medical doctors and personnel. Practitioner themselves should further advertise their products, for example, through the mass media; this would help to promote their approved products. It would also lead to the wide use of the product within and outside the country. If this is patriotically and efficiently implemented, Nigeria's health care delivery system and economy would improve tremendously like what is happening in some Asia countries.

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Chapter Eleven

AFRICAN ECOSYSTEM AND TABOOS

Jude I. Onebunne, PhD

Department of Philosophy

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

juno.anyi@gmail.com

Executive Summary

The ecosystem which basically entails the interconnectedness of organisms with each other and their environment has over time been at risk of human activities, which due to selfishness or carelessness harmed these organisms and the environment which they exist in mindlessly. Taboos, on the other hand, deal with prohibitions triggered by cultural practices and beliefs which are regarded as sacred. It is, therefore, implicit that taboos play a very big role in the conservation and protection of the ecosystem. Using the methods of critical analysis and evaluation, the researcher finds out that taboos are mainly related to cultural ethics and values and are overlooked by modern day man who has blindly embraced the modern education without reference to them. The researcher suggests, therefore, that emphasis should be laid on these taboos which are favourable to the preservation of the ecosystem and as such replicate them as standing law to protect the ecosystem and some of its defenceless inhabitant from going extinct.

Keywords: Taboos, Ecosystem, Culture, Ethics, Value, Conservation.

Introduction

A taboo is an implicit prohibition on something (usually against an utterance or behaviour) based on a cultural sense that it is

excessively repulsive or, perhaps, too sacred for ordinary people. Such prohibitions are present in virtually all societies. On a comparative basis, taboos, for example related to food items, seem to make no sense at all, as what may be declared unfit for one group by custom or religion may be perfectly acceptable to another.

An ecosystem (or ecological system) consists of all the organisms and the physical environment with which they interact. These biotic and abiotic components are linked together through nutrient cycles and energy flows. Energy enters the system through photosynthesis and is incorporated into plant tissue. By feeding on plants and on one another, animals play an important role in the movement of matter and energy through the system. They also influence the quantity of plant and microbial biomass present. By breaking down dead organic matter, decomposers release carbon back to the atmosphere and facilitate nutrient cycling by converting nutrients stored in dead biomass back to a form that can be readily used by plants and microbes.

The role of local communities and local ecological knowledge in the management of natural resources and ecosystems has received increasing attention in recent years. Local ecological knowledge refers to a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief of the relationships of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment, reflecting the dynamic way in which people organise perceptions of flora, fauna, ecosystem processes, culture beliefs and history (Berkes and Folke 1998; Berkes et al. 2003; Gadgil et al. 1993). Such knowledge is often tacit, and its transmission and practical implementation is frequently accomplished through the prescriptions of social institutions, such as rituals and taboos (Colding and Folke 2001). The institution of taboos is a universal

regulator of human behaviour. Colding and Folke (2001) consider some taboos to be integral parts of 'invisible' systems of resource management that often show a functional similarity to the institutions of formal nature conservation. Specific-species taboos regulate the utilisation of particular species and are usually inclusive prohibitions, banning exploitation of a particular species at all times. The rationale behind the existence of specific-species taboos vary, ranging from notions of the species being toxic, being perceived as religious symbols, as well as being avoided due to their behavioural and physical appearance. In an analysis of seventy specific-species taboos, about 30 per cent, predominantly reptiles and mammals, were found to be involved species recognised as 'threatened' by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (Colding and Folke 1997). While this may be an unintended consequence, the enforcement of taboos may have a direct impact on species conservation. Taboos and other forms of informal institutions have, however, seldom been incorporated in biological conservation schemes, partly due to narrow definitions of what constitutes conservation (Berkes et al. 2003; Colding et al. 2003).

Taboos form an integral part and parcel of the cultural morality of the different communities around the world and has been a way of allowing all things exist fairly in the ecosystem. For the ancient man, environmental taboos have a pivotal moral role toward the ontological wellbeing of both the individual person and the environment at large. Prohibitions and restrictions through taboos on unsustainable use of certain plant species, forests, mountains, rivers, pools and nonhuman animals, among other ecological species in the ecosystem, is not a new epistemology to the world at large, but today these ancient way of conservation seems to have been forgotten as a result of the impact of the full weight of the domineering influence of

colonization and globalization. That notwithstanding the world today possess much that is worth retaining and our prospects is to save a good deal of it in succeeding generations, and this can only be possible if corrective measures are taken to revive these taboo.

The Relationship between taboos and the environment

Taboos are 'avoidance rules' that forbid members of the human community from performing certain actions, such as eating some kinds of food, walking on or visiting some sites that are regarded as sacred, cruelty to nonhuman animals, and using nature's resources in an unsustainable manner. For the Shona people, taboos are understood as specific rules that forbid people from performing certain actions, otherwise the performance of such forbidden actions is a negation of the moral code that govern human conduct. It is, therefore, only wise to say that taboos are linked to philosophy as a branch of axiology called ethics.

The society have always looked at the environment as a very important and inseparable part of the human community. The environment is important to the well-being of the individual. Thus, the communitarian nature of society can be understood in the context of the moral relationship that is struck between the individual and the environment through the observance of taboos. Such teachings complement and cement a good moral relationship between the individual person and the environment. Though Mbiti's (1969) contention that "I am because we are", is anthropocentric as it characterizes the relationship between the individual and his society, it can also be applicable to the relationship between the human community and the environment. In this context, the society is what it is because of the existence of the environment that provides it with some of its needs and wants. Tatira (2000) rightly notes that "the Shona people realize the importance of preserving the

environment as a factor in overall development. This knowledge is manifested in some of the taboos that control child behavior in relation to the environment." Thus, taboos are ethical tools that do not only foster good human relations, but also promote good relations between human beings and nature.

However, the world communitarianism does not end at the level of the human community, as Mbiti seems to imply. The individual human person or the communities of human persons do not live separately as moral islands, neither do they live in a moral vacuum. Rather, human persons actually live, and ought to live, in harmony with the environment. Therefore, taboos, just like those of any other social grouping, must be understood as moral rules that regulate human behavior, especially as it impacts negatively on the environment. In this regard, taboos are meant to make the individual adjust his interests so that they conform to those of the society and the environment at large. It can be proposed that the 'I' in Mbiti's declaration "I am because we are" should take on board the interests of the individual human persons, while the 'we' becomes a broader term referring to the human community and the environment. Such a conception of the relationship between the human society and the environment fosters a sound environmental ethic that does not only take into account the well-being of the individual and his community, but also that of the environment, and this well-being is being fostered by taboo. The environment should be construed as an end in itself in a similar way that human beings are perceived, rather than viewing it as a mere means to some human ends. Thus, taboos have an esoteric role towards nature if considered in terms of their embedded environmental role that they play.

Besides being a source of environmental ethics, taboos also cultivate a concept of wholeness between the human community

and the environment. By and large, observance of the environmental taboos brings about a sustainable use of the environment and takes into account its wholeness. Thus, Ramose (1999) notes that: "The principle of wholeness applies also with regard to the relation between human beings and the physical or objective nature. To care for one another, therefore, implies caring for the physical nature as well. Without such care, the interdependence between human beings and the physical nature would be undermined." The idea of wholeness of the human being in relation to the environment as enshrined in taboos is important in fostering a sustainable use and preservation of the various natural resources, such as water sources, natural vegetation, wildlife, and endangered non-human species.

The World Ecology and Management

The term "ecosystem management" was formalized in 1992 by F. Dale Robertson, the then Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Robertson stated, "By ecosystem management, we mean an ecological approach... that must blend the needs of people and environmental values in such a way that the National Forests and Grasslands represent diverse, healthy, productive and sustainable ecosystems." A variety of additional definitions of ecosystem management exist, although definitions of this concept are typically vague. For example, Robert T. Lackey emphasizes that ecosystem management is informed by ecological and social factors, motivated by societal benefits, and implemented over a specific timeframe and area. F. Stuart Chapin and co-authors highlight that ecosystem management is guided by ecological science to ensure the long-term sustainability of ecosystem services, while Norman Christensen and co-authors underscore that it is motivated by defined goals, employs adaptive practices, and accounts for the complexities of ecological systems. Peter Brussard and colleagues opine that

ecosystem management balances preserving ecosystem health while sustaining human needs.

As a concept of natural resource management, ecosystem management remains both ambiguous and controversial, in part because some of its formulations rest on contested policy and scientific assertions. These assertions are important to understanding much of the conflict surrounding ecosystem management. Professional natural resource managers, typically operating from within government bureaucracies and professional organizations, often mask debate over controversial assertions by depicting ecosystem management as an evolution of past management approaches.

A fundamental principle of ecosystem management is the long-term sustainability of the production of goods and services by ecosystems, as "intergenerational sustainability is a precondition for management, not an afterthought". Ideally, there should be clear, publicly-stated goals with respect to future trajectories and behaviours of the system being managed. Other important requirements include a sound ecological understanding of the system, including connectedness, ecological dynamics, and the context in which the system is embedded. An understanding of the role of humans as components of the ecosystems and the use of adaptive management is also important. While ecosystem management can be used as part of a plan for wilderness conservation, it can also be used in intensively managed ecosystem.

Sustainable ecosystem management approaches have been used by societies throughout human history. Prior to colonization, indigenous cultures often sustainably managed their natural resources through intergenerational Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). In TEK, cultures acquire

knowledge of their environment over time and this information is passed on to future generations through cultural customs, including folklore, religion, and **taboos**.

The desire for more integrated policies, expressed in the 1990s, has not yet, or only to a very limited extent, become practical in reality. Nature and environment policies are still predominantly sectoral, and limited in spatial and temporal coverage (for a comprehensive analysis, see De Jong, 2006). Moreover, there has been an increasing opposition against 'green' politics, which has manifested itself in the call for the inclusion of social and economic aspects in nature and environmental policies, in other words, a sustainable approach.

Today's question is whether the concepts of sustainable development, integrated ecosystem management, and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) can provide solutions to these problems.

Although the concept of sustainable development already emerged in the 1980s, it has gained momentum with the adoption of national sustainability strategies at the beginning of the 2000s. Integrated ecosystem management was already proposed by scientists in the first half of the 1970s (Ruivo, 1972). The concept has been further elaborated since and promoted by ecologists (Christensen et al., 1996) and broadened from being mainly ecology-oriented to also encompass cultural, historical, and socioeconomic aspects (Dronkers and De Vries, 1999; Grumbine, 1997; Visser, 1999). There exist many definitions of integrated ecosystem management (Christensen et al., 1996; EC, 1999; Grumbine, 1997; Nordic Council, 1998; Yaffee, 1999) from which several shared elements can be distilled: integrated application of all ecosystem aspects (chemical, biological, physical, and anthropogenic); integration of administrative

sectors (cross-sectoral approach); and involvement of stakeholders. It was at the beginning of the 2000s that the concept was embraced by politics. ICZM may be regarded as a specific type of integrated ecosystem management. Also, ICZM is not a new concept (compare Sorensen, 2005), but has been mainly the subject of academic research. With the publication of the EU Recommendation on ICZM (EC, 2002), the concept has become much more tangible.

Effect of Taboo in the Conservation of Ecosystem

In the traditional African society especially in Igbo society, taboos played significant and positive roles. They provided a set of rules serving as a moral guidance or a law in the community. These laws unintentionally helped a great deal in the preservation of lands and wildlife. Every moral system requires the existence of guiding principles, source(s) of motivation, and some grounds for objectivity. Even though formulated as 'negative' principles stressing 'do not...' and teaching people about what was not acceptable in the society, by implication, they were also pointing out to the actions that were supposed to be done. By preventing people from doing wrong things, they were helping them to focus on what was encouraged in the society.

In a society where there are no police, taboos served as a guardian of moral values. To a certain extent, they were better than modern law enforcing agencies, because, in most cases, breaking of a taboo was associated with an automatic punishment – one did not have to be caught to be punished. They helped in the upbringing of children who grow to meet these taboo practices and thereby follow them and by so doing preserving the world ecosystem. They could be described as 'teaching aids' when explaining some moral principles to them. When one lacked an intellectual ability to impart the importance

of some moral principles, taboos were a useful way of transmitting the same value from a different perspective.

Those values, worded as taboos played an indispensable role in the control of the way people use the wildlife, for instance, some part of the world feels that some special trees are worshiped as gods or a particular animal; the Idemili people of the Igbo tribe of Africa believes that pythons are sacred and should be respected. They believe that when one mistakenly or intentionally kills a python, he or she must perform a full burial right for it. It is therefore seen as a taboo to commit such and this has gone a long way in protecting such animal in their community; likewise, the Indians worship different animals ranging from monkeys to elephant and a few other unmentioned examples. Some societies see some trees as sacred and therefore never try to use its branches for fire wood or any commercial purpose. In the ancient Igbo tradition some enormous areas of land are regarded as sacred like “the evil forest”, as it is popularly called. It is never cultivated, hunted nor entered except on special approval on condemnation.

These taboos governing the use of wild species are still present in many societies. A system of prohibitions known as ‘fady’ is central to Malagasy culture. It has been observed that fady that relates to the use of natural resources in the eastern rainforests of Madagascar play an important conservation role. Prohibitions ranged from strict taboos in which a species or area was forbidden by the ancestors to social norms that concerned acceptable behaviour when harvesting wild species. Strict taboos offered real protection to threatened species, such as the lemur *Propithecus edwardsi* and the carnivore *Cryptoprocta ferrox*. Taboos also reduced pressure on some economically important endemic species by preventing their sale or limiting the harvest season. Despite their value for conservation, the taboos did not

appear to originate from attempts to sustainably manage resources.

Replication of Taboo in Modern Day Conservation of the Ecosystem

With the coming of the white men the effectiveness of taboos became very irrelevant. Laws appeared the most effective way of protecting our ecosystem, but ironically these laws were not as effective as the taboos because people bypass the law through bribery and corruptions and sometimes get away with the harmful activities even without being noticed. A large number of others are ready to bear the consequence of paying the fine when caught.

It is important to note that taboos were perceived to have immediate implication on the family, generation or even the health of the person in question. The effectiveness of these taboos was such that it works even without the offender being seen by anyone. It is necessary that these taboos are reintroduced and strongly abided by. The communities around the world should resurrect these taboo practices and be backed by the laws of the different countries around the world. This replication would enable an effectiveness in the conservation of the ecosystem. The younger generation should be aware of these taboos and their implication as it is believed by the community. Every member of the community should also look out for the offenders and bring them to book by the law this way the law would be working hand in hand with the taboos for a more effective conservation of the ecosystem in a changing world.

The protection of the ecosystem should be a collective effort that combines both the olden days' traditional way of conservation and the modern day planned conservation method. This way the

world ecosystem would have little or nothing to fear as regards to its protection and sustainability.

Conclusion

The role of taboo in the protection of our ecosystem cannot be over emphasized. This paper has pointed out the indispensable contributions of the ancient taboo practices on the ecosystem. It has also shown that these taboo practices might be the most effective way of conserving the ecosystem. The researcher is therefore encouraging the resuscitation of these taboo practices for the benefit of our ecosystem. An indebt study on the different taboo practiced in the different local environment is also encouraged so as to enable a more effective ecosystem management.

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Chapter Twelve

ALI DEITY AMONG THE EVO PEOPLE: TOWARDS AN INDIGENOUS ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

*Tasie Onyedikachi Henry, PhD
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt
hitasie@gmail.com*

Executive Summary

The phenomenon of eco-spirituality is an experience of global concern. This is the reason for review on its decline in modern times. The review of the spirituality of the ecosystem in Evo indigenous religion as it concerns *Ali* deity cannot be overemphasized. This is because the influence of modernization, commercialization and industrialization has severely impacted on African religion, thereby causing a decline in the concept of the land not just as matter but a deity. There are misuses of land such that its production and sustenance of human person is fast depreciating; this is because the indigenous religious prohibitive rules that regulate the use of the environment have been abandoned. The review showed that eco-spirituality was enhanced in the pre-modern era when the indigenous religious ritualistic practices of venerating and worship of *Ali* deity was carried out. Therefore, methods for regulating land misuse were employed following the indigenous religion, and this demonstrated that the spirituality of the *Ali* was a major part of the eco-spirituality of the time. Following the different challenges on the spirituality of the ecosystem, it is recommended that the indigenous religious environmental conservatory measures should be used in modern society so as

to allow room for diversity. The cultural or traditional method can help restore a balanced of eco-spirituality for a sustainable development. Phenomenological method of research was used to discussion the challenges of the decline in eco-Spirituality in Evo.

Keywords: Evo People, *Ala* Deity, Eco-Spirituality, Conservation, Environment

Introduction

The problem of devaluation of land in Evo is a phenomenon of serious concern. Land in the indigenous religion and culture of Evo people was taken seriously. In the pre-modern era the people understood land to be an abode of a spiritual being known as *Ali*. By so doing, there were strict traditional and religious rules that guided its use. For instance, there were rules against deforestation and cultivation of land. People were not permitted to enter into any parcel of land either to deforest or start cultivate the land without first taking permission from the deity in charge through rituals. Thus, the presence of the deity abiding in land, made it spiritual.

On this note, clearing the forest and cultivating on the land, will amount to dislodgement of spirits from their natural abode.¹ Moreover, the act of using the land at will without following the trado-religious guideline of acquiring of land for either farming or building a living place may anger the spirits who is in charge of it and its anger they may bring calamity to both the land and the people. In order to restore normalcy of the environment, it is

¹ Tasie, O.H (2020) *the impact of environmental degradation on the indigenous religions of Evo, Rivers State*,
PhD Thesis of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Unpublished P82,

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required that the spirit is appeased with ritual sacrifices and worship.

Therefore, to pollute the land through setting fire on it, deforesting, or carelessly using it without performing the rituals of permission to *Ali* deity was seriously frowned at because it was capable of chasing away useful animals and destruction of the natural vegetation that was required for human and animal survival. By this, it is apparent that the people of Evo had serious concern for Environmental sustainability and spirituality.

Furthermore, it was not a very common practice to sell land as an individual, neither was land shared as an individual property. Land and landed properties were communally owned by kindred as inheritance from their forebears. Therefore, the living members of Evo society saw themselves as custodians of land bequeathed to them by their progenitors, which they too owe a duty to transfer to the succeeding generations.

Except for those issues that threaten the survival of the community, nobody was allowed to sell land. Since land was not sold anyhow, it is preserved. This served as a way of protecting the environment. In this wise, it was possible to assess the challenges of environmental degradation, since the people take stringent traditional measures to regulate human interaction with the physical land use.

As Port Harcourt developed into a metropolitan city, other agents of development accompanied it. Industrial change in the indigenous religious society, assisted to increase population of the people.

Evo was not left out of the increase in population in Port Harcourt. As development came in, other economic interests such as Shell BP as it was known at that time, but Shell Petroleum and Development Company came to prospect for oil, and subsequently sited their industrial on the lands. This became the genesis of land misuse and decline of eco-spirituality in Evo. Phenomenological method of research was used to discuss the challenges of the decline in eco-spirituality in Evo.

Conceptualization of *Ali* deity (earth deity)

Evo people call Land "*Ali*" and viewed it in different perspectives. Farmland "*Ekwu*" is an uncultivated forest "*Ohia Igba*" and the swamp forest is called "*Ohia mini*". During the pre-colonial era, land in *Evo* and other natural resources were sources of economic wealth to the families or the whole community (Kanu 2015).

The people of *Evo* considered land the greatest wealth bequeathed by their ancestors to the succeeding generations. This is due to the significance of the activities carried out on land ranging from political, social, economic and religious activities. This explains why a lot of cultural sanctions are remediated for Land spirit (*Ali*).

Ali deity in *Evo* indigenous religion is the mother earth or simply referred to as the earth goddess who is symbolized by the ground or soil. The earth deity is one of the major deities in the Ikwerre cosmology on which human being survival is dependent on. For example, when a child is born, they are first placed on the floor to have contact with the earth deity (*Ali*) as well as when someone dies, they are buried in the ground. The ground in *Evo* indigenous religion is the transport vehicle to the hereafter when death occurs. This is why the earth deity is regularly offered sacrifice and offerings since it is the source of soil fertilization for a better crop yield. "The Ikwerre (*Evo*) people adore the 'mother

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earth' *Ali* so much that they see it as the basic matrix of human material and spiritual existence. This is why actions that constitute taboo to *Ali* are seriously frowned at. These abominations includes: homicide, incest, suicide, stealing, sex in the bush, etc. They constitute agents of land (*Ali*) pollution in Evo which requires elaborate placatory rites by *nye-kwali* (chief diviner of *Ali* shrine) in order to restore the ritual purity of the Community. "2

It is important to note that the ground is a symbol which represents the invincible spirit who is in charge of issues that associates human, animals and their existence/survival with land. No wonder the unbiblical cord of a human child is buried on the ground after birth. This action symbolizes the connection of human being with the earth deity who source of human existence. A gesture like pouring libation on the ground has a deep symbolic interpretation, in that it promotes cordial relationship between *Ali* deity and human adherents. This gesture when decoded symbolically simply means asking for permission that *Ali* deity may bless their ritual offerings and sacrifices. When a food is kept on the floor, it symbolizes the feeding the deity.

The spirituality of the environment according to Wopara (2019) permeates all deities, spirits and divinities like *Ali* (earth deity) who inhabits the nature elements like land, forest, trees, and water. As much as these spirits abide within the nature and the

² Olumati, Rowland (2015) The impact of Christianity and modernity on *Ali* - earth goddess of the traditional religion of the Ikwerre people, rivers state, Nigeria, *An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia Vol. 9(1), Serial No. 36*,

people are religiously observing the prescribed rituals, sacrifice worship of the deities, the people are bound to enjoy the blessings of the deities.

Thus, every division of Evo has a shrine dedicated to the worship *Ali* deity. These divisions include:

<i>Ali-Esezi</i>	Family deity of the earth
<i>Ali-Mgbu</i>	Community deity
<i>Ali-Oro</i>	Clan deity

All these *Ali* shrines have specific diviners that organize worship and sacrifices at the shrine. Thus the shrine is conspicuously positioned making it central to all members of the communities and as well as the spirits.

Hence, there are rules guiding *Ali* divinity in relation with to human activities around the shrine. As long human being walk on bare foot, they are in contact with *Ali*. This gesture promotes the sanctity of *Ali*. Similarly, complementary efforts of *Elu - Igwe* with *Ali* assist eco-spirituality in maintaining order and coherence of both natural and supernatural activities in Evo.

There are different religious rituals that are associated with land spirituality in Evo; these religious rituals were for the protection and sanctity of the *Ali* deity. For instance, one of the rituals of land spirituality is **Aku-Igba** (Ritual of cultivating the forest). The ritual was performed in the rain and mangrove forest of Evo in the pre-modern era.

Aku Igba ritual was performed by the *Ojiowhor* (eldest male member of the family and the chief diviner) during deforestation of a virgin land. During the rituals sacrifice, only the male members of the family that are matured for farming activities perform the sacrifice. In the cause of the ritual sacrifice, *Ali* the

earth deity and *Alabida* the forest deity are offered sacrifice of blood of either a he-goat or a fowl. These deities are the guardian spirits that are responsible for the sustenance and growth of the forest trees and fertility of the soil. As mentioned above, the ritual items includes He goat (*Owu-Okani*), Red cock and hen (*Nwere nu oke ochichi*), native chalk (*Nzu*), snail (*ejii*), tubers of yam (*Iji*), a jar of palm wine (*Jungo maya nwgo*), lobes of Kolanut (*iji - ilu*). These ritual items are presented to the deity as appreciation for spiritual guardianship, prayers for the increase of crop yield and the safety of the people during the deforestation and cultivation on the land. This is commonly the ritual that was performed to usher in the farming season.

***Okwa-Ali* (Land Cleansing Ritual)**

This is another religious ritual perform in honour of *Ali* the earth deity. *Okwa Ali*, as the name connotes, is a very important ritual of propitiation which is carried out for reminiscence. As mentioned above, *Ali* is the deity that facilitates the fertility of the soil for improved or better crop yield. There are a number of taboos associated with *Ali*. The people of Evo worship *Ali* deity on a sacred day called *riagbo*. *Riagbo* is the first day of the traditional calendar of Evo people. The weekly calendar consist of five days which begin with *riagbo*, *saragbo*, *nim okwu* and *Namake*. It is important to note that this traditional calendar does not follow the sequence of the Gregorian calendar of Sunday to Saturday. On a *riagbo* day when the people worship and sacrifice to *Ali*, it is a taboo for anyone to engage in a form of hardwork either farming on the land, fishing in the rivers or trading in the village square. These activities include: "digging, clearing of the bush, setting a big fire and cracking of kernel."³ On the *riagbo*

³ Ibid p 36

day, it is believed that *Ali* divinity fertilizes the soil to replenish its support for food production. Since, defaulting on cultural and religious guidelines is inevitable; defaulters are obligated to perform ritual for cleansing (*Osudielii*) to placate the earth divinity.

More so, when someone defiles the religious taboo, he or she will suffer severe punishment meted out by the deities that govern the ecosystem. On the other hand, if by default a taboo is not upheld, the person who committed the crime is expected to placate the deity with ritual sacrifice known as *Okwa Ali*.

Taboos

Taboos are generally prohibitions that are expected to maintain and conserve the environment. These taboos impact on the religious and spiritual consciousness of the people of Evo and their environmental spirituality, helping them to order their life in such a way that they will promote preservation of the environment rather than destroying it.

Each aspect of the environment has taboos that are meant to establish order and coherence in the structure and spirituality of the environment.

Taboo in Evo Indigenous religion includes death on a worship day (*riagbo*), rape, sex on the bare floor, suicide, death of a young person, death by thunder strike, and many other forms of activities that defile *Ali* deity. These taboos infringe on the religious sanctity of *Ali* (earth deity). Hence, if a taboo is committed, it is very compulsory that *Okwa Ali* (cleansing ritual) to perform. This is done to placate the deity from causing calamities to befall the land and the people involved in the taboo. The ritual items that are used to perform *Okwa Ali* follows the

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prescriptions of the diviner by divination. They include goats, rams, fowls, and other items etc.

Where these deities are not placated with the adequate ritual items as prescribed by a diviner, the wrath of the deity is invoked on the defaulter and the land as well. Some of the effects of defiling *Ali* deity includes, low crop yield, infertility of the soil, drought, etc. As much as the environment suffers from the anger of the deity, the human defaulters are also severely punished with calamities like blindness, insanity, deformity or actual death.

Ali keeps watch of every person in the community in that when evil is perpetrated (witchcraft, pollution, stealing, murder, rape, suicide and adultery) defaulters do not go scot-free. This is the reason why wrongdoers are punished instantly to serve as deterrent to other people. The defaulters are punished with one form of disease or the other. More so, should offender swear with the soil which is the symbol of *Ali*, and then the guilty will suffer from harsh calamities within the months? The harsh calamities are mostly incurable diseases or instant death. In like manner, some persons suffer from protracted diseases which compel them to confess to their crime before they die.

These calamities are symbolically decoded by a diviner through divination to ascertain the actual cause. Thus, following the punishments befalls the defaulter; they are not allowed to be part of their family statutory activities like sharing of land until ritual of remediation has been duly performed (*Okwa Ali*). The period of cleansing is determined by the length of the problem. In this regard, it is a serious offense with severe consequence to violate taboo that pertains to eco-spirituality.

Other Cultural Practice that show the Spirituality of Ali Deity

There are other features of cultural practice among Evo people that supports the spirituality of *Ali* the earth deity. This cultural phenomenon shall be enumerated succinctly in this session.

Land Rest

Land in Evo culture, has religious, social and economic implications. Therefore, land is fundamental to their existence as it is the symbol of *Ali* deity. In Evo culture, after cultivating a portion of land for a particular period, it is expected that the land is allowed to rest and fallow. The period of land rest is regarded the *Ali* sanctification. This is the period *Ali* deity blesses the land thereby making it fertile.

The phenomenon land rest includes the weekly that is *riagbo* day and the Seven years rest. During the seven years rest, the land is required to be free from continuous cultivation. This is because it had been used for over some years. Evo people as mentioned above are blessed with vast portions of arable land, mangroves and rainforest, beside other numerous natural endowments. Thus, Land in Evo is a priceless and valuable asset to both human being and spirits. Moreover, it a notable phenomenon that the blessings of peak harvest is associated with land rest since spiritual fertilization is a gift of *Ali* deity.

Hence, the practice of land rest during the seven years and *riagbo* day is very important since it concerns worship of deities and conservation of the value of the environment for human survival. Not adhering to the prohibitive rules of land rest and its ritual is a taboo which has heavy consequences. More so, land rest is required as cultural and religious obligations of the people. This obligation is measured with six years of land cultivating for agricultural purposes, while on the seventh year, the land is allowed to fallow.

Murder

Similarly a death that occurs as a result murder is considered a serious defilement of *Ali* the goddess of the earth. The life of every human being is sacred and cannot be taken carelessly. Ejekwu (2019) an oral informant opined that life in Evo indigenous religion is a gift from *Ehie* the Supreme Deity. It is also the prerogative of the Supreme Being to determine how life should be lived and appreciated. Although there may be times human sacrifice is required used for placatory purposes to the Deity, was not common, it is only required in extreme cases which is determined through divination by a diviner.

In this occasion, human sacrifice was required only for serious offenses against the community or a group of people committed against the deity. Hence, human sacrifice is considered a religious ritual, the Supreme prize. Other than the aforementioned occasion, killing of a human being is sacrilegious to *Ali* deity.

Murder most often is carried out in such a way that every one of its activities, is performed on the ground, the symbol of *Ali*. Thus, the ground is the abode of *Ali* deity. It is an abomination to spill blood on the ground except during religious rituals. Spilling unrequested sacrifice of blood, defiles the sanctity of the ground where *Ali* the spiritual deity abides. In this wise, such an abomination requires proper remediation.

Therefore, when life is terminated without the knowledge or permission of *Ali* deity, it is a serious taboo. In this wise, murder is a phenomenon that defiles the sanctity of the land. Hence, *Ali* must be remediated with a ritual to avoid its wrath. The remediation ritual is performed on the ground as a cleansing rite (*Okwa Ali, Osudieli*).

Murder in Evo indigenous religion has grievous impact and implications on the survival of the community. Often times, as a result of murder, a whole community may be plagued with different types of calamities. These calamities include disasterous famine, low crop yield, insanity, deaths and diseases. Thus, in other to quell the problem, a ritual of cleansing will be performed following the diviners divination called “*Osudeli*”.

Suicide

As discussed above in murder, suicide is another heinous taboo of life against the sanctity of *Ali* deity. Unlike murder, suicide is an act in which an individual terminates his or her own life. When suicide is committed, it is considered a serious offense against *Ali* deity and such an abomination. It has severe consequences on the community. This unusual mishap includes but not limited to unknown death, famine, drought and diseases etc. Suicide like many other taboos requires placatory ritual to *Ali* deity before the individual will be thrown into the sacred forest.

Deaths which occur as a result of suicide are culturally unproductive and abominable to the indigenous religion. Persons, who die as a result of suicide, are considered a curse to the people. This type of death does not qualify the individual to enjoy traditional funeral rituals and ancestral bliss. They are often thrown into the evil forest to sojourn among malevolent spirits. The spirits of these dead individuals do not enjoy blissful rest; they are tormented regularly and sent out to cause mayhem to their living relatives.

In order to avoid spirit attack, members of their family will perform ritual of cleansing and protection. The items required for the ritual of propitiation is often determined by the diviner of the shrine through divination.

Sex on the Bare Ground

Sex on the bare floor or rape is a serious abomination against *Ali* deity. In Evo, sex is a beautiful cultural and religious obligation only within marriage relationship. Hence, sex is only good, within the boundaries of marriage and performed on a bed lifted above the ground.

Following the explanation above, religio-culturally, it is fundamentally wrong to have sex indiscriminately. Engaging in sexual obligation on a bare floor, ground or in the farm, is a grave offense against *Ali* deity. Although *Ali* is not the only deity that suffers from such defilement, deities like *Ojukwu*, *Alabida* are also defiled.

When sexual activity is carried out on the floor, it defiles *Ali* deity. This act of sexual abuse is capable of attracting the wrath of *Ali* deity. In other to identify and punish defaulters, the deity inflicts on them calamities like swollen stomach, swollen scrotum in men (*ibi*) termination of menstrual flow and virginal decay for women, etc. There are so many negative effects of having sex on the bare floor, these include: infertility of the soil, poor crop yield, crop diseases, etc. This phenomenon portends danger to the survival of the people since the provision of their food for living is sourced from the goodwill and blessings of *Ali*.

Conclusion

It is very important as a matter of urgency that adherence of the indigenous religion restrain themselves from indiscriminate misuses of land because land is the abode of *Ali* spirits who is the primary instrument of environmental conservation.

In other to restore the sanctity of the land and reverence for *Ali* deity, parcels of land that are yet to be completely deforested

within Evo should be set aside as forest reserves to serve as the abode of the deities and wildlife.

Work on forbidden days like *Riagbo*: companies that operate and do business in Evo should be made to understand that work on *riagbo* is a taboo, but if work must take place, they are to make provision to placate *Ali* deity .

Religious functionaries (Diviners) within Evo should leave upright lives and not join the jamboree for land speculation. They are to strictly observe the rule that will aid a return to environmental preservation and sustainability through the inculcation of the indigenous religious beliefs and practice and its techniques in schools, and other social gatherings using the media.

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Chapter Thirteen

AGBO OLODE: THE HISTORY AND PHENOMINOLOGY OF A RELIGIOUS FESTIVAL AND FERTILITY DEITY OF OGIDI - IJUMU IN KOGI STATE

OJO, Paul Olarewaju, PhD

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies

Faculty of Arts

University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

topedavidodojo@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

This chapter discusses the Agbo festival among the people of Ogidi-Ijumu within the context of egungun, and the phenomenology of this festival which is a fertility deity as the hub and identity of the traditional religion of the people. It is a discussion of the history of the religion of a people through the descriptive approach.

Keywords: Agbo Olode, Fertility Deity, Ogidi-Ijumu, Kogi State, Egungun, Religious Festival

Introduction

Belief in the numinous, life in the hereafter, the continuous relationship between the living and the dead especially through Egungun, and the celebration of annual festivals is very central to Yoruba traditional religion. While Egungun is the visible feature of the dead visiting the living, the festivals serve as the means of perpetuation of memories, the reenactment, and revitalisation of significant events and personalities of heroic status and places. It is on this note that this chapter discusses the

Agbo festival among the people of Ogidi-Ijumu within the context of egungun, and the phenomenology of this festival which is a fertility deity as the hub and identity of the traditional religion of the people. It is a discussion of the history of the religion of a people through the descriptive approach.

The Concept of Egungun among the Yoruba

The name “Egungun” means masquerade. These are ‘masked men who represent the spirits of the living dead, or who are seen as the reincarnated spirits costumed as masquerades.’¹ Egungun are believed to be ancestors.

Traditionally among the Yoruba generally, and the Okun Yoruba in particular, there are variety of ways for the living to keep in touch with the dead (ancestors). The Okun-Yoruba of Kogi State to which Ogidi Ijumu is a component believe that the deceased can be seen in dreams, or trances, and that they impact information or explanations, or give instructions, on any matter when the family is in a serious predicament. They can also send messages through other persons or through certain cults.²

S. O. Babayemi, a Yoruba drummer and scholar, explains that the spirits of ancestors, who “ensure the well-being, prosperity, and productivity of the whole community” can be “invoked” collectively and individually in time of need. The place of call is usually either on the graves of the ancestors (Ojuorori), the family shrine (Ile’fun), or the community grove (Igbale). They can also visit physically in the form of the Egungun.³ The impression is that the deceased is making a temporary re-appearance on earth in the form of a masked individual. Thus, “it is absolutely essential that not a single particle of the human form should be visible; for, if this is broken, the man wearing the dress must die (presumably as an impostor), and every woman present must likewise die.”⁴

While these policies have changed since British colonization, there is still great respect for the mysterious Egungun. Only authorized persons can come close. Generally, the costumes of Egungun consist of varied colours, horns, cowries, shells, and skulls of animals, skins of wild animals, feathers of mysterious birds, among other things.⁵ Among the Okun Yoruba, the costumes of the Egungun vary greatly from locality to locality and even from town to town. Some Egungun cover themselves with dry banana leaves and palm fronds like the Agbo of Ogidi and Ekirin Ade of Ijumu L.G.A, while others are concealed under an elaborate costume of the cloth like the Uro, Obebeyewu, Ogbin, e.t.c, celebrated all over Okunland. The masks they wear may be carved with woods like the Epa of Iya-Gbedde-Ijumu, some are made of other magical and medicinal elements such as black soap, and the red tail of a parrot (ikoede) may be attached to the costume or composed of objects such as antlers, skulls, feathers, e.t.c. Some are covered with clothes instead of masks. This is often combined with a long train of fabric that trails behind the Egungun, the longer and elaborate the train, the wealthier the family. To complete the illusion, the Egungun must also disguise his voice, which is often disguised in a low fumble or high falsetto, or a piping, treble voice.⁶

There are numerous Yoruba myths that explain the origin of these masked spirits. One of such myths says that when a man dies, he joins his ancestors to become an Egungun. Since his body is covered from head to toe for burial, the Egungun comes back to earth completely covered. Another myth tells the story of a king who was not properly buried when he died. His three sons had no money for a proper burial. The first son saw his father's corpse and fled. The second dressed the corpse up only to leave it behind. The third, after trying to sell the body in the market

(for medicine), finally abandoned it in the bush.⁷ Many years later when the eldest son had become king, his wife could not have any children. They consulted a diviner and came to the same conclusion that he was being punished for not burying his father. To add to his trouble, his wife was raped by a gorilla, and she ran away pregnant and ashamed. She gave birth to a child that had both human and money parts and abandoned him in the bush. She eventually returned and told the king the story. He went to consult a diviner who revealed that the child did not die in the bush and that it would grow up to be Amuludun (Literally 'one who brings sweetness to the community'). Then, the diviner advised the king to return to the place of his father's unfinished burial and perform the proper rites.⁸ These are but few of the many stories that explain the origin of the Egungun.⁹

Each Egungun may represent a particular person in a family lineage, or a broader concept of the ancestors. When contacted at a family shrine, the Egungun who appears is generally thought to represent the ancestor who is being summoned. Some Egungun always appear as young children (Egun Olomo). Though Egungun are known to emerge at any time of the day or night, they are always certain to be present at the annual Egungun festival. These festivals last seven, fourteen, seventeen or twenty-one days and their date is set by a diviner. During the festival, it is believed that the spirits of the Egungun come down from the heavens (as Araorun – visitor from heaven) to fellowship with their relatives on earth.

Geographical location of Ogidi

Ogidi is one of the ancient towns in North east Yorubaland¹⁰ and it is a major town in the present Ijumu Local Government Area of Kogi State. The town lies on latitude 5° North of the Equator and longitude 7° East of the Greenwich Meridian. It shares boundary with Kabba to the Northeast, Iyara to the North-west,

Ogale to the South-east and Ayere to the Southwest. Judging from the 1963 census, the population of Ogidi was put at 15,000. Ogidi is about four kilometers in length and one kilometer in breadth. It is about twelve kilometers from Kabba the headquarters of Kabba-Bunu Local Government Area of Kogi State. A road cuts across the town formerly regarded as “*Titi Ijoba or titi Awolowo*”, as an express way but is now a trunk C road and in bad condition. There are other roads which link Ogidi town with other places like Iyara, Ogale and Gbeleko. They are especially used on market days.¹¹

Furthermore, Ogidi is the valley town enclosed by high hills and mountains with occasional breaks in North-south and South-east, which serve as entrance and exit for the town. The rocks are granite which are useful for building of houses and road constructions.¹² The town has important river, Ohe/Ose, which takes its source from Bunu and flows through the town into the Atlantic Ocean. Another important River is Opaku, while the rivulets include Ojawiri, Apami Oso, and Apami Agbo. The town has an evenly distributed rainfall throughout the year, and this stretches from April to October and dry season is experienced from November until March. The climate is thus favourable and hence the large production of both food and cash crops.¹³

The Origin of Egungun in Ogidi-Ijumu

Traditional religion called Oro has always been the central religion of the people of Ogidi, although now it is waning with the advent of Christianity and Islam. Oro is expressed through the worship of the gods, especially, the gods of the mountains which are called Eborá. Hence, almost every year round, there are various festivals celebrated in the worship of these gods. The various gods are held in high esteem and of great reverence.

These gods are believed to serve as intermediary between the people and the Supreme Being who cannot be approached directly. The origin of these traditional worship is unknown but can be historically traced back to their founders who were believed to have come from the cradle of the Yoruba, which is Ile-Ife.¹⁴

Ogidi as a people and town is made up of various clans with her own Eboradeity to which they are devoted. Some of these are Olu-Iwo in Ilaere, Omo-Olunka in Okoro, Ayi in Ile-Oko, Agira in Igah; and Agbo festival which is the most popular, and for the whole town. The real worship of the clan deities is opened only to adult males of the society, while the women folk are kept off from participation. Some aspects of the festivals are opened, especially that of Agbo. In the parlance of oro, there are six different types of Oro or Egungun in Ogidi-Ijumu most of which have gone into extinction. The Egungun of Ogidi include Uro Odun, Itoga, the clothed masquerade that comes out and stays on the mountain, dances with only one leg, on the mountain that is heavily rubbed with ori (shea butter), and it is with the one leg that it descends and ascends the mountain while dancing; there is the oro Amuluwo (the one that comes out from the cave and agbo masquerades). In Ogidi, outside agbo festival, there are many masquerades that feature during burial ceremonies of great men, chiefs and powerful traditional worshippers. The following are mentioned here among others: Uro, Obebeyewu, Egungboro, Ogbin. Egun Oloye or Egun Aminu, which was imported by Aminu in the sixties to entertain children and as a means of sustenance.¹⁵

The Origin of Agbo Festival in Ogidi

This festival started long ago at Igbo-Eko, one of the 28 settlements that make up Ogidi, by a seemingly insane man, called Agbo, probably a shortened form of Agboola, who came

from Alu (Yagba land) to Ogidi, and was a great diviner. He was regarded as an insane man by the villagers. This was because he had no job, but rather danced round the town in dry banana leaves and palm fronds or Iko leaves, with whips in his hands, the predecessor of agbo masquerade, whilst going round in people's houses to collect whatever they could afford for him. He usually did this once every year. He would sing melodious and inspiring songs for about seven days and nights. This he continued for years but the villagers were indifferent to him and attached no significance to his activities.

There came a time when the village head was a sad man with lots of domestic problems. He had no child even after taking the sixth wife. He then consulted Ifa oracle to find the reasons and solutions to his misfortune. The divination gave him a rather shocking revelation when he was told of the man who used to come yearly and behave like a mad man; this "mad man", the diviner said, was a spirit and he and his household needed to join this man while he danced round the town to enable him (the village head) bear children.

The village head did this with faith and before the following festival, three of his wives conceived. This pleased him so much that he sent messages round the village ordering all his subjects to join the next festival. The following festival was full of pomp and pageantry as everybody danced round with Agbo. Just as the case of the king, many barren women were blessed with children. Hence, the worship spread throughout the 28 settlements, and was perpetuated and is still in practice today. This is done in remembrance of Agbo, who could be regarded as "god of children, prosperity and increase in farm output".¹⁶ Furthermore, the Agbo festival started at Igbo Eko. This makes the Agbo singers regard 'Eko' as the oldest of the settlements in

Ogidi.¹⁷ Through the seniority Eko is strongly disputed by the majority of the people of Ogidi.

The Identity Function of Agbo Festival in Ogidi

The Agbo festival is held annually by the people of Ogidi/Ijumu. This is not to say that the festival is exclusive to the people of Ogidi. According to M. O. Andi, "there is an Agbo festival in Agbowa among the Ijebus. The festival here differs in all aspects when compared to the one in Ogidi. The people make use of different kinds of costumes, songs, dance, rituals and they have a different kind of audience."¹⁸ While the Agbo in Ijebu is costumed with clothes, that of Ogidi is costumed with Banana leaves and Iko leaves blade. It has been noted that "the Agbo festival that has similar characteristics with that of the Ogidi people are those at IyahGbedde and Egbeda-Egga, both from Ijumu land". However, the type of Agbo festival in Iyah-Gbedde is an age-long tradition. This is because such a festival has ceased to exist. At Egbeda-Egga, there is a festival similar to Agbo in Ogidi, but there are marked differences in the two. The people of Egbeda-Egga have similar songs to those in Ogidi, but they normally accompany their songs with beating of bells. This is not the case in Ogidi, where there is no beating of bells to accompany songs. It is also worth noting that the Agbo festival of Egbeda-Egga no longer exists."¹⁹ One can therefore add that the Agbo festival is very central to the people of Ogidi within Ijumu Local Government Area of Kogi State.



Fig. 6.1. Agbo olode in sitting position

The Celebration of Agbo Festival in Ogidi

Agbo festival is the most symbolic of all the festivals in the lives of the indigenes of Ogidi community. The Agbo festival used to be in stages and part of it used to be wrapped in secrecy since Agbo is an egungun, and is seen as coming from another planet. The secrecy is in the details of the religious observance and rituals associated with Agbo festival, since that is the exclusive preserve of the Agbo worshippers. As the worshippers are diminishing as a result of Christianity and Islam, some of the religious observances are thrown out of the festival.

The secret aspects of the festival which are carefully guarded in secrecy by the Oloros (traditionalists) and can be related to researches include the following stages. The first stage is as follows:

- i. **Ifa dida** - divination
- ii. **Igbin fifun** - discovering of snail at the market square
- iii. **Ato wiwo** - gazing at Ato
- iv. **Oja rire** - sacrifice and the gathering of food items from the market.

The second stage is the one which affects everyone in the society, which can be called the main stages of the festival and still remain as:

- i. Ogba outing
- ii. Agbo in town
- iii. Egun Oru
- iv. Ighere moonlight masquerade²⁰

The ecological significance or spirituality of the costume of Agbo Olode: Agbo Olode is dressed on the body with heavy layers of dry banana leaves, overlaid with fresh Iko leave blades, while the masking of the masquerader is done with the use of broom stick.

Among the Yoruba generally Banana tree signifies fertility, continuity and prosperity. The Yoruba potent saying that says: Ara Kogbudo nimi, Ara Kogbudo nimi, emi kogbudo rinira, Iran Ogede kii sun kun atije, ara kogbudo nimio, meaning life must be easy with me, Banana does not find it difficult to shoot out a scion, so I must be fertile. This conveys and justifies the costume of Agbo as a fertility god. More so, this costume is easily gotten in the locality, with Ogidi being located in the forest region of Ijumu land.

The Iko blade leaves is a plant that spring up in the swampy areas when the raining season is gradually winding up in the late September into October. It lives in its greenish luster throughout the dry season while other plants have withered. Its presence as

part of the costume of Agbo portrays freshness, beauty, wellbeing and prosperity. The bunch of broom is purely for the concealment of the masquerader and for visibility. Brooms are common things in forested environment where there are so many palm trees.

The Agbo Festival: period, preparation and celebration Period:

Oro is the traditional relationship of the people with the numinous, and Agbo is very central to it. The head of the religious system of the people is Aworo (chief priest), an office held in perpetuity by the Ilounkon lineage. While Oro is celebrated by the whole community, it is handled principally by Ilounkon and Itaji lineages in conjunction with Olori Uro (head of Uro cult/masquerade). While Ilounkon holds the office of Aworo, Itaji is regarded as Oya Oluwo (Oluwo's wife). According to the chief priest of Ogidi, Oro begins when Itaji goes to inform Ilounkon that Oluwo deity says Oro should commence. It is after this that, Aworo, Itaji emissary and Olori uro (head of uro) will consult Ifa about Oro for that year. This consultation takes place at the house of Olori Uro. Having decided the date for the commencement of oro, Aworo will send Atorin (very long whip) to the three quarters of Otun, Ohi and Ona, informing them that Oro will commence.

Oral sources state that “the entire period of Oro is seen as sacred such that brawling and asaults are strictly forbidden during the festival. Crying is banned when eborā (the deity) comes out at night. Defaulters are heavily sanctioned and they must pay ‘1 pence, 2 shillings’, to the chief priest. While those who assault Sasu or Ape during oro are fined ‘2 pences, 2 shillings’ and a black goat, payable to the chief priest”.

Agbo festival is always carefully planned, performed and directed by the principal officers of Oloro, who are the aworo,

olori uro and members (the worshippers). It spans over a fairly long period of time of about three months, starting from September, which is the preparatory period, and ending in November. The period witnesses many traditional activities and different masquerades beautifully and heavily dressed in fresh iko leaves blade and dry banana leaves. The very many Agbo Olodes (masquerades) give the town a general atmosphere of beauty and excitement.

Preparation: Preparation for oro has several steps

Ifa dida – Consultation of Ifa divination: Every year before the festival, the worshippers led by the aworo (chief priest) will go and consult Ifa Oracle in order to ask for the feasibility, and success of that year's festival. Also, the divination is done to determine the future relevance of the festival. The divination exercise takes place thrice in the house of the orori uro. Since the oba is a member of uro cult, he also will be duly informed, or even be a part of the exercise. If the oba is not an initiate of uro cult (a thing that was not possible in the pre-Christian era), he will still be informed. The first two divination exercises are not done to the hearing of the public. The third one, which is the final, is for the generality of the people. However, their attendance is not needed in the house of Olori uro where previous consultation exercise is performed.

An Ifa priest, who is the chief diviner, uses four pieces of kola nuts as divination objects. In this exercise, the Ifa priest loses his individuality as an ordinary man in the society. The Ifa priest assumes a super human personality. He starts the divination exercise by singing the praise names of Ifa. Then, he holds the kolanuts in his hands for those present to touch. This, in some way, registers their support and acceptance of whatever he tells them as a statement from the gods. One needs to add at this juncture, that, audience participation is minimal. Divination is

held by Aworo, Olori uro, and a male representative of Itaji lineage. No external audience is allowed to watch or listen to the proceedings of the divination exercise. The Ifa then makes salutation to the gods:

*Oluwa mi, o sewa
Ododunkar'orogbo
Ododunkar'awusa
Ododun ka r'omo obi lori ate
Ododunkas'oro baba gha
Onibagbehi todun ni, e ni soju'un
Un sa yin re.
My lord, you are mighty
It is every year we see bitter kola
It is every year we see walnut
It is every year we see little kolanut in the stall
It is every year we celebrate the 'oro' festival of our
forefathers Whosoever says he does not want to witness
this year's own, Let the 'oro' come in his absence.*

This salutary song comes before the priest reveals what the gods have in store for the people. The people present give a general approval to his words when they all respond with a chorus of "Aaasee" meaning 'may it be so'. In some cases, the priest will recommend some sacrifices which are performed as early as possible to avert disaster.

As the divination ends, the festival mood of the Agbo festival begins, as the decision of when the Agbo masquerades will be out is made. When Ogidi people were still living according to their settlements or Apole, before coming together in their present site, there were agbo of Iketu, Igaja, Ilebu Ebeni, etc. but with the coming together into one place, after the last consultation of Ifa, agbo masquerades belonging to Ilebu quarters were determined to be eleven days, hence, that of Iga

quarters became fifteen days; Ilaere quarters, seventeen days, and Okoro quarter eighteen days. These arrangements have revealed that each quarter in Ogidi has its own Agbo. However, all masquerades in these quarters are similar in appearance. With the acceptance of Agbo as an annual festival of the whole of Ogidi, it must be noted that, the coming out of Agbo first from Ilebu, then Iga, Agbo Elegboro, and finally from Ilaere not only shows the unity in purpose of the town, but also, the opportunity of rendering assistance, cooperation among the settlements in successful Agbo outing, and also a symmetric arrangement for a full participation of all, in this festival.

Igbin fifun – finding snail in the market

square: After the consultation of ifa, the next ritual procedure is “igbin fifun” (the finding of a snail within the central market arena), which occurs few days after the final divination. This takes place in the market during the dry season, when snails hibernate. The event is very spiritual as oloro adherents will gather at the central market searching for the mysterious snail. The snail is always found in the bushes around the market. It seems that the snail is usually kept within the central market arena by one of the oloro. This exercise comes up nine days after the divination exercise mentioned earlier. When the snail is finally found, which is inevitable, there is jubilation and the singing of some agbo songs. The finding of the snail is very symbolic as it indicates the success of the forthcoming oro festival. However, the snail is very significant. It is an object which moves very slowly. The movement of this object can easily be traced as a result of the watery path created by it while it moves from one place to the other. It is on this basis that the snail is found.

Oja rire – collection of food stuff from the market:

Another important ritual exercise after the divination and finding of the snail, is “oja rire”. This is the collection of five

percent of whatever food produce is brought to the market for sale. Oja rire actually involves the making of sacrifices to the deities for a peaceful agbo festival. Oja rire is done three times in the central market with an interval of four days. The products which are gotten from the market include pieces of yam, pepper, kolanuts and other food items. Significantly, these products are kept together to be used as part of the cooking items for the festival. Moreover, some parts of these products are distributed to the oloro members who are too old to partake in that year's performance of the festival.

Ato dida - the descent of ato: In addition to the above ritual is the descent of ato, some masked masquerades on Okedu hill, which will be performed before dawn to the gaze of all from a distant hill. Ato belongs to ona Gogongo people. Ato are semi-agbo in outlook. The numbers of ato is often taken to be a pointer to how numerous the agbo will be in the town for that year. Ato descend on a hill called Okedu, while the people watch from another hill called Okuta ara. This early morning event leads to ogba outing; that is the instrument used for gathering the materials for the costume of agbo.

The second stage / the main stages of Agbo Festival

Ogba outing: From the ato performance on the mountain, called oroke edu, immediately follows the shout of nonintelligible shouts of ogba, which are forbidden to be seen by women and children. A lot of those who participated in seeing ato for few minutes will have to take to their heels in haste to get back home in order not to see ogba. As from that day, through the agency of ogba, or aromale, there commences the preparing of the secret gathering of dry banana leaves and fresh Iko leaves blade which are the costumes of Agbo. Women generally and children are forbidden from seeing who or how and when the materials for

the costume of agbo are being gathered and carried to the Igbale, or Igboka. As a result, women cannot go to the farm frequently during this time, since the materials are gotten from the farms and swampy areas in faraway locations from town. This lasts for seven days.

Agbo in town: This is always done with a lot of festive moods in each quarter. At the beginning of agbo rituals, the adherents first give respect to superior powers by singing the song “ajola moju ere lapami” at four designated sites: aala, aofin, agbede and aalo.

Solo: MojubaMojuba o

All: Ajolamojuba ere lapami

Solo: omo Ela o

All: Ajolamojuba ere lapami

Solo: Emei iburu elere mo jeji o

All : Ajola mojuba ere lapami

Solo: sugbon onikan gbenigbanse o

All: Ajola mojuba erelapami

Solo: oraba iyawo oliyawoloru

All: Ajolamojuba ere lapami

Solo: Oko yin Oba mo o

All: Ajolamojuba ere lapami

Solo: Ohi ile ko sue je ounnri dada o All: Ajolamojuba ere lapami

Solo: Okunetigbo be ria?

All: Eyeeooo

The English interpretation is as follows:

Solo: I give regard to great ones

All: As the weaker snake gives to the strong

Solo: No matter how bad, a farmer must reap the fruit of his labour (this is a proverb).

All: As the weaker snake gives to the strong

Solo: But somebody vowed to deny this proverb from coming to pass

All: As the weaker snake gives to the strong

Solo: He sneaked into another man's wife in the night when he was caught

All: As the weaker snake gives to the strong

Solo: He sneaked into another man's wife in the night when he was caught

All: As the weaker snake gives to the strong

Solo: He said it was darkness of the night that obstructed his vision, so He couldn't know she was another man's wife.

All: As the weaker snake gives to the strong

Solo: Have you ever heard this kind of excuse before?

All: No ooo

The outing of agbo is a sequence following the gathering of materials through Ogba for seven days. After the 7th day, each quarter will celebrate their festival with an interval of three days in between. Before the outing of agbo, there will be the elaborate singing and dancing by everyone in the particular quarter whose turn it is for their agbo to emerge. The singing will be led by a lead singer, and chorused by others; there will be the dancing round the quarters, to finally end at the king's palace, from where the king and everyone will be led to the Ala village square to await the arrival of the agbos from yonder land or heaven. The joy, pomp and excitement are normally expressed because the masquerades which represents agbo and the men in each quarter will be singing and dancing with a lot of sticks and rods with which they beat one another, intruders, miscreants, and careless fellows. The actual outing of agbo starts segmentally according to the town's quarters, beginning with agbo Ilebu, agbo Iga, agbo Elegboro, and finally agbo Ilaere. Agbo outing in Ilaere is in this order: agbo Odomogun, and agbo Ilowe, and finally agbo Okoro.

There are occasional variants of agbo such as agbo omode (that is, agbo for children called Olumusin), and agbo olodimeje. Agbo olodimeje must not be seen three times by a reigning monarch.

Songs are very essential aspects in agbo festival. They provide humour and correct the social ills within the society. Above all, they serve as prayer in some particular contexts to appease the god of the agbo festival. The agbo song consists of solo and chorus. Some agbo songs are sung for particular situation and in particular contexts. We have particular songs for the obas/ololus while they are being accompanied to the ala by the participants, which is "Idu komo re ijo". It is at this ala (arena) that the masquerades will meet the oba/ololu for his address. As the whole congregation moves with the oba from his palace to the ala stage, a song accompanies the movements:

Solo: Eduro e gborokan o (2x)

Ologidi modamorun bit'ileke Idu
k'omo re re'jo om'a gini

All: Idu k'omo re re'jo

Solo: Listen everybody and hear something (2x)

Ologidi impresses me like ornament.

The mighty takes his children to the public

All: The mighty takes his children to the public

Agbo lasts in the town for seven days, at the end of which it goes back to the yonder, having mingled with the people, blessed supplicants, flogged miscreants, added glamour to the town, and signaled another year in the life of the people. Throughout the period of celebration, there must not be the beating of drums or gong. Although, churches have broken the rules. The night of the withdrawal of agbo from the quarters are always dreaded night, as only the brave men, and initiates can stand the scene, the screaming, the yelling of the withdrawing masquerades to yonder. As the last batch of agbo has emerged, that is agbo

Okoro, the song that is sang is “abo eboras Esu amoyo” (we have sacrificed to Esu and we are free). Three months after agbo festival, imole and ofosi will take possession of the cultic members. Oral sources state that initiation into these cults has ceased in the community as the last set of ofosi was in the time of Alaere Amujabi, who ruled from 1941-1950.

The descent of the clan deities as Egun Oru - the dreaded night - masquerades.

Another follow-up event after the agbo festival is the celebration of three principal eboras (deities of the community) namely oluwo, ayi and agira known as egun oru. They descend from the mountain during the night. The elderly initiates prepare akara egun (mashed beans), molded in leaves and cooked in extra-large sizes which are taken in advance to the igbale of the egun oru, as a welcome stable by devotees to the egungun. One night, Oluwo at Ona, Agira at Otun and Ayi at Ohi, all descend simultaneously, to visit every nook and cranny of their quarters for solicited and unsolicited divinatory role. In each quarter, they usually come to give warning to culprits who might be responsible for any evil deed in the town. Their warning and orders must not be violated, anyone who tries to violate their orders has himself/herself to blame. They are never seen by women or non-initiates and young boys are excluded from seeing them. So, when their voice is heard, women and children hide immediately and all lanterns are put off.

The coming of eboras/egun Oru is always heralded by the blowing of Akutu (ram horn), to invoke them and send signals for non-initiates and devotes to stay indoor, be silent, and ensure total absence of movement. The eboras move freely without any interference. The eboras/egun orus play important divinatory role in the life of the community. They warn miscreants and

individuals who have erred be it a chief or the King. They invoke peace on the community. They also make forecasts and can tell whether individuals will be alive to see the next season. More so, childless women or anybody with any type of affliction can send gifts to ask for favours and seek solutions to their problems. Oluwo, Agira and Ayi spend nine nights and during this time, there will be no market until they have left.²¹

Ighere - moonlight masquerade

Three months after the festival, there will be another follow up which will be performed by young boys. In the evening, they will be dressed in palm fronds used to mask themselves. They are forbidden from going to where there is light. They sing and dance and this usually marks the end of the festival until the following year. They are known to be unruly, thus, their outing has been banned.

Appraisal of agbo festival in Ogidi

It is obvious that Ogidi people celebrate this festival yearly in remembrance of agbo who is seen as the god of fertility and peace. All surrounding villages and towns do come and watch the ceremony, especially the first seven days of the festival which is marked with merriments and festivity. M. O. Andi in his research paper has said,

It is common belief among Africans that each social system has its own culture. Throughout Yoruba land, for example, each town or village gives some attention to the celebration of one traditional festival or the other. For example, Oshogbo in Oyo State is associated with the Osun goddess and her annual Osun festival. Ire and Ondo towns recall the celebration of Ogun festival which is believed to be the god of creativity and the god of Iron²²

The agbo festival in Ogidi-Ijumu has social, religious, economic and political importance. In the realm of religion, the festival serves as a means through which the oloros (traditional worshippers) appease their gods. The people, at this time, pray for peace in the town and for prosperity. Prayers are also said for a peaceful reign for the oba. It is very important to mention that the agbo festival has a lot of taboos and rules which must be taken note of. Disobedience to these guiding rules and taboos can bring down the wrath of the gods. The people of the town try to obey these rules because they believe that “African gods do not forgive their offenders. You offend, the punishment is immediate”.²³

It is considered an offence to the deities for anybody to die during the festival, because it is considered a festival of fecundity. If such happens, people must avoid wailing as it is regarded as a disruption of peace during the festival as a result of this, the deceased cannot be buried until after the festival. During the festival, there should be no crying, no beating of drums and no singing for the deceased. Peace and harmony are further enhanced through the belief that it is a taboo for anybody to fight during the festival. Physical combat between adults are totally forbidden. In case of disobedience, the offenders are brought to book and they end up paying some amount of money and a big-she goat each to appease the gods.

Socially, the agbo festival provides entertainment and fun. Agbo masquerades do a lot of dancing while the agbo chanters sing and dance. The songs contain humour which provide entertainment. In addition, the songs have the purpose of correcting some social ills within the society. If anybody commits any serious offence like stealing, witchcraft and adultery, the songs are directed at such deviants. The singers also perform interpretative function and suggest ways of change. They make

known the sufferings of other individuals and families resulting from the misdeeds and wickedness of the deviants. The songs are equally entertaining. They are rendered in a way that everybody laughs and rejoices, especially when the evil doers are exposed. Despite the informal nature of the songs, the deviant and evil doers never miss the castigating message. This brings us to a unique function of the songs during the agbo festival. They serve as a form of social control in the community. Evil doers and their families are shamed publicly; the effects of the public revelations are actually long lasting. Many times, they never repeat such offences. Also, every other member of the society makes a conscious effort to behave well, especially when the period of the festival is getting near.

The economic importance of the festival cannot be overstressed in the sense that during the festival there is a lot of out-put in farm products which the people regard as a blessing from Oluwo deity. Also, due to increase in the town's population, there is an increase in the sales of food stuffs and other consumable items during the festival.

The festival equally ensures the transmission of culture, which serves as means of cultural education. The singers reflect the society, they give regards to dead kings, hunters and philanthropists in Ogidi and appeal for the emulation of such people. Some indigenes are also anxious to preserve such vital information, by supplying tape recordings to record and store these songs. Often times, the singers help to do the recording. In some instances, however, interested people are allowed to go about with the singing group and do the recording themselves after the necessary clearance. Whichever way it is recorded, the information is stored to be played and replayed, within the family or group, in the town and other villages around. In this

way, other people are being educated about the culture and tradition of the Ogidi community.

Politically, the festival places the Oba as the head of all, because the Oloro has to work with the Oba in carrying out the rituals. Also, the Oba and his chiefs have to be present at the stage when each quarter is bringing out their agbo masquerades. He will address the participants and ask them not to beat strangers and the school children. Obviously, the position of the Oba is enhanced during oro festival.

The festival promotes community spirit in the town. All Ogidi children look at one another as brother and sister because they are celebrating a common festival. Also, the discipline and orderliness which the gods call for during the festival are obeyed by the people. It is on this basis that agbo festival is always celebrated in an atmosphere of friendliness and peace among the people of Ogidi. The taboos are meant to avoid tragedy and the songs are directed at correcting societal ills, even while they entertain the people. The festival generally regulates peace and harmony in the community.

The agbo festival despite its immense positive impact has some shortfalls:

Negative economic impact: The fact that women and children are restricted from going to the farm and market and barred from undertaking any economic activity during the festival must be addressed. Indeed, all markets are closed while the festival lasts.

Negative social impact such as restriction of movement of people which run counter to their fundamental human rights: There is the restriction of boys, girls and women from attending church services and Islamic activities. While the festival lasts, no

social gathering is permitted, for such attempt will be hindered by the masquerade through the employment of his whip to flog people. There is also the hindrance of children from being able to go to school. Though, most of these practices have been relaxed as a result of the pressure by the Christian community in Ogidi and the effects of modernization.

The people of Ijumu have more than 365 festivals which they celebrate every year. These festivals are in honour of various gods such as Owa, Epa, Gberaka, Omoelepo, Oluwo, Agbo, Ina-Oko and others. Each of these require different intricate ways of worship and they are revered by the people who worship them as sacred.

The two religions (Christianity and Islam) that have come to unseat the traditional religion are aliens to the culture of the people and they have recent origins. The spread of Islam was the handiwork of the freed captives that returned from the Nupe Kingdom and the subsequent proselytization of Muslim clerics. Although, Muslims were very few in number at the beginning, they were also able to gain some sort of support. Christianity, on the other hand, came as a result of "the intention of some individuals to search for conversion, the desire to acquire the Whiteman's status, the prevailing European influence at the time and their personal resilience in enduring persecutions, after accepting Christianity around the tail end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century"²⁴

The advent of Islam in Ogidi

The importance of Islam in Ogidi was made possible by returnees from Bida who had accepted the religion of their masters. Islam, however, predates the Bida raids in the area, as the Okun, like their Yoruba kith were already abreast of a religion called Imole for several centuries. However, Islam had

no foothold in the community until the coming of the Bida returnees. These few returnees had already embraced the religion which their overlords practiced. When they first came, they were allowed to practice the religion but were hated because of the ill-feeling the people had for the Nupes who made life difficult for them until they were relieved by Captain Wallace's forces. As time went on, many converts were won. Some of the early converts were Bonire, Yahaya, Mallam Kesirin Obajemu, and Ibrahim Adeniji. These converts mixed Islam with their traditional religion. When the converts were growing, the following people decided to employ an Arabic teacher to teach their children; Ikumapayi, Yusuf Ilugbemi (now Alhaji) and Giwa (also an Alhaji). One important cleric called Mallam Lasisi was employed. He came from Akunu in Akoko.

According to Asinde, "In 1956, the Muslim had grown in strength and so built an Arabic school between Ileteju quarters and the Anglican mission. The school was later moved to Ilaere quarters where it has since become a primary school. The school was taken over by the Government Schools Board in 1967. It thus became the third party school in Ogidi".²⁵ Although, the Muslim percentage in the community is relatively small, the healthy rivalry that developed between them had made them to be preeminent in the town. The town has at present one Jumat mosque and about three other mosques. The town can also boast of many who have gone to Mecca on Hajj. The first Imam, Alhaji Muhammed Adeniji and Mallam Bello the first Ladan were both natives of Ogidi. At present, Mallam Isa Ogungbamiwa from Okoro is the chief Imam.

The advent of Christianity in Ogidi

Data point to two sources of Christianity in Ogidi. First, the archival records at the St John Anglican office state that

Christianity was birthed in Ogidi when two converts from Oweland visited Ogidi. At about 1905, “two men named Olowolaiyemo and Abraham came from Gbeleko-Kabba to Okoro-Ogidi. They lived at Abudo compound where they preached. From there they went to Oke-Igbo, another compound to preach. This was how these two men preached the gospel in Okoro-Ogidi until six men accepted the gospel. They were Degan, Omojagbara, Arobani, Enimola, Alerinu and Jacob OlowoIhinmmitowa”.²⁶

The second source states that some three years before this, in 1902 a man in Ejugbe called Bamigboye had accepted Jesus Christ. He was converted at Abeokuta area where he lived but was unable to practice the religion for fear of persecution. He later joined these men and then they brought A.B.D. pamphlets from the missionaries and started to read and write. These people met regularly at Ebuku where Agbo worshippers erected a hut for keeping all their materials for the festival. There, they learnt the Yoruba alphabets A.B.D. until they were driven from the hut by agbo worshippers. Later on, the people began to see light in the converts’ lives so they continued to join them. The following people later joined them: Jemirade, Meduwa, Aroniye, Gbangba, Olupeka and Abigael Olupeka. The converts were so enthusiastic that they went to surrounding villages whenever there was any stranger or missionary to learn the Bible. Bamigboye taught some of the converts to read the bible and worship. This was how people got converted and Christianity soon began to spread like wild fire in Ogidi.

The advent of Christianity was not as smooth as the early part of this chapter has portrayed. It was only through God’s power, that it was firmly rooted in the town. The agbo worshippers (after the coming of Christianity), who no longer had agile and active members to help them sing and dance, decided never to

allow the new religion to stay. The new converts were persecuted that they decided to run away from Ogidi. Some went to Kabba while others went to Aiyede Ekiti. It was at Kabba that a white missionary, Rev. J. J. Williams advised them to return so as not to allow the new religion to die. The converts were not able to comply with this advice because of their fear of the agbo worshippers. When another missionary, Rev. Betham, came to Kabba, he gave them a similar advice and they complied this time.

After they had settled down at home, more people were converted among members of the traditional religion. This triggered the annoyance of the agbo worshippers and they employed new persecution tactics. All sorts of means such as charms, cudgels, denial of marriage, flogging, etc. were used to fight the Christians. When this did not give the desired result, they changed to the use of clubs, arrows and cutlasses (This will be discussed later). The Christians at last got a breathing space and it inevitably led to the spread and strength of Christianity in Ogidi. Today, there are more than ten Christian denominations including the Anglican, Baptist, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Christ Apostolic, Jehovah witness and Aladura operating in Ogidi town.

The Impact of Christianity and Islam on agbo festival

It is evident from human history that human beings always resisted change. This is even a peculiarity of African tradition which is rigid and authoritarian. The introduction of Christianity and Islam into Ogidi, like any other town, was not without resistance. Even the early churches, as recorded in the Bible, were persecuted, but one thing worth noting is the fact that, persecutions against the Christian church in most cases always help it to be more firm and spread wider still.²⁷

Initially, the old traditional religionists of Ogidi (agbo worshippers) opposed the learning of “ABD”. Therefore, the new converts were driven out to Ebaku. The traditionalists also expected the young converts to join in the celebration of agbo festival. When it was time for the festival, the elders called on the young Christian converts to join them for the celebration but they refused. Consequently, it led to conflict and the *oloros* asked the Christians to quit the area where the Church was built (Ebaku) because the place was the centre of traditional worship. As young converts began to denounce some traditional practices, the traditional religionists also started to suppress the new religion. On Sundays for instance, the Christian converts would take permission to be exempted from farm activities so that they might go for worship. This request was usually turned down, just to make it impossible for them to get deeper into the new religion. According to an informant, one Sunday morning, the Christians were already in the church when the traditionalists went there to attack them openly with bows and arrows, but the leading men in the church restrained the Christians from fighting back. Another instance was on the eve of Christmas. The Christians went to destroy the *ebora*’s shrine at Okoro where the traditional religionists perform their rituals during the agbo festival. The *oloro* saw this as an abomination and decided to revenge by destroying the public bell which the missionaries gave to the Christians. This resulted in serious conflict and the people went to Kabba to report the case for investigation.²⁸ The elders demanded that the Christians should move out of the town. After much debate, the District Officer charged the traditional religionists three pounds (£3) which they had to pay.

Persecution and Conversion of Chief Ayeni Olupeka

The persecution came to a climax at the conversion of one Olupeka, a prominent chief and one of the best singers, during the agbo festival. He was said to be a very bold and powerful man, and was therefore respected in the society. During one of the festivals, it was reported that Olupeka invited the Christians and promised to become a Christian on the condition that these Christians join them during that year's festival. This was not too much sacrifice on the part of the Christians. On behalf of a soul which Christ had died for, the Christians complied and participated in the festival. To his promise, Olupeka denounced traditional worship of agbo and became a Christian after the festival together with many of his associates. The traditional religionists were filled with rage realizing clearly that Christianity was a thorn in their flesh and so they embarked on further attacks against it. Islam, in the earliest time, had little or no conflict with the traditional religionists because some of the converts were practicing syncretism. Moreover, they were in the minority in comparison with the Christians. Islam became prominent because of the rivalry that developed between the Muslims and Christians.

In addition, it is obvious that the two alien religions had a great impact on the agbo festival up till today. The number of agbo adherents has decreased greatly, and some of the rituals involved are not esteemed as before the advent of Christianity and Islam. Also, education brought about some changes and modifications to the celebration of the festival. For instance, school children were given the privilege to get home from school before the festival activities begin. Also, as regards the rituals performed in the night by egun oru (night masquerades), students were allowed to be back from evening classes before the masquerades can come into the town.

Christianity has contributed much to the development of western education in Ogidi. It is responsible for two of the three primary schools in Ogidi: Saint John's Primary School and Saint Michael's Primary School. Many sons and daughters of Ogidi who are now members of Ogidi Development Union and Ogidi Development Association had their earlier primary education from these primary schools. It is of note that with regards to western education in Ogidi, Saint John's Primary School which was first built, started with a good number of converts being able to read and write in 1910²⁴, then the school was erected as a hut at the present Maternity site in Okoro quarters between 1930 and 1932 when it formally admitted pupils, before it moved to its present site in 1932. Then, in 1947, St Michaels Primary School started.

Besides the establishment of schools, the various Christian organizations, especially Roman Catholic Mission which got the support of the mother church in Rome have been responsible for the education of some important sons of Ogidi. Even before the establishment of schools, about seventeen years earlier, some early converts were capable of reading the Yoruba alphabet and the Yoruba bible, due to the influence of the missionary teachers.²⁹ Also, the preservation of the Yoruba language in writing stand as a credit to the Christian missionaries so that an individual can read the Bible in his or her vernacular not necessarily in English or Greek.

Christianity and the advent of Western Civilization in Ogidi

Christian missionaries advised the people, when they were still living independently of one another, to come together to a place (the present site of Ogidi) where they can have access to the road and be in touch with other parts of the country. It was the colonial administrators who were responsible for bringing them

together through force in 1917, in order to carry out effectively their colonial activities.

Above all, cognizance should be taken of the rate at which evil practices are reducing with the activities of some groups of Christians in Ogidi today. It is a common knowledge that in all towns and villages, there exist some wicked fellows who practice their wickedness with impunity. Sometimes, educated and able youths who could have been of great asset to the society mysteriously die in great numbers. At other times, infant mortality will rise in the community and sometimes, it is through disease, accidents and lots of problems that evil seems to be perpetuated in Ogidi community.

It should be noted that a good number of Ogidi people who were observant identified some of these evil practices. When such things happen, it would be exposed and the persons involved are forewarned. This is due to the prayers and services of some dedicated Christians in the town. These dedicated Christians now seem to be filling the gap, by doing the work which a branch of the traditional religion and worship was doing in the pre-contact days.

Conclusion

In the past, there has been much pressure on and a shift from the agbo festival to the Christianity and Islam. The present effort of the Nigerian Government at promoting our cultural heritages can be boosted through its agents, the State Government, Kogi State Council for Arts and Culture and Nigerian Television, amongst others, to give the festival a wide publicity. First, these centres for disseminating cultures should give some attention to the festival. This will help in generating some effective researches on the potentials of the festival and aid the

preservation of the festival from dying out or from being eclipsed by Western Civilization.

Second, agbo songs need to be preserved from its weakness, by being transformed from its oral nature to a written one. Since Ogidi language is a dialect of the Yoruba language, and not yet written down as a standard literary form of communication and writing, skilled fellows need to be engaged in order for the songs to be written down and therefore develop its literature for future reference.

Above all, the festival serves as a common core which binds the people together, no matter the divide that is presently witnessed in Ogidi. There is a demonstration of religious tolerance in the town during the festival. The wealth of the festival, and its socio-cultural importance beacons on all cultural revivalists and enthusiasts to make out time to watch the activities during the festival. This will contribute to scholarship and research which will further identify and understand the dramatic potentials of the festival. There is the possibility that this exercise will aid the identification of some similarities between this festival and other festivals in the country.

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Chapter Fourteen

TIV TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND NEED FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE ECO-SYSTEM

Dorothy Nguemo Afaor

*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
Benue State University Makurdi, Nigeria
dorafaor@gmail.com*

&

Bappah Muhammad

*Department of Religion and Cultural Studies
Benue State University Makurdi, Nigeria
bappahmuhammad80@gmail.com*

Executive Summary

The paper investigated Tiv Traditional Medicine and the need for the preservation of the Eco-system. The aim was to identify traditional medicine as impetus for the conservation of the environment. This is owing to the fact that the effectiveness of traditional medicine is a reality in many cultures and among Tiv people in particular. The fact that traditional medicine is practised side by side with orthodox medicine had proved its worth. However, with the emergence of globalization, environmental degradation has become a nightmare. Human activities like deforestation, urbanization, modernization and mechanization have contributed hugely to the depletion of the environment. A phenomenological method was adopted. Historical and expository approaches were deployed. Findings of this paper indicated that; Tiv traditional medicine is an essential part of the people's culture; that the eco-system is been aggressively depleted due to human activities; and that with proper orientation, our eco-system will be saved through

afforestation and stricter laws. It was concluded that, Despite the challenges of globalization on traditional medicine, it has persisted and will hopefully continue to be regarded by a greater number of people as effective and acceptable health care system.

Keywords: Tiv, Traditional Medicine, Orthodox Medicine, Ecosystem, Environment

Introduction

The role played by plants and other natural resources in traditional healthcare promotion and medicine is one that cannot be over emphasized. According to Ama (2021, Oral Interview), man has overtime suffered from common as well as complicated illnesses ranging from headache, fever, stomachache and epidemics. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) emphasizes that in all these predicaments, man learned overtime to deploy various parts of the plants traditionally for the relief of certain illnesses and to cure even chronic ailments. Thus, traditional medicine acted as protection against a variety of diseases and disorders from time immemorial. According to Gera, et al (2015), the Plant kingdom is well endowed with a variety of phytochemicals that are important in healthcare promotion, disease prevention and has remained the foundation for the discovery of innovative drugs.

Consequently, the use of traditional medicine as a source of medicine has not been strange among the Tiv of North central Nigeria. Gera *et al* (2015) aver that, from generation to generation, the Tiv have used traditional medicine as the first line of action in outbreak of illnesses. The young ones learn from the adults who possess a good knowledge of plants that cure a variety of illness including diarrheal. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) adds that, even with the introduction of orthodox medicine, traditional Medicine remains a viable alternative to

primary healthcare delivery among the Tiv. This is as a result of its effectiveness and continues utilization among consumers. Adega *et al* (2020) note that, Tiv Traditional Medicine is as old as the Tiv themselves, and that the practice of traditional medicine came into being as soon as the Tiv became feeble and frail due to infirmity, ill health and old age; thus needing some form of medicine for the restoration of his/her health. Accordingly, Tiv traditional medicine at its inception was purely made up by the products of nature such as barks of trees, shrubs, roots, stones, sand and animal matter.

However, notwithstanding its relevance of plants and their products in traditional medicine, many plants spices suffers some level of extinction among some Tiv. Tondo (2021, Oral Interview) emphasizes that desert encroachment, urbanization, and loss of interest in the practice of traditional medicine are the causes. Ama (2021, Oral Interview) suggests that this is because the introduction of orthodox medicine has been found to be more convenient by many people; hence little attention is given to preservation of medicinal plants. This paper examines the effectiveness of traditional medicine in the treatment of diseases among the Tiv people of Benue State and the need to preserve the environment. The crux of the paper is to identify with traditional medicine as a strong reason for the preservation of the eco-system.

The Tiv People

Tiv is an ethno-linguistic nation in Nigeria that ar inhabitants of the larger part of the Middle Belt Region. Wegh (1998) identifies Tiv as the name of an ethnic group in Nigeria; the name of their language and the name also stand for their ancestor-Tiv. Thus, Tivland covers an area of about 30,000 square kilometers stretching from about 6-30c to 8-10c-north latitude of 8 to 10 east

longitude. Wegh (1998) further points out that, Tiv people constitute approximately a total population of over 7 million individuals throughout Nigeria and the 4th largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Tiv language is widely spoken in Nigerian.

For Torkula (2004), the Tiv originates among the Bantu people who once inhabited the central African continent in the Shaba area of the present day Democratic Republic of Congo. They migrated to the Benue valley having sojourned in a mountainous region known as the *Swem* in the south eastern Cameroon over centuries. Their migration is laden with series of wars, conquests, displacements and with setting on-the-run other ethnic groups as the people descend and occupied the Benue plains in 1500AD.

Hagher (1990) emphasizes that the Tiv people depend on agricultural produce for commerce and life; therefore, land is essential to them. They conceive land as the land of their fathers that is sacred. Religiously, according to Dzurgba (2007), the Tiv acknowledges *Aondo* as the Supreme Being who created the universe and directs all its affairs; a belief not very different from the Christian conception of God. Tivland is surrounded by neighbouring ethnic groups like the *Alago*, *Angwe* and *loro* in the north, the various ethnic groups in *Ogoja* collectively known as *Udam* in the south, the *Jukum*, *Chamba* and *Mumuye* in the east and the *Idoma* and the *Igala* on the west respectively. The climatic condition in Tivland is determined by two major seasons: the rainy and the dry season. The rainy seasons start from April and ends in October, while the dry season begins in November and ends in March of the following year. The temperature is usually between 80 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit (Atel, 2004).

Tiv Traditional Medicine

Tiv Traditional Medicine refers to local and unorthodox substances obtained locally from the barks of trees, roots, shrubs

and animal parts (Adega et al, 2020), for the purpose of healing or cure. Over time, the tiv have systematically observed various ailments and have developed ways of tackling the traditionally in accordance with its peculiarities. According to Afella (2015), the Tiv people usually prepare medicine in various forms. There are those that are prepared in liquid forms made from fresh leaves, stems, roots, backs of plants, shrubs, soil and animal parts. There are also liquid medicines made from dry materials of some of the materials just mentioned. These materials are sometimes grounded in powdery form and licked or taken orally in paste food (*Ibier*). Tiv traditional Medicines are also prepared in paste form to be robbed on the affected part of the skin. Drying medicine materials and also pounding them are methods devised by the Tiv for preservation or storage of medicines for future use.

According to Apenda (2016) the practice of ethno-medicine or traditional medicine is based on the practitioner's knowledge, which is derived from their indigenous world-view, myths and beliefs which include the healing techniques transmitted from generation to generation over centuries. Gbenda (2007) points out that there are several justifications for the use of herbs by the various traditional healers surfacing from their therapeutic values, focusing on the three major aspects of a human person, namely; physical, spiritual and psychological therapy. Chiichi (2012) corroborates that:

The Tiv concept of medicine is holistic like elsewhere in Africa. The holistic health care is an integrative approach, balancing the mind, spirit, and body. African medicine makes little distinction between body, mind and spirit. In treatment, the whole person is treated including the physical, social and spiritual milieu deemed necessary for

total health. The wholeness of the patient is considered paramount in the healing process (p.59).

Ama (2021, Oral Interview) acknowledges that Tiv traditional medicine cuts across all facets of human life. In other words, all forms of disease or ill health such as fever, cough, snake bites, fractures etc, have their treatment procedures and plants to be used. Gbenda (2007) corroborates that diseases like stroke (*akpiti*), cough (*hoo*), malaria (*ayaakule*), madness (*ihundugh*), bone setting (*kuhe zoloon*) and in several other cases, various herbal products are used to effect healing. Emphasizing the centrality of Tiv traditional medicine, Apenda states that:

The fact that Tiv traditional medicine treats several health related problems which western medicine still finds it increasingly difficult to comprehend, also entails that traditionally, every Tiv healer is essentially significant in the ability to handle various methods in healing, especially in some healing centers where professional matters are tackled from “wholistic” point of view. In this regard, many diseases/ sicknesses are named after the parts of the human body affected or the objects associated with such problems, and specific herbs that could be used in healing are given their names depending on the ecology of the people (p.244).

In support of the prospect of Tiv traditional medical efforts, several authors have made efforts to document the medicinal uses of plants in Tiv land against infectious diseases. For instance Gera et al (2015), Adegba (2020) and Afella (2015) have surveyed and documented several medicinal plants used among Tiv people of central Nigeria for the treatment of disease. Several species of plants are identified from different species. A similar survey was carried out by Tor-Anyii (2003) who documented the medicinal plants used by the Tiv people for antivenomous applications.

Traditional medicine and medicine men can be categorized severally depending on the kind of treatment they offer. In his investigation, Chiichi (2012) identifies the following; herbalists (*mbawanicigh*), ritualists (*mbasoronkwagh*), diviners (*mbakpehen ishor*), traditional surgeons, Orthopaedics (*mbazoron lkyuhe*), traditional midwives (*mbakoron mar*), traditional psychiatrists (*mbasoron ihundugh*). Similar to scientific or orthodox medicine, traditional medical experts diagnose and identify sicknesses especially, ordinary before they administer treatment. In this way, treatment is based on manifest symptoms. Chiichi (2012) adds that Tiv traditional Diagnosis is achieved by visual assessment or inspection of the affected parts of the body e.g skin, eyes, urine, and faeces.

Traditional Medicine and the Eco-System

An ecosystem consists of the biological community or locality, and the physical and chemical components that make up its non-living or abiotic environment. The study of the eco-systems mainly consists of the study of certain processes that link the living or biotic components to the non-living, or abiotic components. Simply put, the eco-system is the environment in its natural habitat. Recently, it has become known that accelerating changes are occurring at the global scale in the eco-system. According to Darley and Kent (2013), a wide range of environmental problems have emerged which include global warming, the depletion of ozone layer, the acidification of surface waters, the destruction of tropical forests, the depletion and extinction of species, and the precipitous decline of biodiversity. In his view, Ama (2021, Oral Interview) admits that, the damage against the eco-system is affecting humanity than expected. Yet, while all of these challenges have objective or physical expression, their causes and their possible resolutions

are invariably bound up with human attitudes, beliefs, values, needs, desires, expectations, and behaviours.

Park (2001) reports that around half of the world's mature forest have been cleared by human activities in form of deforestation. In Benue state, and particularly among the Tiv, deforestation has taken place on a very large scale. This has contributed to rising case of environmental degradation and loss of forest reserves at a significant pace. Tondo (2021, Oral Interview) points out that, deforestation occurs for a variety of reasons, but the majority of deforestation now occurs when tropical forests are cleared for agriculture and cattle grazing, urbanization, development of infrastructure such as road construction, drainage channels and establishment of institutions. Benue being predominantly an agrarian state, this fact cannot be imagined. Other forms of deforestation among the Tiv include the destruction of trees for charcoal production and the selective logging of forests for timber. The forests, not only cover the earth's surface, they are an essential part of the global eco-system and of the biosphere which help to regulate climate as well as a medical reserve. The forests also protect soils from erosion and provide habitats for a vast number of medicinal plants and animal species.

Following from the above Ama (2021, Oral Interview) laments that, human activities are a major threat to medicinal plants and animals. The spread of disease, the destruction and degradation of their habitats, and direct exploitation have become a point of concern. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) remarks that, the human population has increased over time and along with the increase, there has been a need for increased food production. This situation has added to deforestation in a bid to prepare lands for agriculture. Orbunde (2021, Oral Interview) submits that these warning signs of the ecological crisis cannot be regarded as problems requiring solutions by specialists alone; rather, these

crises are essentially human problems and they are intimately related to the question of what it means to be human. In order words, efforts at resolving these crises must be collaborative.

The role of Tiv Traditional Medicine practice in the management of the environment is immense. Chiichi (2012) acknowledges that Tiv Traditional medicines are natural ingredients provided for man by the creator himself to enable man live a healthy life. These natural ingredients are indigenous to any given culture right from the period of creation and are found within the environment; hence the need to protect it. Ama (2021, Oral Interview) emphasizes that, the preservation of medicinal plants and other natural resources is essentially the preservation of the environment or the ecosystem. Orbunde (2021, Oral Interview) corroborates that, when nature is preserved for the purpose of obtaining medical plants, the environment will by extension be conserved. Atagher (2021, Oral Interview) adds that, it is a mutual vista whereby; the requirement to safeguard medicinal plants leads to the preservation of the entire eco-system. At the same time, the desire to preserve the environment leads to the preservation of medicinal plants.

In spite of the effectiveness of traditional medicine in Tiv society, recently, there has been rising environmental challenges that threaten the existence of plants spices that are rich in traditional medicine. Chiichi (2012) admits that globalization is the major propblem of traditional medicine. He adds that, the challenges of globalization on traditional health systems are influenced by cultural mistrust and stereotypes, religion, education and civilization, urbanization, modernization, industrialization and technological advancement. These factors pose greater challenges to traditional medicine and healing in Tiv society. The

above challenges are entrenched in both external and internal factors to deter traditional medicine from its global health status.

Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel (STAP, 2018), on “Integration: to solve complex environmental problems” reports that environmental challenges are complex and interlinked, not only in themselves but also with social and economic issues. Addressing these interconnected and interacting environmental and social challenges requires systems thinking; this is fundamental to better integration. ‘Systems thinking’ examines the relationships between the different parts of a system, for example, the food supply system, or a commodity supply chain, especially cause and effect relationships, and positive or negative feedback mechanisms, between the biophysical and socio-economic features of the system. ‘Systems thinking’ also considers the interactions between components of a system across different locations and organizational levels, as well as over time. Many of these relationships are non-linear. Understanding the connections between variables helps to identify points for effective intervention.

This present paper is conceived within an understanding that the effectiveness and inescapable nature of traditional medicine in Tiv society is definitely an impetus for the preservation of the eco-system. Many Scholars of Tiv Traditional Medicine such as Gbenda (2007), Chiichi (2012), Afella (2015), Apenda (2016), Adega (2020) have expressed the inescapability of traditional medicine in their works. For instance, Gbenda (2007) acknowledges that there is abundant justification for the use of herbs by the various traditional healers evolving from their therapeutic values, focusing on the physical, spiritual and psychological therapy. According to Gbenda (2007) diseases like stroke (*akpiti*), cough (*hoo*), malaria (*ayaakule*), madness

(*ihundugh*), bone setting (*kuhe zoloon*) and in several other cases, various herbal products are used to effect healing.

Furthermore, Chiichi (2012) notes that, traditional plants in Tiv society did not only provide conventional pharmaceutical drugs, the traditional healers provide clientcentered, personalized health care which is holistic and channeled to meet the needs and expectations of the sick. Apenda (2016) corroborates that the belief in traditional healing is sacrosanct because there is some disease which western medicine could not permanently cure. The patients especially when the illness is protracted tilt towards the belief in super natural causation; thus, establishing a psychological satisfaction and impressive mystical environment for the healers to machinate upon them. Adegba (2020) affirms that Tiv Traditional Medicine has made significant and considerable impact on the health needs of the Tiv and the healthcare delivery system in Nigeria generally.

Conclusion

This paper focused on the Tiv Traditional Medicine and the preservation of the eco-system. It was found that the Tiv strive to promote, maintain and restore good health and well-being at all times. They develop unique indigenous and conventional healing traditions developed and defined by their culture, beliefs and environment, which satisfied the health needs of their communities over centuries. Traditional medicine is a cultural treasure of the Tiv community around the world and encompasses all kinds of unconventional medicine and indeed any kind of therapeutic method that has been handed down by the tradition of a community or ethnic group. With the depletion of forests and its materials, the threat for traditional medicine has doubled. The result of the studies expressed above has justified the continued relevance of Tiv traditional medicine to the

society. Based on the findings above, this paper concludes here that consideration be given to the environment so as to preserve the forest resources.

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Chapter Fifteen

HERBBAL POTENCY, ECOLOGICAL THREATS AND CHANGES IN MEDICO-SPIRITUAL HEALING OF PATIENTS IN THE KOM CHIEFDOM OF CAMEROON

Nixon Kahjum Takor & Nkwain Clovis Ankiandalibesa

Department of History & Archaeology

The University of Bamenda

takornixon@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

This paper exposed the threats to the potency and practice of traditional healing relative to human activities as well as natural and ecological considerations. The paper pointed out that, the advent of colonialism and Christianity introduced new ideologies which often tried to suppress the practice of traditional medicine, even so, the emergence of new disease like HIV/AIDS further compounded the challenges facing traditional healing and its potency was put to test. The paper equally examined the effects of human activities notably agricultural and grazing on traditional healing and environment. The paper concludes that, the place of traditional medicine in Kom remained indispensable, though the practice witnessed a number of threats which necessitated the introduction of new norms to meet up with the prevailing circumstances.

Keywords: Herbal Potency, Ecological Threats, Medico-Spiritual Healing, Kom Chiefdom

Introduction

Traditional medicine has been a basic source of healing, treating, preventing and dealing with problems associated with

morbidity and mortality in the Bamenda Grasslands in general and Kom in particular. In the indigenous Kom society, traditional medicine was the only form of healthcare available to deal with the various psychological, spiritual and physical illnesses prevalent in the Kom society. In effect, the role of traditional medicine and traditional healers became indispensable, and it sustained the precolonial Kom society without any alternative. However, the advent of colonialism witnessed the introduction of bio-medicine to compete with traditional medicine.

Bio-medicine was introduced mainly by European missionary bodies whose doctrines condemned traditional medicine on the assumption that it was demonic, primitive, superstitious and ineffective. This era witnessed a stiff competition and division amongst the Kom population: those that embraced Christianity and its doctrines and had to abandon traditional medicine due to its inclination to Kom culture and traditional religion; and those who glued to traditional medicine, which to them, was a reflection of their culture, belief system, experience and the nature of illnesses affecting their communities. The major threat to traditional medicine in this era was the newly introduced Christianity and its doctrines; bio-medicine and the western culture that was imposed by the colonialists on the Kom people.

The results were the destruction and desecration of shrines, sacred springs and forests, as well as the abandoning of some healing practices. Moreover, the postcolonial times saw the emergence of new threats to add to the existing ones. This new threats included the emergence of new diseases like HIV/ AIDS, and Hepatitis which exposed the limitation and challenged the potency of traditional healing; modernization, human and ecological activities which greatly affected the potency of traditional medicine and led to the introduction of new trends

within the healthcare system. It was in the light of the forgoing that this study investigates the indigenous healing practices, its threats and as well as the changes in the medico-spiritual healing in the Kom fondom. The central argument sustained remains that, traditional medicine played a central role in the maintenance of indigenous health, though there were threats to its existence which became heightened during the colonial and postcolonial periods. These threats and other developments made changes with regard to the practice of traditional medicine inevitable.

Perceptions of Illness Causation

In Kom culture, illnesses were considered to be caused by several factors like the food they ate, insects, poverty, stress, substance abuse, family line, poor hygiene, innate illnesses, gods, ancestors and humans (witches and sorcerers). These causal factors could be classified into natural causes, social causes, spiritual causes, family line or hereditary, individual lifestyle and cultural norms like curses and breaking of taboos¹.

According to Kom perspective, illness causation was elaborate, complex and inter-related since there was always some amount of spiritual inclination to illnesses even when they seemed natural. For instance, it was believed that a snake bite could be natural as well as spiritually manipulated. Same as a fracture sustained through an accident could be considered natural and could equally be caused by human spiritual manipulation. This

¹ Kwame Abukari, "Traditional Medicine and Healing Among the Dagomba of Ghana", (MA Dissertation in Philosophy, Arctic University of Norway, May 2016)

complexity in illness causation theories and believes made illness diagnosis and treatment a more complex task which needed to go beyond the biological explanation of illness and diagnostic procedures as was involved in Bio-Medicine².

Since illnesses were regarded as having both natural and spiritual causes, both spiritual and physical means were needed in diagnosis, treatment and prevention of illnesses. Kom traditional beliefs considered the human being as being made up of the physical, spiritual, and social aspects. The functioning of all these aspects signified good health and if any of these aspects was out of balance, it signified sickness. The treatment of an ill person involved not only the physical being but the spiritual, moral, and social components of the person. In effect, there was need for a special diagnosis, which was often through *fiinyah* or divination.

Fiinyah

Fiinyah (divination) was a means of consulting the spirit world. It was a method by which information concerning an individual or circumstance of illness was obtained through the use of arranged symbols to gain healing knowledge and procedures. It was also considered as a method to access information that was normally beyond the reach of the human mind³.

The *wul fiinyah* (diviner) was a diagnostician, and an expert in carrying out diagnosis, he not only defined the illness, but also the ultimate cause in line with the Kom belief system. He was consulted for a wide range of issues which sometimes were not

² Joseph Nsom, *Modern Kom Society: Culture, Customs, and Traditions of the Kom People*. (Yaounde: Nyah Publishers 2015)

³ Samuel Adu-Gyamfi, Anderson Eugenia, "Indigenous and Traditional Healing in Africa: A Synthesis of the Literature, Philosophy, Social, and Human Disciplines, Vol. 1, (2019)

limited to health. A diviner could be consulted to know why there was prolonged sunshine, heavy rains, why the farms were not producing enough, why there was ill luck, in fact, he was consulted whenever anything went wrong in the community. Diviners differed from each other in the methods they used in the diagnostic process.

The diviners used divination to communicate with their ancestral spirits (and their patients) to diagnose the cause of their patients' misfortunes or ailment, which was done using different physiological, psychiatric and spiritual conditions. Diviners were said to be spirituality experts as they diagnosed and defined illness, its origin and the reason in terms of Kom belief systems⁴.

The diviner was a person able to communicate with the spirits when in a state of possession. His spirituality was divination within a supernatural context through culturally accepted mediumship with the ancestral spirits. In addition, he may have some knowledge of medicinal herbs.

In general, diviners differed from each other in the methods they used in the diagnostic process. While majority carried out the diagnosis while in a state of possession, others used possession and casting of bones. For this purpose, bones of animals, birds, and humans were used. The ancestral spirits then talked to the diviner through the bones he laid. Less common methods included the use of shells of tortoise, pieces of polished wood, a

⁴ *ibid*

mirror, a needle, a calabash or dreams and smells. In some cases, shells and kulanut peelings were thrown on the ground and the diviners used their spiritual powers to interpret following the positions of what has been cast⁵. Some healers were able to inform their patients the reason for their visit and the social cause of their illness without having been told anything by their client. Once a certain spirit has been identified as the cause of the illness or misfortune, the practitioner advised the patient on the procedure necessary to propitiate the spirit, and sometimes also prescribed herbal remedy to cure the physical damage already sustained by the individual⁶.

According to Kom traditional beliefs, a person does not choose to become a diviner; only a person “called” or “chosen” by the ancestors could become a diviner. In most cases, the “spirit mediums” were believed to have inherited their healing spirit from a deceased healer in the family or from an alien spirit.

Oral interviews were sometimes used by some traditional healers to find out the history behind the illness, where they had been for treatment and how long the patient has been in that condition. This approach enabled them to know how they need to handle the situation. In some cases, the healer required family members to speak on behalf of the patients in cases where the ill person was unable to express himself or herself. In recent years, after the healing process, the patients were asked to go for medical check up to confirm if they have been healed. The medical reports sometimes serve for record keeping for future reference and equally a way of assuring other clients of the healer’s ability and credibility. Due to the holistic nature of traditional medicine, the healers did not separate the natural

⁵ Ambrose Chia YAfi, aged 44, Traditional Healer, Interviewed by Clovis Nkwain, Mbingo, 10 May 2019

⁶ Idem
African Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems
Edited By: Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, OSA, PhD

from the supernatural or spiritual from the physical. Thus, health issues were addressed from two major perspectives⁷.

Spiritual Healing

Spiritual healing was a main component of traditional medicine in Kom. Perhaps, practices under this domain may be what added to the uniqueness and cultural specific nature of Kom traditional medicine. Spiritual healing involved providing treatment, management and prevention of illnesses, which were believed to have spiritual causal origins. It tried to provide a balance on the patient's physical and social world with the spiritual one. These illnesses could be caused by human spiritual involvement, or other supper human beings such as, ancestor spirits and gods. As a departure from other illnesses, spiritual illnesses required some special diagnosis which did not base so much on presenting physical symptoms of the illness. Most spiritual healing practices involved rituals, cleansing, sacrifice and ceremonies.

Diagnoses, prevention and treatment of disease in Kom traditional medicine relied heavily on spiritual aspects. It was based on the belief that psycho-spiritual aspects should be addressed before medical aspects. In Kom culture, it was believed that nobody became sick without sufficient reasons. Traditional practitioners looked at the ultimate 'who' rather than 'what' in locating the cause and cure of an illness, and the answers given came from the cosmological beliefs of the people⁸.

⁷ Idem

⁸ Francis Chia, aged 75, Spiritual Healer, interviewed by Clovis Nkwain, Jinkfuin, February 2021.

Rather than looking at the medical or physical reason behind an illness, traditional healers attempted to determine the root cause underlying it, which is believed to stem from a lack of balance between the patient and their social environment or the spiritual world not only by natural causes. Natural causes were in most cases not seen to be natural at all, but manipulations of the spirits or gods. Sickness was sometimes said to be attributed to guilt by the person, family, or village for a sin or moral transgression⁹.

Rituals

Healing and treatment practices in Kom traditional medicine were often rich with rituals, ceremonies and sacrifices. Most of these rituals and sacrifices either had spiritual meanings or were used in fostering culture and relationship building. Most of the illnesses that required rituals and sacrifices had spiritual causal origins and each illness determined the type of ritual to be performed and the different animals to be used as sacrifices in the healing process.

Generally, rituals were an important aspect of African Traditional Religion and medicine, which was practiced across all cultures of the continent, as observed by Kelly:

The importance of rituals in indigenous African tradition cannot be overstated. Ritual serves as a gateway to the land of the ancestors and to the realm of spirits. It evokes sacredness and intentionality. From birth until death, some rituals mark every milestone in a person's life. Rituals anchor the individual to the community and give structure and meaning to life.

African spirituality embodied the belief and invocation to the gods, reverence and acknowledgement of ancestors. Ancestors

⁹ Idem

were humane spirits of the departed blood-relatives of an individual, and involved a whole lineage, spanning generations. They were revered but not worshiped as one would pray to God the ancestors served to mediate between the living and *mbom* (Creator or God). They were regarded as custodians of the lives of future generations and, therefore, occupied a position of dignity and respect within their descendants¹⁰. Therefore, to ensure a good relationship with the ancestors, rituals and sacrifices were required. Rituals in Kom were performed at the individual level, family level, and at the community level.

At the private level, there existed traditional healers- who were recognized by the people as competent to provide health services and knew about the spirit world and how it operated, and so, individuals who witnessed signs that signified a problem between him and the ancestors or spirits had to visit these healers for the necessary rituals and sacrifices. The traditional healer addressed a range of personal, social, economic and spiritual issues. The rituals were usually performed by a traditional healer after consultations through incantations, divination, and questioning of the patient had revealed the cause of the illness and the type of ritual required. The traditional healer who acted as the link between the living and the dead, ancestors, and gods would tell the items required from the patient for the performance of the ritual based on the type of ritual to be performed.

The ritual usually involved the slaughtering of an animal, either a fowl, goat, items like palm oil, eggs, salt, palm wine, and more, depending on the purpose, the significance or simply as

¹⁰ Idem

instructed by the ancestors. The slaughtering was important as the blood signified the connection between the individual and the ancestors. It represented the eternal bond between the ancestors and their descendants. For that reason, the slaughtering had to be done properly, according to specific guidelines and at the right place which often was the homestead and could not be at an abattoir. This spiritual healing provided a sense of security, anchoring and validated the identity of the descendants and a sense of belonging and purpose in life.

At the family level, each household and family in Kom practiced and maintained some healthcare methods. There were some family gods and ancestors who needed to always be in harmony with the family in order to ensure good health within the family. The communication between the family and these gods, and ancestors was mainly done through sacrifices and rituals¹¹. There were equally practices like the *Iking practice* which was used as a healthcare method and was available in almost all families and households in the fendom.

At the public level, rituals and sacrifices were performed by traditional authorities on a collective basis to achieve the health objectives of the community. It was aimed at keeping away all evil spirits as well as diseases which could affect the community as a whole¹². This was done on specified periods and in designated shrines. These included rituals like *fuchuo*, and *azhea* which were performed at their dedicated shrines to serve the entire fendom. These ritual shrines were at the *Aku a müfieh* which was the spiritual gateway to the Fendom,

¹¹ Roland Mai Tubuo, aged 50, WoinKom Cultural Group Coordinator, WhatsApp interview by Clovis Nkwain, 8 June 2020

¹² Henry Kam Kah, "Ih'neem Ritual/Ceremony, Food Crisis and Sustainability in Cameroon, *Journal of Global Initiative: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2016)

The *aku a miifieh* which was a well preserved, and reserved sacred forest located above the Kom palace, played a pertinent role to sustain both the ecological, physical and spiritual wellbeing of the kom people; firstly, it was home to the rarest medicinal herbs used by traditional healers for both spiritual and physical illnesses, secondly, at the middle of the forest, was the *ndo fuchuo* in which the *achaff and ekui* priests carried out the Fuchou ritual invoking the spirits and ancestors to intercede for peace, fertility and more food in the fondom; etc.

The Kom people had a mastery and control of their environment. Soil fertility, sunshine, and rainfall were often altered to their favor by performing rituals, pouring libations, and offering prayers to the spirits and ancestors to intercede and yield to their demands. The Azhea ritual, which was performed at sacred forests, was to ensure regular rainfall, sufficient sunshine, and good harvest. Once the ritual was performed at the sacred forest, the same was repeated at the kom royal compounds of Alim, Fuli, and Yang. From the royal compounds, the other villages were nourished¹³.

The performance of these rituals in the sacred forest demonstrates the kom attachment to their environment; how they mastered their environment, protected and preserved it for their medico-spiritual needs; it equally shows their cultural understanding of their environment and the role of environmental understanding for the existence and sustenance of the kom fondom

¹³ Walter Gam, "Mythical Python and the sacred Forest"

Sacrifices

Sacrifices were sometimes offered at the request of the spirits, gods, and ancestors. Sometimes, animals such as goats, dogs, fowls were slaughtered or buried alive at midnight to save the soul of one at the point of death, with the belief that their spirits were strong enough to replace human life. There was also a view that because the animals were domestic animals and were very close to people, sometime when they saw that someone close to them was about to die, they offered their lives for that person to live. This was true especially when these animals died mysteriously, thus it was believed that it had sacrificed itself in the place of the owner. Sacrifices were sometimes offered in order to consecrate some herbs without which the medicine was meaningless. Divine and ancestral sanctions were considered necessary before and during the preparation and application of medicine.

Spiritual Cleansing and Appeasement of the gods/Ancestors

Spiritual cleansing was sometimes required of the sick person. The person was required to bathe at specific times for a prescribed number of days with water mixed with some herbal concoction. If an illness was perceived to be caused by an invocation of a curse or violation of taboos, the healer would appease the gods, ancestors, or spirits according to the severity of the case. The individual was often required to provide certain items for sacrifices or libation, such as cat, dog, fowl, kola nuts, eggs, and white, red, or black plain cloth. These items were demanded according to the spirits and nature of the illness¹⁴. After use, the items were either thrown into the river, allowed to rot, or placed at strategic places, usually at crossroads at the outskirts of the community, road junctions, depending on the

¹⁴ Francis Chia, aged 75, Spiritual Healer, interviewed by Clovis Nkwain, Jinkfuin, February 2021.

nature and severity of the case¹⁵. The *Ateff* and *suisi mikain* was one of the appeasement and cleansing practices aimed at waving away misfortunes on individuals or families caused by broken oaths or curse emanating from an angered ancestor¹⁶.

The *ateff* was often carried out by the elders in a family when there was said to be a misfortune that affected members of the family. The origin of such misfortune was often as a result of a broken taboo, or an unsettled dispute against a deceased family member while he/she was alive. The angered spirit of the deceased in such cases needed to be appeased before the family could live in harmony with its ancestors. The *ateff* was done at the family level though it required a specialized traditional healer who could lead in the appeasement ceremony. During the ceremony, elders in the family offered prayers and apologies to the angered ancestors on behalf of the family, and at the end of the orison and forgiveness plea, the direct responds from the angered ancestor was awaited. The ancestor spoke through the items used which were; a calabash filled with corn beer, some herbal concoctions, some dry grass and a match¹⁷. When the prayers were done, the traditional healer would set fire on the small grass under the calabash held in his hands, if the corn beer in the calabash bubbles and outpours within seconds, then it signified the ancestor had accepted the apologies, and if did not outpour then, there were still issues which were yet to be settled¹⁸.

¹⁵ Muteh Peter, "Socio-Cultural Perceptions of Infertility in Women and Treatment: the Kom Case in Boyo Division, Northwest Province" (MA Dissertation in Anthropology, University of Yaoundé 1, 2003)

¹⁶ Idem

¹⁷ Esther Ndum, aged 60, Farmer, interviewed by Clovis Nkwainn, Mbingo, 6 December 2019.

¹⁸ Idem

Herbal Healing

Herbal medicine constituted the most commonly used form of Traditional medicine in the Kom society. Since this kind of medicine did not include any form of spirituality or spiritual knowledge, it was not only administered by specialists. It was said that most Kom people had a basic knowledge of some herbs that could be used in treating some illnesses even when they were not specialized in the art of healing. This proved that herbal medicine was the basic and most common form of medicine that was available to the people.

Herbal medicine was used by traditional healers mainly to treat the physical manifestation of illnesses, even when they had already been treated spiritually. There were equally specialists in herbal medicine though this was often through experience and not specialization, because the healing system in Kom did not distinguish between a herbalist and a spiritualist. The reason for this was that both diviners, soothsayers, spiritualists were actually involved in using herbs in treating patients when need be.

The role of herbal medicine was so remarkable since it arose from a thorough knowledge of the medicinal properties of indigenous plants and the steps necessary to make the plants ready for consumption. The use of herbal medicine was universal in different cultures. However, the plants used for the same ailments and the modes of treatment varied from place to place. In Kom, there existed fairly a good knowledge of common curative herbs except in cases of chronic illnesses.

Herbal medicine in Kom was applied through various forms and methods depending on the nature and type of illness. It could be taken orally by chewing of fresh herbs, by drinking a mixture of either boiled or raw medicine concoction, or by taking it in

powdered form. At times, a patient was covered with cloth over a hot pot of medicine; this was intended for the body to absorb the heat-induced vapor of the herbal concoction.

There were equally various processes of herbal preparation before it was ready for use. It included harvesting and selecting of herbs, backs of trees and root crops that were medically rich. This step was usually followed by mixing, and boiling depending on the needs of the patient. For medicine that was required to be used in powder form, it was chopped and sunned till it got dry. When it was dried, it was pounded, ground or sieved and sometimes packaged if it was to be preserved for future use.

The art of herbal healing to run in families but was not necessarily hereditary. The point was that, to become a herbalist, it was the individuals choice, and thus by profession was freely accessible. The novice was apprenticed to a practicing herbalist of repute for a number of years. His business was to act as a messenger, herb gatherer, and general helper to his master; accompanying him on his excursions as medicine-bearer. All the time, learning was by observation and instruction, thus the apprentice learned to identify and name the relevant herbs, plants, animals, insects, and birds. He was equally taught how to select the best specimens. Later on, the apprentice could be sent to go and harvest alone but to bring the exhibits to his master for checking and approval. Next, he learned how to combine and mix the various ingredients and prepare a mixture. Further, the novice would assist the herbalist in the administration of medicine and could be allowed to treat some patients according to the master's instruction

Illness Prevention

Traditional medicine in Kom equally involved the prevention of illnesses. In order to prevent illnesses, the Kom people used different techniques and measures. Since the Kom belief system considered illness to either be natural or spiritual, they equally had different techniques in preventing natural illness and those in preventing illnesses considered to have spiritual causation.

Natural illnesses were prevented mainly with the use of herbs, good feeding habits, good hygiene and sanitation practices. It was common place for people to drink herbal concoctions even when they had no sign or symptom of an illness, this was in a bit to prevent frequent illness. It should be noted that the Kom people did not really take natural illnesses as serious as they took spiritual illnesses. So, much was not done to prevent illnesses of this genre.

Some preventive medicine was purely aimed at preventing illnesses that could be caused by the spiritual world. Many of these medicine types took place in the form of rituals and ceremonies through which the gods and ancestors were consulted and their spirits invoked for protection against evil forces. By means of these rituals and ceremonies, families could ascertain that none of its family members had offended the ancestors. When the ceremony showed that someone was guilty of an offense, this gave him/her the opportunity to rectify the situation before the ancestors could visit him/her with misfortune. There were equally some specific medicine against witches, wizards, evil spirits and other supper natural agents of misfortune. The prevention of bad luck equally occupied a substantial part of Kom traditional medicine and was the main reason for the constant contact between indigenes and traditional healers. Protection was usually sought against witchcraft, bad luck, thieves, infertility and human activities. The

objects of protection were the individual, his property, the family and the community. For example, protective medicine could be sprinkled in the yard to protect the homestead against witchcraft. Further methods were taken by using amulets, bracelets, charms, and necklaces aimed at driving away spirits.

There were some specific seasons when the traditional authorities carried out what could be likened to the vaccination campaigns in Bio-Medicine. During this period, the *afieh-iseh* which was aimed at immunizing or protecting children against skin disease and evil spirits would move from community to the other, with the intention of bathing and protecting every child in the community. In addition to bathing and protecting children, the traditional authorities had as a duty to protect the entire village against external evil forces¹⁹. The *ngvin* was responsible for this village protection. The *ngvin* was the community medicine bearer during this protection exercise, where he will move round all the entrances to the village and throw some well-prepared herbal concoctions which formed spiritual barriers into the community²⁰.

Some preventive medicines were carefully guarded secrets belonging to certain families. There was equally the tendency of preparing medicine especially for infants which was aimed at protecting them against evil forces. It was believed that Children were particularly vulnerable to attacks from evil forces and

¹⁹ Walter Gam Nkwi, *African Modernities and Mobilities A Historical Ethnography of Kom, Cameroon, c. 1800-2008* (Bamenda: Langa Research and Publishing CIG, 2015)

²⁰ Ibid

witches especially in case where the father was considered to be spiritually strong, and enemies would rather target their children if they proved weak and easy to get. It was normal that every child, especially male children had this medicine tied on their waist.

Also, In Kom traditional medicine, there were some practices which were aimed at influencing events in favor of the person concerned. Medicine was available for success in farming, hunting, business, artistic skills, potency and even fertility.

While causative medicine was very essential and important when it came to issues of war and the defense of the kingdom, it was more often considered to be antisocial and hence was often kept a secret by its owners. This was mainly because causative medicine often coerced other parties to take actions that they would normally not take if they were on their rightful senses and it involved bringing misfortune to competitors and enemies. People who were known to own this type of medicine were feared in the community. This was because most of this medicine was for evil purposes like inflicting pain on people, killing enemies, retarding peoples' progress, and there was often competition among those who owned such medicine, and the ultimate results of competing with someone who's medicine was stronger was deadly. However, there existed the village juju cults which acted as a policing force and regulated the owning and usage of such medicine in the village and those who proved stubborn were excommunicated.

Ecological Threats to Traditional Healing

The Kom environment has been threatened by many factors which either helped to degrade the environment, vegetation or made it lost its original value. The Kom vegetation began gradually witness the disappearance of forests especially sacred

forests which had been preserved for medico-spiritual healing purposes; and these forests were gradually becoming grasslands and farms with a visible and substantial disappearance of herbs. These ecological threats were mainly caused by factors emanating from human activities, and to a lesser extent natural factors²¹.

Notably, the growth and expansion of towns like Belo, Njinikom, and Fundong witnessed a tremendous destruction of shrines, sacred springs and rivers which had been preserved, reserved and protected for centuries. The destruction was often done not intentionally but for the necessity of road construction, building of residential houses, markets, western hospitals, schools and more, which hitherto was not given priority. The disappearance of such places had great impact on the ecological and medico-spiritual healing milieu in Kom. It was believed that such springs, forests and shrines were inhabited by spirits and deities which often partook and influenced the daily lives of the people around. Thus, the shrines represented the meeting point of humans, natural and spiritual entities, and its importance in human communal affairs took the aura of sovereignty. This explains why rituals which were meant for the spirits were performed in such places. The destruction of such places had consequences on the people. A major direct effect of the desecration of the shrines, sacred forests and springs was the drying up of the springs which did not only serve a spiritual and healing purpose but was a source of drinking water, and was equally very vital for the ecological preservation of the Kom society.

²¹ Walter Gam Nkwi, "Sacred Forest and the Mythical Python: Ecology, Conservation and Sustainability in Kom, Cameroon, c. 1700-2000", *Journal of Global initiatives*, Vol.11, No. 2, (2017)

The expansion of towns and modernization equally introduced new forms of architecture which differed from the Kom indigenous building architecture²². The introduction of the new architecture in the early 1990s was joyously received by the Kom people and it gained much popularity in the proceeding decades. Though the modern architecture was welcomed and it positively influenced the quality of life, it had a severe impact on the medico-spiritual healing in the fendom. Contrary to indigenous homes, the new housing system destroyed habitats of some organisms which were important components in the medico-spiritual healing in Kom. A typical example is the ant lion (*bilibili*) whose habitat was often in the dusts in verandas of local houses, this creature was used by almost all traditional healers, but the modern architecture which consisted of tiled and cemented surfaces did not provide a conducive environment for the existence of the ant lion. This gradually led to the disappearance of this creature.

Agricultural Activities

Agriculture has always been one of the major backbone of the Kom's economy. The indigenous Kom people, especially women mainly practiced subsistence agriculture where bush fallowing and shifting cultivation was the main agricultural method. This form of agriculture encouraged the growth of herbs which was invaluable for the medico-spiritual needs of the Kom people. However, the 21st century witnessed a paradigm shift in the agricultural techniques used by the Kom people. This was certainly due to the emergence and development of settlement areas such as Belo, Njinikom, and Fundong, with an increasing population and high population density, commercialization of

²² Gilbert Mbeng, "Preserving the Traditional Kom House", (MA Dissertation: School of Architecture, Planning Preservation, University of Maryland, 2010)

agriculture. This necessitated the introduction of Chemical agriculture; the use of fertilizers, and notably herbicides. There was an abrupt shift from the traditional agriculture techniques of clearing and cultivation of farmlands to the use of herbicides which, however, increased the agricultural productivity but had an adverse effect on the ecology. With the constant use of these herbicides, various medicinal plants were threatened with disappearance and extinction. The effects were more severe owing to the fact that agricultural activities were often carried out along river banks and lowlands which were a safe haven for medicinal plants, this was so because the hills and highlands were subjected to wildfires and continuous grazing. In effect, hills and highlands did not provide a conducive atmosphere for the growth of medicinal plants. The use of chemicals proved more problematic as some of these chemicals were absorbed into the resistant medicinal crops, which often reduced the effectiveness of these herbs. Some of these chemicals were said to cause ozone depletion.

Changes in Medico Spiritual Healing

Traditional healers, like any other profession were rewarded for their services. In Kom society, the payment for a treatment depended much on its efficacy.

Traditional healers in kom were formally paid in kind. Usually a small retainer fee was paid initially, and the rest was paid when treatment was completed or when the patient was healed.

In general, the fee schedule was not fixed or standardized. The fee charged varied from healer to healer and according to the illness and nature of treatment. Most often, as was the case with spiritual healers, the gods did demand the items to be presented by the patient, which mainly consisted of oil, salt, goats, fowls

and many other items which were used in rituals and/or sacrifices depending on the nature of illness and sacrifice required. Arrangements to bring the products later were easily made if the patient proved unable to provide at that moment. In such cases, the traditional healers would lend the products to the patient who would symbolically hand them back to the healer.

Many practitioners did not charge much and some did not charge any fee at all; they did not regard the practice of medicine as a source of wealth but as a service to the community. Such healers were rewarded by the status accrued to them and their families from their ability to heal, and have access the world of spirits. Although some practitioners did not receive any fee, they expected patients to offer gifts from time to time, and this method of payment, in certain instances became very expensive. In cases where payment was to be demanded, it was not done until the cure was gotten and the patient was fully healed²³.

Communal medicine which was offered by traditional public health authorities was without a fee. The role of Laikom was to ensure and maintain good health throughout the kingdom and this was portrayed through the various rituals like the *Azhea*, *ntul*, *fuchou*, which guaranteed the well-being of the community members. The *Ise* and the apotropaic medicine which was both preventive and treatment medicine was offered to the people free of charge.

²³ Chia Christopher, aged 75, Traditional Healer, Interviewed by Clovis Nkwain, Mbingo December 2019.

However, the commercialization of traditional medicine in Kom opened a new page in traditional medicine²⁴. The payment methods changed over time, and most practitioners began asking for monetary payments and sometimes, exorbitant amounts were demanded even before treatment could begin. The commercialization of the practice equally gave rise to fraudulent practitioners who became only interested in making money without rendering the health services paid for.

Places of Healing

Traditional medicine in Kom was practiced at the family, individual and community levels. Most families were not specialists in healing but used their traditional knowledge of herbs, and equally connected with the family ancestors to maintain good health within the family. On the other hand, there were specialized healers who were sometimes diviners, herbalists and spiritualists at the same time.

The healing place of traditional healers depended on the type of healer and the case at hand, basically, traditional healers used their residences as health care centers. In this case, traditional healers will host the patients in his compound till the patient was fully recovered. However, in cases where the illness was severe and the patient cannot walk, the healer sometimes went to the individual homes of the patients to administer medicine to them.

One common feature in the healing system in traditional Kom society was the use of shrines. There existed family shrines where the family members performed rituals and offered

²⁴ Idem

sacrifices to the ancestors and to the gods of the compound, who were believed to reside not far from homes.

Specialized traditional healers used shrines when they were dealing with illnesses which were believed to have spiritual causal origins. The shrines were used for rituals, sacrifices, spiritual bathing and cleansing which constituted the main elements of the spiritual healing. Shrines were central and indispensable to traditional healers, hence, all traditional healers owned shrines where they carried out their art of healing. The shrines served several functions. It served as an instrument of justice as the shrines were patronized to seek redress, as in the case of communal shrines. It should be noted that some of these shrines were on the graves of deceased important clan or community notables. In some cases, human sacrifices were done before instituting these shrines, which indicates that these shrines stood as the gateway between the physical and the spiritual world.

Conclusion

It has been illustrated that traditional medicine and healing was the sole healthcare system available to deal with the prevalent physical, psychological, social, spiritual and mental illnesses in the indigenous Kom society. This form of healing sustained the Kom society as well as its environment, since its practices were nature-friendly in terms of preservation, protection and reservation of environmental elements such as springs and forests. This paper exposed the threats to the potency and practice of traditional healing relative to human activities as well as natural, and ecological considerations. The paper pointed out that, the advent of colonialism and Christianity introduced new ideologies which often tried to suppress the practice of traditional medicine, even so, the emergence of new disease like HIV/AIDS further compounded the challenges facing

traditional healing and its potency was put to test. The paper equally examined the effects of human activities notably agricultural and grazing on traditional healing and environment. The paper concludes that, the place of traditional medicine in Kom remained indispensable, though the practice witnessed a number of threats which necessitated the introduction of new norms to meet up with the prevailing circumstances.

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Chapter Sixteen

MAN, SPIRITUAL FORCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN IGALA RELIGION

Israel Yunisa Akoh, Ph.D

*Department Of Religious Studies
Kogi State University, Anyigba, Kogi State
israelakoh3@gmail.com*

Executive Summary

A level of consciousness is observable with regards to environmental sustainability in the Igala traditional religion. The research seeks to motivate high and quality environmental consciousness based on the physical environmental challenges of soil erosion, flooding, physical environmental quality and deforestation within the environment. It also seeks to loud sufficient precautions that have been overlooked over time against the need to maintain desirable environmental quality. To achieve this, the researcher has the following in mind: to state a descriptive view of the Igala people's environment in relation to their religion as well as to investigate the level of consciousness of the Igala religion in relation to the environment, and suggest ways of reducing global warming, climate disaster and destruction of environmental deposits. The methods adopted are descriptive, historical and phenomenological. Data collection was done through interview. It is observed that the environment plays a key role in the everyday practice of the Igala people's religion hence, the need for more effective integration of its religion with its environmental policies.

Keywords: Environmental sustainability, Igala traditional religion, Eco-system, Africa

Introduction

The Igala people's religion like any African religion is not a religion of the holy book like the Koran or the Holy Bible. It is a religion that is written on the hearts of *Igala* people and can be learnt through their songs, myths/legends, idioms, wise sayings and arts/symbols. This religion like other African religions, according to Shishima, "is part and parcel of life in traditional African society. Religion permeates all aspects of life, be it politics, economics, education, etc. This is to say, to be an effective member of the community, one must belong to the religion of the land" (2).

The idea held by Eurocentric authors as stated by Idowu, "that the African people (Igala inclusive) had no idea of God and where the devil in all his abysmal, grotesque and forbidden features, armed to the teeth and with horns complete, held Sway" (87). Idowu thus cites the Berlin Journal to hold that:

Before the introduction of genuine faith and higher standards of culture by the Arabs, the natives had neither political organization not strictly speaking any religion.... Therefore, in examining the pre-Mohammedan conditions of Negro races, to confine ourselves to the description of their crude fetishism, their brutal and often cannibal customs, their vulgar and repulsive idols and their squalid homes (87).

The researcher disagrees with the above statement because there can be no people all over the world who are totally devoid of cultures and religion as it relates to the knowledge of the living God. What Igala people's religion does was that since the Supreme Being (*Ojo Chamachala*) is so mighty, powerful and

above the physical reach of man, they convey their religious ideas through supernatural beings as agents of the Supreme Being (Kanu 2013 and 2015).

In our society today, environmental studies are receiving greater attention by biblical scholars. In some of such scholarly works, the ecological concept of the natural world, as distinct from the theological concept of creation, is clearly an emerging subject matter in biblical studies, thus in the words of a biblical scholar, Fretheim, “we have a lot of catching up to do” (16). In affirmation of Lynn White’s Theory of ecology, Eneji writes:

Everybody now says they are Christians and that the ancestral belief was misleading, God gave man dominion over all living creatures for Man’s satisfaction of his needs, so why would anybody put restrictions of the use of any part of God’s Creation? We must exploit these resources to our satisfaction. God was not a fool because he knew we were going to need these resources (50).

With the above, one would accept Lynn White’s theory that Christianity has played an important role in the erosion of former traditional belief systems. According to Eneji:

Things formerly held sacrosanct have been destroyed and the ascription of psychic power to these objects of worship has been completely removed, hence traditional African religion is now seen as an evil thing to believe without considering the efficacy of the belief system in the conservation and management of environmental resources (Eneji 50).

The researcher is, therefore, of the opinion that other faiths should be blamed for the crises we experience in our world today. Furthermore, religion without etiquette is bad. The questions that arise include: How can we dwell in harmony when the rights of members of ecosystem are not respected?

How could there be harmonious relationship when animals (land or sea) are killed with reckless abandon even to the point of using chemicals developed through technology and science to destroy them? Following the question above, Chiedozie and Ufele comment, "More science and more technology are not going our old one" (4). Chiedozie and Ufele further observe that, "Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen because it gave man the right to dominate and exploit nature" Chidozie and Ufele (5). As to what Christianity contributes to this emerging technological world view, Lynn White as cited by Chidozie and Ufele further adds that "Both our present science and technology are so tinctured with so called orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature so that no solution for our crises can be expected from them alone" Chiedozie and Ufele (5). The position of Chiedozie and Ufele is not conclusive as many other scholars will understand their position as a misunderstanding and one-sided rendering of the Christian creation story.

Human Relationship with the Natural Environment in Igala Religion

The Igala people believed that God (*Ojo*) is both the creator and the maker of all things. This is evident in Igala story of creation that in the beginning, only God (*Ojo Chamachala*) existed, and the shapeless world was in total darkness. Out of his eyes came lighting that brought forth the sun (*olu*) and the moon (*ochu*) with the stars (*amilawo*)... God created man out of the clay and breathed upon his forehead of the man created. Thus the first man became *Atinalo* (*Ata ene olo*) (father from the sky) (Egbunu 9).

The Igala people lived harmoniously in a religious world where both human beings and their natural environment relate well with each other. The Igala people consider the earth as both

home and mother of all, but with the coming of the foreign religions, things started changing from what they used to be. In line with Lynn Whites's theory as quoted by Chidozie and Ufele "what used to be the traditional method of environmental preservation collapsed and sustainability even disappeared" Chidozie and Ufele (32). Nevertheless, religion still played a major role among the Igaka people. Though the exact time when man was created in Igala creation story is not stated, it is evident that man was brought into being after heaven and earth and other heavenly bodies were created. Man is regarded among the *Igala* as the head of all things, but that God is the most powerful and the source of all powers.

The Igala people regarded God as the Supreme Being, the Almighty, All powerful, dependable, and that he is eternal. As such, he is both creator and sustainer of all that was created. The Igala people believed that the spiritual world is populated with divine beings. These beings have a hierarchy (Miachi 114). They believe that the earth and material world was created, they also have belief in a multitude of gods and spirits. It is a religion that is dogmatic and thus no questions or challenges are entertained (Chidozie and Ufele 54).

Important factors associated with the Igala religious system are that spirits are everywhere in persons, trees, rivers, animals, rocks, mountains, forests and other sacred personal effects. Interestingly, Igala people believed that God could be at work any of the above since religion permeates all aspects of human life in Igala society. It is, therefore, abnormal to be involved in crimes such as adultery, stealing, cheating and suicide. The priest and traditional custodians of the people communicate the wishes of the spirits to the people. In Igala religious system, all events have their proper rituals that could not be over looked in

anyway. These rituals are performed through dance, music, liberation or art. Some of these rituals have been retained in one form or the other in various communities concerned. In Gbenda's view "part of God's self-disclosure to human is in nature" (43).

The *Igalas* in their religious questions pondered on the mysteries of the universe such as mountains, rivers, streams, lakes, forest, animals, plants, season, weather and climatic changes. They then asked themselves questions such as "who could be the author of this well patterned universe, and what the mysteries behind them are?" Usually, they conclude that it must be the handwork of a supersensible intelligent being. According to Gbenda, "Man's responsibility was to maintain a harmonious relationship with cosmos and other beings such as the fauna, flora and spirits of ancestors in order to sustain perfect harmony with God and His agents" (44). Awolalu and Dopamu support Gbenda's view that, "Each people in Africa responded independently to the experience of our immediate environment. When all these beliefs and practices are put side by side, they present an unitary view with common orientation, religious thought and philosophy" (27).

Another action for man's relationship with nature is from the fact that the universe and all therein are creatures of the Supreme Being. It, therefore, means that everything belongs to the ecosystem and the environment has strong spiritual meaning for man. The traditional Igala view, therefore, is profoundly religious and it forms the basic attitudes that characterize most, if not all spheres of life. That is why there is no basic distinction between the sacred and the profane, material and immaterial. To Igala people, many of the things in his environment are held in high esteem for religious reasons.

Furthermore, the attitude of the Igala people is rooted in the belief that those things were created by the Supreme Being and for continuity of harmony with nature; there must be a relationship for mutual obligation between all the things created by the Supreme Being. Since there is no visible dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual worlds in that they both interlink into each other or overlap, the visible world acts as a vehicle for spiritual power while the physical is held or modeled after the spiritual world. The Igala people believe that the cosmos is a representation of an organic unity thus the environment is seen as a nurturing mother, sensitive and alive, and its capable of responding to human action. It is further believed among the Igala people that these natural resources were provided for the benefit of man and Man's duty is to explore, develop and use with moderation, all the available natural resources to enhance his wellbeing. According to Apendad and Adegas as cited by Gbeda, "Nature is created on the principle of balance and all the systems in nature must exist and function in harmony with their balance (387). This of course, is a contrast with the outright domination and control as in Gen. 1:28 which Lynn White says was the cause of the environmental crises seen today in our world.

Though, the Igalas have always collected food, medicines, and other materials from the wild animals that all depend on these natural resources for their livelihood. "Consequently, if these natural resources are used up to as a result of over exploitation, or lack of protection, or even due to our change of attitude towards them, their number would greatly reduced, thereby, depriving the future generations the opportunity to either see them, talk more of even using them to better their lives" Gbenda (46). That is why Igala culture, reveres, protects and respect things in their natural environment.

In Igala religion, lands are often set aside at the out sketch of the village settlements. Examples are *Ayabi* in Affa-Ibaji, both sides are rivers and streams, *Okwula* forest, *Egbe* forest in *Egume*, *Ojaina* (Royal Cemetery at Idah), farming and other human activities such as hunting, felling of tress, fetching of fire woods, etc., were not allowed. These forests retain their original flora and fauna. To signify their importance, shrines of some deities are located therein. With singular action, the forest is the small forest dedicated to '*Agana-Obagwu* in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State. In this case, only the priests who are custodians of such sacred forests could enter at specified times of the year. The researcher's quest to know why the surrounding of *Ofu* river remains bushy from Ojofu Anyigba to the lower part after Okogba in Ibaji generated the response from Momoh Omata (Gago Ajetachi) thus: "Rivers and streams in Igala religious setting are treated as sacred by people who lives in its forest".

While the researcher was schooling at CMML Secondary School Anyigba, there used to be strange noises from within the River Ofu between 11:00am-1:00pm. It was then believed that the water spirits were celebrating at those periods. Consequent upon these we were not allowed to go to the stream around the same time to avoid the wrath of the spirits. Towards the middle of the river at Ofokopi near Ugwolawo, there is as point in the river called Ulokoamo. This place is said to be the abode of the spirit living in the river. Similarly at Ugwolawo, opposite the local government secretariat, there is a place which is referred to as *ejuliomimamo* (the eyes see water that cannot be drunk) where there was a cave where some spirits were said to have lived. History has it that a priestess, Serahagali, a traditional doctor had shrine there. The river in *Maboloegane* in Olamaboro local government area of Kogi State, is also a place said to be the home

of *aligenu* (water spirit). Most of the priests and priestesses of *aligenu* visit the site regularly, at times they even jump into the dreaded area of the river *mabolo* so as to obtain more powers and inspirations from the spirits dwelling within. These histories and activities have made these sites sacred and kept away from human activities.

In line with the above, most of the people that live along river banks in Igala land mostly revere or venerate water spirits which to them gives them fortune in fishing, farming, prevention of water accidents, some even believe that the barren could be given children through some prescribed sacrifices and rituals. As a result, people built shrines and veneration centers along the banks and mysterious parts of the river.

In Igala religious system, there is protection offered for totems. Here, there is an intrinsic relationship of friendship and protection between a person or group of persons and a particular animal or a natural object. Both parties keep to mutual close bond of life. Among the *EgwuAfia* (Long Masquerade) people in Igala land, the animal called *Ewolo* is neither to be killed or eaten. Some group in Igala land like the Ajire in Ajaka forbid the killing and eating of alligator (*Abaji*). Some clans around Ibochi prohibit the killing and eating of rabbits (*Afolo*) because it was said to have saved their forefather from the danger of being killed during war. Among the descendants of Ogbajele in Ofakaga, Ajetachi and Agala in Igala land, they are forbidden from using *Okopi* tree for fire wood because it was used to save their forefather from a dreaded disease.

The Igala people believe in the power of spirits as forces behind lightning and thunder. It is believed to be an avenger of wrong dealings and as such when properties are stolen, the thunder

spirit is consulted through the diviner. Days are given to the victim to either confess before the day or be ready to face the consequence. When confession is not made as to who stole the property, full rituals are carried out. In effect, the victim would be stricken by thunder and in that case, nobody must cry or mourn for the victim, neither shall he/she be touched until the necessary rituals are observed. Thus, when an Igala man or woman hears the sound of thunder they utter this expression *Tukpara, Tukpara, Ojomudubanwu mi* (I recant, I recant, my God forgive me). Therefore, with the fear of the wrath of thunder evil actions were curbed in Igala communities.

In another development, the earth is revered so much in Igala land because of the religious importance it has. Specific locations are set aside where the earth divinities are venerated (*Eṛṛane*). There and then cleansing extends to the whole community (*Anefa*). To the Igala people, this cleansing brings about good rain, soul fertility, good fortunes and likes. The *Ereane* is usually marked with the planting of a tree to mark the spot. A good example is the *Obala* tree in the middle of Omata's compound at Ajetatchi-Anyigba as the starting point of the human community in the area.

Because of the sanctity attached to the earth by igala religious system, it is purely an abomination to have intercourse with a woman on the ground. People who do so will never flourish in life because they have defiled the earth goddess and so they are under a curse.

Science and Technology and the Natural Environmental

According to David and Dada,

There are lots of ecological problems and hazards that man does to the world of nature. This can be due to the fact that the livelihood of man depends largely on natural

resources which are obtained by striving for survival through massive production of food produce (32). Man's quest to achieve the above; seek after land allocation which of course has its ecological consequences on the natural environment, has resulted in wanton destruction of natural vegetation, leaching, disruption of biogeochemical circle among other negative effects on the land.

Another activity of man that disrupts the originality of man's natural environment is the act of bush burning. This act destroys the potentials of the soil, soil structure and the ecology is arbitrarily destroyed. Through bush burning so many microbes are destroyed as well as soil macro organisms in the likes of earthworm, snails, rodents, insects, etc., and this had led to their reduction as well as some going into extinction; the ecology is also interrupted when man uses pesticides and herbicides which has led to the death of many pests and herbs. Similarly, human activities have threatened the peace and stability of the natural environment. According to Obasola cited by Asiodu:

It is now plain that the path blazed the material civilization that has been dominant in the world in the last one and half centuries is leading mankind to disaster because of the devastation that is has brought on the environment. The motivation, orientation and goal modern civilization have been overwhelmingly materialism is one the major cause's wanton destruction of beasts and their habitats as well as the earth and its beauty (205).

Other agents disrupting the continuity of natural environmental resources are the issues of urbanization and industrialization. When land is cleared in large quantity for housing, construction of roads, industries, educational and social reasons, it results to

the destruction of many economical plants, pounds, lakes, etc. The above action of man brought about by science and technology also led to the destruction of wildlife habitats and species living among the vegetation of the affected areas.

Man's action on the ecosystem has been more negative than positive through his mode of operations. Investigations have shown that the destruction caused by man to the ecosystem is far more that roles he plays in training and benefiting from the environments. The point above is manifested in the cutting and felling of the trees which have resulted to gradual desertification of Igala land. Not only that , the trees of religious importance in the land had been cut off thus depriving the spirits of their abode which has resulted theses spirits hunting for man since they have been made homeless.

The activities of rain makers is counter-productive in the sense that they prevent rain when it is needed for farming activities all in the name of festivals and mud house building. The action of these rain makers in Igala land has in no small measure affected the rate of rainfall. If this is not checked, it could lead to crop failure, famine and untold hardship on both human on the ecosystem.

In view of man's negative interaction with the natural environment, Schumacher quoted by Obasola States that, "we are at war with nature and if by chance we win the war, we shall be the loser" (199). By this he meant to say that our civilization is at risk because we are misusing natural resources and disturbing natural systems.

Another area worth noting is the area of pollution of air, soil, fresh waters and the oceans which has become a serious and continuing threat to humans and other species.

To conclude this section, the words of Hoffman as quoted by Obasolaare is important:

The true cause of the catastrophic environmental destruction is the hubris of modern man who has become godless, who believes himself to be an unlimited master of his environment and one unleashes his boundless hedonistic consumer passion on nature as if it has no right of its own to exist intact (201).

Ways of Tackling Environmental Crisis

For the simple fact that each of the world religions has acknowledged care for the earth and all therein, the adherents need to be fast in recognizing and applying such ideas that express deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice. The inability of putting relevant strategies in their proper place would amount to the destruction of the future of humanity. Similarly, religious traditions should question any economic progress that allegedly is in contradiction with the preservation of the environment.

There should be rediscovery of ecological sensitivity in the light of religious traditions so as to encourage those lagging behind to rediscover the ecological sensitivity and take radical steps towards combating ecological crisis.

To maintain the originality of the natural environment, the sacredness of the cosmos should be promoted, rotational farming and bush fallow system should also be adopted to protect the ecosystem. Indiscriminate tree felling in Igala land should be stopped if the wildlife and trees and herbs used in traditional medicine is to flourish. Similarly, bush burning should be discouraged for the protection of the eco-system.

Furthermore, the issue of grazing by Fulani herdsmen should be addressed since they also contribute to leaching, destruction of micro and macro organisms living in the soil as well as farm lands. The use of chemicals on lands and water bodies should be minimized or stopped.

Igala taboos, religious beliefs, sacred rites and totems provide a frame works for defining acceptable resource use. When these traditional practices are promoted and protected, ecological balance would be restored.

Conclusion

The Igala people believe in the existence of spirits/ deities in their natural environment. They also believe that these spirits protect, heal, hear them and are capable of communicating their wishes and aspirations to the Supreme Being (*Ojo Chamachala*). Because of belief that natural environments have some super natural powers in them, sacrifices are offered to them for onward transmission to the most high (*Ojochamachala*). It could therefore be deduced that because man is not lording or claiming total dominion over the created beings, but believes that there are transcendental power in nature, the human person protects them since their livelihood and surval depends on these agents of the universal creator. It is submitted that the Igala must protect his or her environment for sustainable preservation of life and nature itself.

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Chapter Seventeen

EDUCATION AND THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Adamu James NANBAK

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education

University of Jos, Nigeria

jamesnanbak@gmail.com

Executive Summary

The value added chains of educational benefit towards the environmental protection of Africa can never be overemphasized. This is because education is the catalyst for human emancipation which empowers the human person with techniques of preserving the environment. This Chapter investigated the relationship between education and the African environment. Using secondary data, the qualitative study found that with proper education, Africans can defend their eco-system from common threats which seek to endanger the natural resources domiciled within it as well as ensure integral development of the human person within his environment by being equipped with basic skills of conserving the environment. It recommended creation of awareness about human cultural values and curbing environmental degradation as practical steps of integrating education with African traditional values of education. The study concluded that through proper education, the African ecosystem would be conserved for generations to come even as the current generation relishes its gains.

Keywords: Africa, Education Climate, Ecosystem, Environment, Pollution

Introduction

The global call for protection of the environment can only be achieved through a deliberate, well-articulated and concerted educational plan. This is because education being the hallmark of development is critical in the attainment of this objective given that no meaningful development is possible without it. Africa is not left out from those continents suffering the brunt of environmental degradation, hence the need for a critical analysis. An analysis of what constitutes environmental education in the African setting; the parameters and indices for effective environmental education; challenges and setbacks to the attainment of effective environmental education in Africa; possible ways on how to attain effective environmental education in Africa, are posited as concrete measures to be used in the attainment of commendable environment for Africa.

Spadework

a. Education

Why should education take central stage in the quest for ensuring a friendly African environment? It is simply because of education is a unique talent by which human beings sharpen and enlighten one another. Education has been described by the Dictionary of Etymology as the process of facilitating learning, acquisition of knowledge, values, beliefs, morals skills and habits, has its roots from the Latin word *educaten*- bring up (children), to train. *Educaten* is from the past participle of the Latin word *educare* meaning to 'bring up, to rear. It is also related with the verb *educere* which means bring out, or lead forth. Given that the role of education is to bring out or bring forth salient qualities in people, Africa can be said to be in dire need of an educational blue print that places premium on the environment

b. African Environment

The continent of Africa has five main types of ecosystems namely coastal environments, deserts and semi deserts, mountain environments, savanna grasslands, and forests. Each of these ecosystem has its typical environment and climatic setting. also over the years, people who lived in these places have adjusted and gotten adapted to them so as to be able to use the resources available therein.

The conservation and preservation of the African environment requires a strong will from all stakeholders in both public and private sectors to ensure that human interference does not lead to infraction on the ecosystem (Kwashirai V.C). The term “Ecosystem” was first coined by A.G.Tansley, an English botanist, in 1935. The ecosystem refers to the structural and functional unit of ecology where the living organisms interact with each other within and around their surrounding environment. In other words, an ecosystem is a chain of interaction between organisms and their environment.

Literature Review and Discussion

The discussion about Africa and its environment as observed by Juliette B (2021), Africa is endowed with about 30% of the world’s mineral reserve with 65% in arable land and 10% renewable energy source. However, But Africa’s challenge is immense. It must quickly implement programs to restore and protect ecosystems while addressing issues such as climate change, security challenges, food security and biodiversity loss. The region must also wrestle with the cruel irony that it is the most exposed region to the adverse effects of climate change despite contributing the least to global warming

Traditional African Society: A Historical Sketch

The traditional African conceived himself an integral part of his environment. He communicated and shared his joys and sorrows with his environment through series of rituals. The environment needed to be spoken to by means of a variety of rites to either appreciate it (when bumper harvests were realized), appeased it (when a taboo against the land was committed); and at some other times, the rites were simply carried out to curry for favors. All the seasons had different rites to usher in such seasons. The traditional African society through its many tribal settings did not have the tools to exploit the environment to the deplorable state as we have it today. Different societies were however able to harness the available resources for their immediate needs by the use of hand tools which at best could be described as environmentally friendly. Even smith works which required the application of metal never went through the mechanized system. Production of the needed equipment was

Traditional Indigenous Education and the African Environment: Merits

There are several benefits attributable to Traditional Indigenous African Education (TIE) which when properly managed, can boost a renewal of understanding on the management of the environment in this present time. First the promotion of communalism (strength in unity through diversity) can serve as an avenue for creation of awareness on the dangers of unwholesome practices against the as bush burning, indiscriminate felling of trees. Also, the transmission of cultural values and heritage through folklores and folktales which discourages the abuse of the environment in whatever manner can play a major role. Other values which included the respect of elders, bravery, crafts and art works can be revived to inspire towards proactive commitment to the preservation of the

environment. Modern farming which tend to put more pressure on the land, exposing it to various forms of degradation leaves us with a challenge from the traditional method of farming (which used only organic fertilizer that aided the preservation of the environment) due to entrenchment of moral and religious discipline

Demerits of traditional African Education in relation to the environment

Traditional African Education had simple and practicable approach towards existence; hence it was not complex or complicated. It was also oriented towards subsistent farming with the aid of animal dung as manure. Thus, it would seem like there is no downside to this practice in relation to the preservation of the environment. However, the absence of literacy and computation leading to poor historical data compilation count against the practice. Lack of systematized curriculum and reliance on oral communication modules made it difficult impart to visual and hearing disabilities. Under this system, it can simply be said that Trans-geographical language barrier made it difficult for ideas to be shared beyond one region to another.

Education and the African Environment: A Comparative Analysis

Munamoto C. (2019) observes that in the face of pollution, climate change and the depletion of or extinction of fauna and flora threatened by global warming, Africa has been left behind in terms of awareness and campaign. Thus, as observed by Nanbak (2020), combating these environmental problems in Africa require a strong revival of interest towards a deliberate investment in the preservation of the environment. This is possible through the application of both traditional indigenous

African education module which never separated the man from his environment but acknowledged him as an integral part, and the modern technique of education which relies heavily on machines for the exploration of the earth. The many problems confronting the African environment threatening to endanger the region can be identified to include: deforestation, soil degradation, air pollution, and climate change and water scarcity. Furthermore, the indiscriminate felling of trees has also led to a decrease in forest reserves, thus exposing the land to desert encroachment. Rampant clearing of forests and land conversion for the purposes for agriculture, provision of fuel, urbanization and road construction have made the environment highly decimated, thus endangering it with whatever is contained within. Ninety percent of Africa's population requires wood to use as fuel for heating and cooking. Furthermore, illegal logging across the continent poses as a great threat to the environment as it speeds deforestation. Mining activities as well as bush burning also endanger the ecosystem by adding to the environmental warming within the region. Let us look at some of the problems of the African environment in detail below.

a. Soil Degradation

Soil degradations are caused by rains, winds and even by excessive manipulation by people for agricultural and industrial purposes. Growth in population has made the soil to become a scarce commodity as people often throw caution to the wind in a bit to fend for livelihood. It is alleged that a main cause of soil degradation is lack of manufactured fertilizer being used, since African soil lacks organic sources of nutrients. The increase in population has also contributed when people need to crop, as a source of income, but do not take measures to protect the soil furthermore, the current method of agricultural practices put a lot of pressure on the soil as well thereby making the nutrients to speedily evaporate.

b. *Air Pollution*

The air in Africa is greatly polluted due to multiple reasons stated below. The primitive method of farming that takes place in most areas in Africa is certainly a causal factor. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) about 11.3 million hectares of land are being lost annually to agriculture, grazing, uncontrolled burning and fuel wood consumption. Also the burning of woods which leads to the emission of carbon dioxide pollutes the air. This results in the germination of different airborne diseases in the air which is being absorbed by the organisms within the region. According to a report, sub-Saharan Africa is experiencing a fast increasing pollution which stemmed from many causes, such as burning wood for cooking, open burning of waste, traffic, agro-food and chemical industries.

Also the dust from the Sahara carried by the winds through the Sahel area, all this enforced by urbanization. For instance, in South Africa, the mercury level that is absorbed from the air into the soil and water is so high and is thus affecting every living organism in the region. "The soil allows the crops to absorb the mercury, which humans ingest. Animals eat the grass which has absorbed the mercury and again humans may ingest these animals. Fish absorb the mercury from the water; humans also ingest the fish and drink the water that has absorbed the mercury. This increases the mercury levels in humans. This can cause serious health risk".

c. *Climate Change*

The inconsistency of the climate of Africa makes it vulnerable and prone to environmental encroachment by harsh weather

changes. These frequent climate twists have resulted massive food shortage for all species, sometimes forcing migration from one part to another. Caitlin Welsh (2021) alleged that African countries rely on imports to meet approximately 85 percent of their food needs, making African countries vulnerable to food price shocks—from economic, political, or climate-related phenomena—as in the global food price crisis of 2007-2008.²⁴ As African countries' food imports rise, their food exports are rising at the same time, ²⁵ so reduced agricultural yields result in foregone profits for producers. In this light, there is the need to create awareness through concerted educational campaigns to ensure judicious food usage. Campaigns against human activities abetting in Fas tracking climate change such as indiscriminate felling of trees and water wastages should be encouraged through such campaigns.

d. Water Scarcity

Some parts of Africa especially the northern part such as Algeria do not have sufficient rainfall all-round the year. This has greatly placed the environment in a porous state for habitation. Other parts cannot access good and clean water to drink as such waters are contaminated by other forms of pollution such as dust and industrial chemicals which find their way into the air and then settle in the water. This lack of water has endangered the biotic ecosystem in different ways.

e. Deforestation

The indiscriminate felling of trees for industrial and commercial purposes such as road construction and building without replacing them with new plants has exposed the environment severe hazards leading to an unprecedented warming not only in Africa but across the world. Due to poor enlightenment, Africans in rural villages have the habit of setting the bushes on fire which inadvertently destroy the fauna thus endangering in

such habitat. In brief, causes of deforestation include but not limited to these: forest fires, illegal logging, harvesting of firewood, mining activities, and climate change.

Structure of African Ecosystem

The structure of an ecosystem is characterized by the organization of both biotic and abiotic components. This includes the distribution of energy within the environment. It also includes the climatic conditions prevailing in that particular environment. There are two major categorization of the structure of ecosystem namely: Biotic Components and Abiotic Components

The biotic and abiotic components both have strong relationship in an ecosystem. The ecosystems play crucial role in maintaining the balance of the environment. Some of the functions of the biotic and abiotic components of the ecosystem include, the provision of a guide to the basic ecological processes and also support the life system by rendering stability, provision of active support for the efficient cycling of nutrients between biotic and abiotic components, provision of equilibrium among the different trophic levels within the ecosystem, maintenance of balances in the movement of the minerals within the biosphere and abiotic components which makes it possible for the synthesis of organic components that require the exchange of energy to take place.

Types of Ecosystem in Africa

There is the need to clarify the kinds of ecosystems available with the region of Africa in order to appreciate the abundant resources within as well as how they are gradually being pushed into endangered state by lack of care for the environment. According to Mohendra Shiwarnarain (2018), an ecosystem is an

interaction between living components and nonliving components to form a complex and relatively defined area. Many ecosystems blur into each other and there are not usually clear boundaries between them. In other words, an ecosystem can be said to be as small as an oasis in a desert, or as big as an ocean, spanning thousands of miles. There are two types of ecosystem: Terrestrial and Aquatic Ecosystems.

a. Terrestrial Ecosystem

Basically, terrestrial ecosystems are exclusively land-based ecosystems. There are different kinds of terrestrial ecosystems scattered across various geological zones within Africa. These are identified as follows:

i. Grassland Ecosystem

In a grassland ecosystem, the vegetation is dominated by grasses and herbs. Temperate grasslands, savanna grasslands are some of the examples of grassland ecosystems. Grasslands are not prevalent in Africa but are sparsely found in tropical African Savannah regions/it is characterized by sparse plants and lush grasses.

ii. Forest Ecosystem

A forest ecosystem is made up of several plants, animals and microorganisms that live in relation with the abiotic factors of the environment. Forests help in maintaining the temperature of the earth and are the major carbon sink. Africa has a large amount of forest ecosystem due to sufficient rainfall.

iii. Desert Ecosystem

Deserts are found in three areas in Africa, namely, the Sahara desert and the Namib Desert and the Kalahari desert. These are

regions with very little rainfall. Here, the days are hot and the nights are cold.

b. Aquatic Ecosystem

Aquatic ecosystems refer to ecosystems present in a body of water. In other words, they are water-based and can only survive within and where there are waters. These can be further divided into two types, namely: Freshwater Ecosystem and Marine Ecosystem

i. Freshwater Ecosystem

The freshwater ecosystem is an aquatic ecosystem that includes lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and wetlands. These have no salt content in contrast with the marine ecosystem.

ii. Marine Ecosystem

The marine ecosystem includes seas and oceans. These have a more substantial salt content and greater biodiversity in comparison to the freshwater ecosystem.

Recommendations

a. Revamping Traditional Educational Values

African Traditional Values (ATV) that promotes respect for the environment should be identified and promoted within core curriculum for teaching in the classes. This approach could take place right from the elementary stage of modern education. Although subjects such as biology, agriculture and geography are taught, a more African environment- friendly approach which recognizes the benefits in African environmental science through traditional education be encouraged. An appreciation of the medicinal benefits of herbs which were used for curing certain ailments should also be revisited and brought into the modern system of education. All efforts should be made to

synthesize the traditional, religious and community's leaders to promote among the people the cherished values inherent in the indigenous lifestyle which appreciated and treated the environment with reverence and dignity.

b. Training and Re-Training of Teachers

The value and dignity of the role of the teacher in the preservation and protection of the African environment cannot be overemphasized. Teachers are the catalyst by which ideas and measures are disseminated to the public through schools. Thus, for a positive change of mind about the damage being meted on the environment to take place, governments and stakeholders of different levels should invest in the training and retraining of teachers. The critical role the teachers can play after the retraining would be to serve as agents, creating awareness within schools. Students can also become agents towards the attainment of this objective after being trained by the teachers to their parents.

c. Bridging the gap Between Digital Emigrants and Digital Natives

In an era where the elders have the knowledge but lack technological expertise, there is the need to bridge the gap them by harmonizing the two into a common pool of resource. The difference between digital natives and digital immigrants is that digital immigrants are goal oriented and digital natives are value oriented. Digital natives like to parallel process and multi-task (Martina C 2017). The older generation who are often regarded as the Digital Immigrants have so much to offer to the young who are regarded as the Digital Natives. The collaboration between the two would yield limitless possibility for the evolution of ideas (from the old) and the application of such (by the young) in a technologically driven society. Africa needs this synergy to not manage its environment but also to compete with other

regions of the world on the table of discussion concerning other global matters.

d. Making a Case for Digital Education about the Environment

The African society has reached a crossroad where either proactive measures are taken to avert the looming threat of degradation or it is swallowed to collapse into precipice by our collective neglect. The way to go is to be digitally embrative from all fronts while making every effort to avoid endangering the environment due to our immediate and parochial needs. The attainment of this objective requires the involvement of all, both public and private stakeholders. Hence, a deliberate attempt should be made to create awareness about the environment in both formal and informal setting through the electronic media. The danger of the environmental depletion should be at the forefront of all educational plans across Africa.

e. Undertaking Exchange Programs between Africa and other Continents

The business of maintaining the environment is not a peculiarity of the African continent. Every continent has own share of the environmental degradation. Thus, there is the need to cross-fertilize ideas with experts of other regions through collaboration and exchange programs to explore best ways of tackling the menace of environmental pollution. Such exchange program will enhance global awareness and an appreciation of the challenge posed by environmental degradation.

Conclusion

Education has been the pivot of the African society whether one refers to the Indigenous Traditional education or the modern

system of education. Indeed, the ITE had her own ways of imparting knowledge that led to the preservation of the environment back in the olden days. This was because the traditional ways of relating with the environment stemmed more out of religious beliefs which regarded the individual as part of the environment, hence the need to care for it. Back then, the unbridled desire to subdue the environment to gratify the unquenchable appetite of man had not been aroused.

The African man lived a simple life. However, with modernization, he is let loose on the environment by man in attempts to exploit the hidden treasures of the environment. This has adversely affected the ecosystem, thereby endangering the human being and other animals within the continent. To redress this threat, there is the need to underpin the core values of the ITE in the light of modern education to treat the environment with reverence and dignity as in the days of old. For this to happen, the need to put into practice the recommendations given in this work is critical.

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Chapter Eighteen

THE CONCEPT OF AFROECOSOLIDARITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT

Mark Omorovie Ikeke, PhD

Department of Religious Studies & Philosophy,

Delta State University

Abraka, Nigeria

ikeke7@yahoo.com

Executive Summary

The African environment, both social and natural, is degraded and polluted. The African environment is plagued by problems such as human-wild life conflicts, atmospheric pollution, deforestation, desertification, terrorism, wars and violence, etc. Various theories have been proposed in social and environmental thoughts such as biocentrism, ecocentrism, ecofeminism, and so forth in dealing with the environmental crisis. In spite of these theories the environmental crisis has continued and is raging on. This paper proposes a new concept that is deeply rooted in African beliefs and practices as a panacea to the environmental crisis in Africa. This concept is termed Afroecosolidarity. This term is actually the combination of three terms, Africa (Afro), ecological (eco), and solidarity. The paper argues that the African belief in interconnectedness, inter-relatedness of all lives and entities in the cosmos necessitated responding in relating with human beings and the natural world in a healthy and sustainable manner. This feeling and praxis of unity and concern is termed solidarity and because it not just for human beings but for all life, it is called ecosolidarity. Rooted in African thought system it becomes Afroecosolidarity. The paper

will use critical hermeneutics and analysis to examine this phenomenon. What impedes its fruitful practices is also examined with how it can be fostered. The paper finds that there are indigenous foundations that ground the notion of ecological solidarity (ecosolidarity). The paper concludes that a practice of ecosolidarity informed by African value will help to curb the environmental challenges in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Ecology, Solidarity, Ecosolidarity, Environment, Afroecosolidarity.

Introduction

In the year 2005 this present author proposed and developed the concept of “ecosolidarity” as a panacea to environmental problems. In the dissertation titled, “Redesigning an Ecosolidarity and Indigenously-Informed Education,” the author argued that all forms of educational curriculum in Nigeria both religious and secular need to be informed by environmental preservation themes and also be attentive to indigenous challenges such as the quest for socioeconomic and cultural rights. To the best knowledge of this author an explication of that concept was not available previously. There were definitions and explanations of the notion of solidarity. There were terms like “eco solidarity”, and “eco-solidarity” but a conceptualization of the term “ecosolidarity” for ecojustice, and socioeconomic and environmental harmony was lacking.

That theme of ecosolidarity is what this paper pursues further in this work. The environmental problem in Africa has continued unabated and Africa is still witnessing ethno-cultural struggles by her various peoples for their group rights have been trampled upon by colonial and global imperial forces. Tragically, both the human beings and environment in Africa are under serious siege. In terms of human and social welfare Africans are

suffering under-underdevelopment precipitated by corrupt and inept leadership. Africa is grossly underdeveloped. Among the problems plaguing the continent are corruption, poverty, terrorism, forced and illegal migration, and unemployment. All these problems have negative impacts on the welfare of the human persons. Invariably they also affect both human and environmental health. The state of the African natural environment leaves much to be desired. The natural environmental of Africa is degraded and polluted. Agbese (2008), Alokwu (2018), and Ndungu (2005), all testify to the fact that the African environment is degraded and polluted through such anthropogenic activities as deforestation, desertification, mis-management of solid waste, gas flaring, etc.

In this present work, this paper moves beyond the concept of ecosolidarity to speak of Afroecosolidarity. The aim is to present an African foundation and provide a basis for the philosophy of ecosolidarity. It is grounding the concept of ecosolidarity in African indigenous ecocultural thought and practices that this paper calls Afroecosolidarity. In pursuing this goal of the paper, the critical hermeneutic, and analytic methods are used. The major concepts that ground this paper such as Africa, ecosolidarity, Afroecosolidarity, and environment are examined. Ecosolidarity is concerned not just for the natural environment but also the social environment in which human persons live. Both the social and natural environment are inter-connected and should not be separated from one another. The features and problems confronting the praxis of Afroecosolidarity will also be explicated. The implications and applications of the Afroecosolidarity will not be left out. And before the paper concludes there will be a look at ways and channels to promote the philosophy of Afroecosolidarity.

Conceptual Analyses and Clarifications

Important concepts that pervade this paper are Africa, solidarity, ecosolidarity, Afroecosolidarity, and environment. The concept of Africa adopted here is that of continental Africa, as distinct from the other continents in the world. The continent of Africa is the second largest in the world and is considered the birthplace of human civilization. Before the advent of the Whiteman to Africa, the peoples of the continent have their indigenous beliefs, cosmologies, worldviews and practices. These beliefs and practices were by and large undiluted by western beliefs and practices. The advent of the Whiteman to Africa brought foreign beliefs and practices that have impacted African indigenous beliefs. In spite of this, there are still many places in Africa and in the African diasporic world where indigenous beliefs and practices still predominate. By Africa in this paper the focus is on continental Africa though by implications, the ecological values derived from Africa have global implications.

Another key concept in this paper is solidarity. When the term solidarity is mentioned the minds of some immediately goes to the radical political movement called Solidarity that arose in Poland in 1980 led by Lech Walesa to fight communism. This movement successfully brought about the fall of the Communist powers in Poland. In that movement the people stood together in unity to struggle against the evils of the Communist power. Harper (2021) states that the term solidarity is etymologically derived from the 1829 French word, “solidarite,” which means “communion of interests and responsibilities, mutual responsibility.” Harper states further that it is a coinage of the 1765 Encyclope; “Die” from the word, “solidaire” (interdependent, entire or complete). Solidarity is a dynamic and action word. It is interactive communion of interests linked in a mutuality network. Solidarity speaks of unity and togetherness. Hobgood (2007) states that: “Solidarity is grounded in the reality

that all human beings, their welfare, and the social structures in which they live, are interrelated” (p. 1306-1307). Writing further, Hobgood (2007) argues that: “Solidarity is engagement in concrete socio-political struggle that responds to the analysis of interstructured oppression as understood by liberation theology and ethics” (p. 1307). Writing from a social perspective, Jary and Jary (2000) enunciate that it is the degree of integration shown by a social group and it can be based on kinship, shared values or mutual relations. Murithi (2006) explaining social solidarity writes that it is recognition of the humanness of other human persons, sharing in fostering human wellbeing and welfare, promoting safety, security and inter-connectedness. At this point is it important to emphasize that solidarity is deeper than human interrelatedness. It goes deep to intricate interrelatedness and connections between/among all that exists including plants, animals, and all entities in the cosmos. This idea is well stated by Francis (2015) when he writes that: “...everything is closely interrelated,” for nature cannot be separated from human society. The environmental crisis is also a human crisis.

By its very definition, the term solidarity already implies ecology, for it speaks of the inter-connections and inter-relations and inter-actions of all beings in the cosmos. For the term, “ecology”, it comes from two Greek words, “oikos” (household or home) and “logos” (study or discourse). Davila (2007) describes it as “the study of the multiple relationships of coexistence, production, and consumption in environments composed of living and non-living things” (p. 388). Mayhew (2009) opines that: “The study of the interrelationships between organisms and their surroundings, outer world; the study of animals and plants in relation to each other and their habitats” (p. 147). Allison (2009) describes three ways the term ecology is

used: (1) intellectual study of interactions among living things in their environment; (2) the system of interactive relationships among species; and (3) a political moral programme of actions aiming to promote the health of ecosystems and humans. A very good definition of ecology is given by Francis (2005) when he enunciates that:

Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. This necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production and consumption. It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected.... Just as the different aspects of the planet - physical, chemical and biological - are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand (p. 79).

The term environment is often used in some cycles interchangeably with ecology. This is how they will be used in this work. Francis (2005) states that:

When we speak of the "environment", what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality (p. 80).

The environment refers to all that surrounds an organism. It is inclusive of the air, water, land, etc. The natural environment refers to nature, the social environment to human interactions in their environment. The concept of African environment means

the natural African landmass made of water bodies, the atmosphere, plants, animals, etc. You cannot speak of the African environment without speaking of human ecological footprints or interactions with the natural world. As will be discussed later the human impact on the natural environment in Africa has often been malevolent, and also human to human interactions are also riddled with many social evils in Africa.

This paper revolves around the concept of Afroecosolidarity. Ecology and solidarity shortened in this work as ecosolidarity is the notion that the human response to the earth, the home in which human lives and carry out their works, should be that of feeling affinity and standing in concerted solidarity with the entire ecological world. The human person should not stand aloof of the environmental or ecological problems that human beings have plunged the world into. The human is to work to free the earth and the entire universe from all harms and evils. Solidarity with the earth, ecosystems, the environment is ecosolidarity. Ecosolidarity is solidarity with and for the earth. It is both an attitude and action paradigm. Afroecosolidarity or its like terms- Afroecosolidarity or Afroecosolidarity, or African ecological solidarity stands for the reality that ecosolidarity is an African value and indigenous way of life. Standing in solidarity with the earth is not foreign to Africa. To name a value as African does not mean it is practiced only in Africa, but it is to state the reality that the value is dominantly experienced and practiced in African cultural life. That value of ecosolidarity (standing in solidarity with the earth or ecological world) does not mean there are not ecological deficits in Africa. For despite the value there are people in Africa who live contrary to the ideal value. Africa have this value but there are Africans who out of greed pollute and destroy nature as they fell down trees and kill

wildlife for selfish purposes. Every entity in nature stands in need of other entities for survival, whatever affects one invariably affects others. Whatever harms or injuries done to any aspect of nature, no matter where it happens, affects other aspects of nature. Everything needs one another. Human beings are the highest form of consciousness in the created universe. As the highest form of created consciousness in the material world, human beings have the responsibility and capacity to stand in deliberative and intentional solidarity and union in preserving all creation. This is a serious implication of ecosolidarity. Ecosolidarity is standing for the mutual interests and wellbeing of the entire ecosystems collectively or the entire natural world. It is opting and standing for human cum environmental health.

Afroecosolidarity and the Resolution of the Human-Environmental Crisis

The concern in this section will be to explicate further what is Afroecosolidarity and the African indigenous ideas that ground it? How it can help to resolve the crisis will also be described here. Pervading this paper is the notion that ecosolidarity is a panacea to the African natural and social crisis. There is also the idea that ecosolidarity is akin to traditional African philosophies and theologies. African ideas that ground ecosolidarity are: Ukama, Ubuntu, Ujamaa, humanism, etc. Paul (1995) asserts that: "African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village." It is difficult to think of Africa without thinking of solidarity. The notions of Ujamaa, Ubuntu, Ukama, humanism are all various ways of describing solidarity with humans and non-human creatures. The term Ujamaa was first used and popularized by Julius Nyerere. Ujamaa is a concept that means brotherhood/sisterhood. It is shared family life and existence. Family here is beyond the nuclear family and extends to the

entire kindred and beyond. Onwubiko (2001) citing Wehr notes that the root of Ujamaa is *jama'a* which means unite, combine, bring to whole, gather. Though the concept of Ujamaa seems anthropocentric, the fact is that this acting in communal concert of friendship made persons to come to the help and support of one another. As people act in concert they act for the good of the community which includes earth care and preservation. It is human beings who consciously stand in solidarity not only for human interests but for African values, of which one of those crucial values is Ukama and the recognition of the earth as mother, and giver of life.

Ukama is an African notion that means, "I am because of the entire cosmic web." It is an expansion of the notion of Ubuntu. Ubuntu affirms that: "I am because we are." Ubuntu is togetherness. One's life is tied with the life of others. Your existence only has meaning because of others. The idea of Ukama is grounded in the notion that all life, that of human persons and non-human persons are inter-related and affect each other. The implication is that human actions are not neutral. What you do even to fellow human beings affects the plants, animals, stones, etc. Ukeh (2016) quotes Madubuko to show that human interactions with other beings can either weaken or strengthens them. Francis (2015) citing Benedict XVI writes that: "Every violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment" (p. 81). The African belief is that human beings have affinity with other entities in nature. By this affinity he shares in participation and solidarity. Human beings can share, be in solidarity with other beings and entities in creation/nature for in the African cosmological paradigm other entities and beings have life and are not dead. Mbiti (1990) rightly asserts thus: "... animals, plants, land, rain and other natural objects and

phenomena, describes man's environment... some of these objects and phenomena are attributed with life and personality, so that strictly speaking, 'nothing is essentially) dead or devoid of life (being)'in the sight of African peoples" (p.90). Writing of tribal societies, Stoutzenberger (2006) reveals that they believe that all of life, including plants and animals are permeated by sacredness. This informs tribal people cultivating and taking from nature in humility and gratefulness to the maker of all things. This informs standing in unison with all that exists.

Ubuntu was a call that whatever would hurt your neighbour and the social community is to be shunned. Corruption, greed, lust, stealing, arson, murder, and immorality offend against the value of Ubuntu. Desecration and depletion of environmental resources for selfish gain were to be avoided. The environment was to be protected so that every other human being will be secured in their food and health. Taking from nature was to be done in a gentle and minimal manner while taking into consideration the unborn and young children. Traditional Africans lived keeping in mind the security of the children who will grow up to become adults. Strengthening the spirit and bond of Ubuntu can inspire in today's Africans the vital need to work for human rights and secure environmental resources. Theories and beliefs drive action and practice. The theory of Ubuntu does not automatically translate to environmental protection and human security, but it can if enforced through various public policies and laws. Many human beings often will not act for what is right unless it is enforced. Think of the many environmental laws in the African continent. In Nigeria for instance there are many environmental laws such as environmental sanitation. In spite of all these some people still dump garbage in streams and in the streets, some don't observe environmental sanitation days. In African traditional societies, there were communal regulations to guide people's actions. A strong aspect of Ubuntu was the

recognition of human bondedness, belonging and union. In Africa, every child was the community's child. People sought the welfare of others.

All these notions ground the reality that the completeness and wholeness of life is constituted of human welfare and human harmonious relationship with all entities in nature. The African cosmos is one in which all beings, things, realities, entities and organisms are interconnected and interrelated. All things are tied together in solidarity. Each aspect of nature enriched itself by depending on others for mutual symbiosis. No being in nature can survive by living a solitary life apart from others. To use the words of Shorter (2001) Africans had a cosmic consciousness that believed in an organic universe in which the physical environment was seen as sacramental as through it Africans communicated with spiritual realities. Shorter writes further using the words of Joseph Goetz that the African cosmology was a "cosmobiology" (p. 47). The universe is filled with life and all forms of life interacted with one another. The concept of solidarity is not just a stagnant reality. Solidarity involves interactions of life. Even in the human community, when human beings don't interact and commune they cannot be said to be in solidarity. Tempels (1959) explains that this African notion is that of vital force. For Tempels, God is the source of vital force that permeates and influences all beings and realities in the cosmos. The beings in the universe stands in solidarity with one another as they influence one another and depend on other forces outside themselves to enrich their vital force. Humans make use of things in nature to enrich their vital force, animals depend on plants to enrich their vital force. In the cosmic hierarchy of beings, life is shared and enriched. He (Tempels) writes thus: "All creatures are found in relationship according to the law of

hierarchy... Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network" (p.41).

The ecosolidarity attitude-action paradigm is one to use the words of O'Murchu (2007) that for millions of years of human emergence on earth recognized interdependence of all creation, not domination. The notion of human conquest, control and domination was not there from the beginning. Margulis (1998) argues that from the study of microbiology there are indications that the primary orientation that exists in nature is that of cooperation among organisms not that of competition. From the beginning of human consciousness in Africa and in the course of the evolution of African religion, African primal ancestors knew of this reality. Ecosolidarity is the ground of all cosmic existence. To cite O'Murchu (2007) again, "We belong integrally as do all others. It is in our sense of belonging, not in our isolation, that we come home to who we really are. Our interdependence, and not our self-centered independence, is the doorway to survival and fresh meaning" (p. 31). In traditional African cultures, offerings and sacrifices are given to nature, water bodies, and other landscape in acknowledgement of human reliance on them. It is a well known fact that outside the almighty, the supreme being; Africans do discard gods they perceive are not functional in meeting their needs. All of life in Africa is interlinked and "web-together." This is why Ubuntu and Ujamaa should not simply be read in humano-centric paradigms. Human solidarity with one another extends to solidarity with other creatures.

The notion and practice of communalism cannot be separated from that of Afroecosolidarity. They are mutually inclusive. The African understanding of the human person is that the human

being is a being with. There is interactive solidarity among all that exists. Recognize that other realities in nature outside the human person are not technically in African ontology of being, "non-living things." All realities including non-human realities are infused with vital force. By the fact of that force their force influences and rubs on others beings in the universe. All nature with human beings inclusive are a complete whole. Human beings are not complete without nature. Ecosolidarity is the completeness and totality of all cosmic forces and entities and their mutually depending on one another for life and survival in the African hierarchy of being. Writing of African communalism, Agbakwuo (2013) asserts that:

Communalism is central to African ontology, concept of person and socio-anthropology. Any behaviour that negates it is ethically wrong. Integral to the African understanding of communalism are human participation and solidarity. They are the characteristic elements of communalism. Africans do not see themselves as individuals living independently, but rather as people living in a community interdependently, with communal responsibilities. The web of interdependence and inter-relatedness is intrinsic in the African hierarchy of beings (p. 161).

Peterson (2004) indicates that African communalism implies the bondedness of all life and entails responsibilities to fellow human beings and the planet. Communalism is not a neutral or stagnant reality. Communalism is another way of expressing solidarity. It is possible to speak of an African ecocommunalism or Afroecocommunalism. For the African notion of communalism does not only speak of mutual life and assistance among humans but includes human obligations to live in communion with spiritual and other metaphysical beings and

organisms in the universe. Adeola (2008) rightly notes that: “The sacred view of nature by Africans makes them to have a relationship that is bio-centric and not anthropocentric and this had its impact on them as much as it has on nature. According to traditional African worldview, one remains healthy in a holistic sense only by living in harmony with the whole creation” (p. 27). The African indigenous value for ecological solidarity can help in resolving the human and environmental crisis in Africa. For one thing, the value of Ubuntu helped Africans to recognise the importance and value of each other human being. There was the radical awareness that the human being is not a solitary being. Your humanness comes from others. You have a duty to serve the welfare and wellbeing of others.

Afroecosolidarity is a wakeup call to human solidarity among humans equally. There is no doubt that if Africans stand in concerted and active solidarity they will be able to confront the socioeconomic and political problems plaguing the African society. In unity in the various countries they will fight oppression, bad leadership, poverty, exploitation of environmental resources, terrorism, banditry, and all the developmental problems in the continent. Solidarity with the earth has little meaning unless it also implies solidarity with fellow human beings. In African traditional thought the human person was seen as the centre of all things as all things are created to foster his welfare. African anthropocentrism is different from the western notion. That things are created and humans have to sustain their vital force by making use of environmental resources does not mean they can pollute and degrade nature. There is anthropocentric responsibility to the natural world. A strong practice of ecosolidarity can help to foster human and earth care.

At the core of the theory of Afroecosolidarity is that the human person has responsibilities and duties to the ecological world. The human being must stand in solidarity with all beings. Agbakwuo (2013) propounds that:

In the African category or hierarchy of beings – Supreme Being, spirits, human beings, animals, objects – one mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance has to be maintained to avoid a drift from one mode to another. There is peace and harmony in the community when the balance is maintained. This ontological harmony is very decisive for a peaceful co-existence and consistence of the society. An imbalance is very catastrophic to the living and the eco-system. A spill of the blood of an innocent person or a relative, for instance, could disrupt the harmony. Even violating the laws of the land or a taboo could cause a drift in the eco-system. At the centre of this system and order of being is the human person who tries to maintain a harmonious balance. Mbiti argues that in addition to the five categories there seems to be a power, energy or force that permeates the whole universe (p. 23).

Ethical living in shunning vices and social ills is beneficial not only for human beings but also for all other earthly beings. When human beings live in shunning greed, stopping natural resources exploitation, ending wanton destruction of plants and animals, and avoiding polluting the streams and land; they help to protect the ecosystems. Ethical living is a vital way to promote the values of Afroecosolidarity. The environment will continue to experience a crisis and human welfare will be gravely vitiated if human beings live unethical lives. Think of the fact that if human beings live out the value of Ujamaa, they will support one another. There will be a life of sharing of resources and this will

put less pressure on environmental resources. A recognition and practice of Ubuntu will make Africans equally assist one another and see to the welfare of one another. There will be less conflicts. This will help to preserve the earth. Human beings cannot survive without depending on the resources of nature. But this dependence should be done in a humane, humble, peaceful, kind, and simple manner that is aimed at sustainability. That from an African trade-ecological perspective Africans feel a sense of moral obligation to care for the earth should not be in doubt. Ejeh (2008) argues rightly that:

The desire to maintain peaceful and harmonious relationship with the rest of creation is the basis of a sense of obligation for responsible stewardship of creation that Africans have. There is in every African culture, certain unwritten guidelines of how to deal with the land, air, water and vegetation because there is strong belief that any misuse or abuse of nature directly incurs the wrath of the spirits and divinities who dwell in them and consequently a bad omen for human beings (p. 195).

While it is a fact that one may not agree with every African belief the reality is that genuine ecological practices that help to protect the earth should be recovered and integrated into government policies. Beliefs themselves do not immediately transform to eco-preservation. Beliefs have to be put into action.

Furthermore, what are more imports of solidarity? Iroegbu (2000) explicates the implications of solidarity to human society in various manner. Solidarity he argues means that people stand in togetherness in doing good, co-operate in projects that benefits all, harness their talents, wisdom, love, values, in fostering mutual assistance to uplift humanity. In solidarity people seek the welfare and wellbeing of the other. Solidarity fosters peaceful co-existence and communal services. Ecosolidarity is seeing and acting not simply for human solidarity among humans but also

for the wellbeing and cosmic good of the entire universe. It stands for the health of ecosystems and harmonious human relationship with the earth. Afroecosolidarity is ecosolidarity that is grounded in African indigenous ecological values. A mind-set of Afroecosolidarity works to overcome social, economic and problems plaguing human society; while also attentive to environmental promotion.

Factors Impeding Afroecosolidarity Values

There are many factors that have impeded and continues to impede African values of ecosolidarity. A primary factor that has impeded African values, including that of earth care and communal care for human welfare is that of the advent of the Whiteman to Africa. Coming to Africa, the Whiteman arrogantly devalued and condemned African values. Prime (2010) notes that Europeans negatively represented the African culture. The Eurocentric worldview saw African values as inferior to European values. They named African worldview as pagan, dark and evil. The words of Wallace (2005), are applicable to Africans, Africans believed that the earth is sacred, holy and to be revered; but the Whiteman renamed African towns and villages and landscapes with their own names as if African names were not valuable. For some Western missionaries, conversion to Christianity means total abandonment of African culture. Today it is well recognized through the theology of inculturation that there are many good aspects of African culture and they need to be reclaimed. The Whiteman plundered African forests and resources as they looted them to Europe and beyond. They carted away African works of arts with which our ancestors expressed their links to the divine and expressed their communalistic values. There was a high misrepresentation of African history. Hegel (1956) erroneously argued that Africa has

no history and that the absolute spirit has not even moved in Africa. Makumba (2007) cites Kant who saw Africans as inferior to Whites. But Makumba notes that Kant is flatly wrong. Makumba (2007) also cites Levy-Bruhl who saw Africans as primitive and pre-logical. European cultural imperialism impacted all aspects of African life including ecological beliefs and practices. Beliefs about the intrinsic value of the earth coded in religious language of perceiving the earth as having divinized dimensions were all condemned as barbaric. The African worldview of perceiving divine values in nature is not essentially different from what eco-centric Western scholars now call natural intrinsic value.

Negative forms of missionary Christianity have also affected gravely the African social and ecological beliefs. Many missionaries often condemned almost everything that was associated with African beliefs and culture. They saw African beliefs about the land, birds, animals and rivers as totally evil. For them becoming a Christian implies abandoning in its entirety the beliefs and cultural practices of one's ancestors. The doctrinal impact of negative forms of missionary Christianity are still prevalent today especially in some forms of Pentecostalism. African forests are often seen as evil and the habitation of witches and other evil beings. To cleanse a village, the trees are felled and destroyed in the name of deliverance. This has led to a great deal of deforestation in Africa. Prayers for deliverance can actually be done without cutting down the trees. People that are perceived to be influenced by evil spirits have prayers done for them without them being killed or destroyed. If need be the trees should be prayed over without cutting them down. After all, it is the negative spirits that are the problems not the trees.

Some Christian beliefs have also been misconstrued and misused to exploit the earth. In African these misconstructions have

affected African based ecological beliefs. Parochial understanding of pneumatology, soteriology, Christology, eschatology and ecclesiology have all contributed negatively to denigrating of African ecocultural values. It is wrongly taught by some Christians that the Holy Spirit only dwells in human beings and so non-human creation lacks intrinsic value. It can be exploited for human good. In both soteriology and Christology, it is taught that Jesus Christ came to save only human beings and so the rest of creation has lesser value. Ecclesiologically, the concern of the church they argue should be human salvation and not showing concern for earthly things. In terms of eschatology, the concerns of human beings should be how to go to heaven. Christian songs such as, "This world is not my own, I am just passing through..." have made some Christians to neglect social justice and political concerns. Patriarchal beliefs and practices also influence people's practices. The domination and oppression of women has made some to equally believe the earth is simply an object to be dominated and it exists for human utilitarian purpose. Adeola (2008) writes that anthropocentric dominionism rooted in a mis-reading of Genesis 1:21ff have made people to despise the created world and treat it merely as an instrument to gratify the insatiable needs of human person. This dominionism amounts to a mastery over nature attitude which, Ndungu (2005) notes some scholars have argued is responsible for exploitation of nature.

Westernization has also contributed to marginalization of African social and ecological values. With western influence coming through satellite television and the internet some Africans have abandoned the study and learning about their cultural values. Many young persons are more interested in learning the songs of western musicians, playing western games,

etc. The educational curriculum in much of Africa is still filled with western contents. Much of the history, political theories, philosophy, economic thoughts, and environmental ethics that are presented in the classrooms are those of Europeans and North American scholars. Maffi (2010) citing Eldredge rightly notes that a predominant notion prevalent in Western philosophy wrongly sees human beings as separate from nature and not part of it. This view informs what African children are taught in schools especially in the biological and physical sciences. With such notions they hardly see anything that is valuable in nature as they grow up with the mind-set to conquer and exploit nature.

The forces of globalization often tend to be negative on indigenous cultures, Africa inclusive. Anti-globalization protests have taken place in many areas in the world denouncing the evils of globalization. These evils include: desecration of local cultures, heightening of ethnic identity politics, uncritical acceptance of western norms. Though there may be some benefits from globalization it remains an ambivalent force that should be morally confronted.

It is difficult to exempt capitalism totally from the plight of the planet. The powers of capitalism have affected almost every part of the planet. Capitalist values influence and inform the lifestyles and consumption patterns of many people in Africa. Rubinoff (2004) argues forcefully that environmentalists know and many others know that “the excesses of consumerism and industrial society” have plunged the earth into an ecological crisis (p.11). When society is ruled by the spirit of consuming more resources from the earth and there is no strive to live prudently and wisely on earth, then more trees and other resources will be taken from the earth. People ruled by the values of consumerism will rarely

give time to the African values of ecological solidarity. They will see it as depriving them of pleasure and material delights.

Some Ways to Reclaim and Promote Afroecosolidarity

Africa has a contribution to make to the global environmental crisis. The African value and ideological standpoint of Afroecosolidarity is also useful to healing Africa in this crisis. The United Nations (2007) rightly notes in articles 12 to 15 that indigenous peoples of which many Africans are have a right to manifest and propagate their cultural heritage including ecological and spiritual wisdom. In terms of recovering African values that have been bastardized by western forces, the movement for mental decolonization has not fully accomplished her goals. There are still many Africans suffering from mental inferiority and who see little or nothing good in Africa. Bob Marley rightly sang that Africans need to emancipate themselves from mental slavery. The educational curriculum need to be decolonized and Eurocentrism need to be dethroned. In article 14, the United Nations (2007) declares thus: "Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning." There is vital need for re-education of Africans unto indigenous African eco-values. The educational systems in most African countries have to be re-created to emphasize Afroecosolidarity themes.

Related to the above is that the role of an Afrocentric ecological education should not be despised. Education continues to carry great power in the transmission of cultural and social values. Education enlightens and motivates people. No true social mobilization of people can be done without one form of

education or the other. People need to be empowered with ideas. The formal education curricula in schooling in Africa should be thoroughly re-written so that it is grounded in African indigenous ecological values. African ecological ideas such as that of ecological solidarity should cut across the curriculum.

There is a place for ecological politics in promoting the values of ecosolidarity. Mayhew (2009) defines ecological politics as “advocacy for, work towards, protecting the natural environment from degradation or pollution” (p. 147). Actions to promote the values of ecological solidarity are necessary. This can be done in various ways. Individuals should live by ecohabits such as proper disposal of domestic waste, resisting from felling down trees without a necessary cause, practising agricultural friendly methods, prudent use of energy (electric power), avoidance of domestic waste, etc. On a corporate level, businesses and companies should avoid industrial pollution of the land and rivers with solid waste and poisonous chemicals, oil mining companies should stop gas flaring, and practice environmental sustainable ways.

The law through environmental and social regulations is another important instrument to regulate human conduct. The notion of Africans standing in solidarity to fight social evils and environmental ills should be framed in laws. This is already done in many African countries. What is needed more is the enforcement and implementation of the law. There are laws against air pollution in Nigeria; yet oil companies flare gas since they are simply only required to pay a fine, which they are willing to pay. There are laws against poaching of wild life in some East African countries. Yet there are many persons that poach and go scot free.

Ecological conversion or eco-moral rearmament also has a role to play in promoting the values of Afroecosolidarity or ecological solidarity no matter where it is practiced. People will generally only commit themselves to ecological preservation when they know of its importance and are willing to live by ecovalues.

The practice of environmental or ecological citizenship grounded in African eco-ethical values is also of great importance. Vigourous propagation of African based ecological or environmental theologies and philosophies. These theories among many others are: ecowomanism, beliefs of African earth keeping churches, etc. The propagation of all these can be done through conferences, seminars, symposia, books, journals,

With regard to recommendations on how to promote Afroecosolidarity, there is need to see ecology from an integrated perspective and there is need to see solidarity in a holistic manner. Ecology is not just about ecosystems excluding human beings. Humans are an integral part of ecology. Human beings are part of the planetary home. Their presence should not be seen as an intrusion or unnecessary. Though their presence should be benign not malevolent. The tendency to radically separate human community from the natural community is unAfrican. Drawing insights from Bookchin (1990) the two extremes-separating human society from nature, and the other that sees no distinction between nature and human society are unacceptable. Boff (1996) points out that: "Ecology has to do with the relations, interaction, and dialogue of all living creatures (whether alive or not) among themselves and with all that exists. This include, not only nature (natural ecology), but culture and society (human ecology, social ecology and so on)" (p. 7.). Living creatures here should not be understood in the sense of western biology that

speaks of some things as living and some as not living. In African radical ecotheosophy, the entire universe is alive and nothing in the truest sense is dead or without vital force. The African ecotheosophical belief on all nature as alive is akin to most other indigenous world view. McKay (1994) opines regarding this that indigenous spiritualities see the world in terms of relationship and dynamic interaction of love for human and non-human creatures that are seen as relatives

Human perspective matters and informs attitudes and practices towards the earth and even the peoples of the earth. This paper though proposing an Afroecosolidarity approach to protecting the environment, both natural and social, does not ignore the fact that often people do not practice the ideals and norms. There are many places in Africa that are polluted or degraded as a result of poor environmental practices by Africans such as careless dumping of domestic and industrial waste, poor implementation of environmental laws. In many places in Africa there are also corrupt and inept leaders who have failed to live out the values of solidarity. Failure to live by the ideal and the law should not lead to abandonment of the ideals or the law. Rather, this, all the more calls for environmental education and creation of eco-awareness rooted in Afroecosolidarity consciousness.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the theory of ecosolidarity and Afroecosolidarity. It also looked at the implications and imports of this theory for the African environment, both social and natural. A conceptual clarifications of terms that ground this paper was also done. It was shown that solidarity implies that human beings recognize their wholeness and inter-relatedness with fellow human beings and the entire earth community. This recognition and acting in love and compassion for fellow humans and other lives amount to ecosolidarity. This notion of

ecosolidarity was argued above as deeply rooted and akin to African values such as Ubuntu, Ukama, Ujamaa, and communalism. Ecological solidarity or ecosolidarity is a truly African indigenous value. When practiced it can help to ameliorate the African social and ecological degradation.

This piece also showed that the value of Afroecosolidarity was threatened by different factors such as: negative forms of western missionary Christianity, the advent of the Whiteman to Africa, westernization, and negative forms of capitalism. These problems the author argued can be combatted through a renewed ecological education grounded in indigenous ethical values, re-invigorated ethical living, re-awakening of African-based ecotheories, etc. If the negative forces examined above can be successfully combatted through the ways proposed it will greatly promote Afroecosolidarity to foster a sustainable African environment.

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Chapter Nineteen

IGBO BELIEFS IN TABOOS AND OATHS TAKING: AN ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Emmanuel C. Anizoba, PhD

Department of Religion & Cultural Studies

Faculty of the Social Sciences

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

emmanuel.anizoba@unn.edu.ng

Executive Summary

The Igbo people of Nigeria believe tenaciously that violating of taboos and oath breaking are part of the mystical causation of diseases and environmental hazards as against the western germ theory of disease. The aim of this paper is to examine this Igbo belief in causation and its implications for the environment. As a qualitative study, it adopts a Phenomenological research design and descriptive method for data analysis. Personal interviews form the primary method of data collection while the secondary sources are the library materials. The findings reveal that, in Igbo cosmology, the violation of taboo and breaking of oath, may account for untimely deaths, diseases like swollen legs, strokes etc., and other related ailments which are believed to be mystical in origin. The study among other things recommends that hospitals in Nigeria and beyond should take into account such mystical agents like violation of taboo and breaking of oath alongside other pathogenic agents that caused diseases for better management of diseases and the environment.

Key words: Mysticism; Disobedience; Taboos; Oaths breaking; Environment; Igbo; African; Nigeria

Introduction

Disease is one of the cardinal problems and challenges that humans have had to battle with from the earliest of time. In fact, it has caused more deaths and sorrows than all other factors put together. Human beings in one way or the other fall sick, and therefore go for treatment depending on their choice of treatment (religious perspective or Western medical treatment). Although African Traditional Religion is not against the Western medical way of treatment or healing process, its followers believe that there are some diseases that Western medicine cannot treat, and therefore need spiritual attention, as it is sometimes practiced in churches. At the backdrop of this challenge, Humans in every age have had to devise various means of combating diseases. Two of the major and most universally accepted methods of combating and battling disease are Mystical/Spiritual and the western medicine.

It is believed in African Traditional Religion that there are some mystic forces in the universe which can be tapped and utilized to bring about some effects, good or bad (Omoregbe 1999; Kanu 2015a). Omoregbe observed that some people have access to these forces (Supernatural powers) and make use of them. Some utilize them for good purposes, such as healing and solving difficult problems. These include the priest-physicians. Some people however make of use these powers for evil purposes, such as causing harms and disease to other people.

Omoregbe (1999) maintained that some people who have access to these force use them to cause mysterious illness, disease and death to other people. These are witches and sorcerers who do a lot of havoc by means of mystic forces. In this regard, African Traditional conception of causes of diseases and sickness are always tied to some forces higher than humans. These higher forces can be the product of displeasure of some gods, divinities

or often spiritual forces or through the violation of taboos and breaking of oath. Humans can also manipulate some forces to cause disease or sickness for their fellow humans. But even in the midst of wide spread orthodox medical practices, Africans in modern times, still believe tenaciously the violation of taboos and breaking of oath as are causation of certain diseases (Ilogu1987; Ngong 2009; Kanu 2015b). Seen from this background, the question then is “are diseases caused by mystical forces in African believe or, by germs according to the western believe?” Set against this background therefore, the aim of this research is to critically examine violation of taboos and breaking of oaths as factors of disease causation as maintained in African traditional belief system.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design and the descriptive method of data analysis. Personal interviews form the primary sources of data collection with 5 informants chosen at random for the interview. They were given code names which range from informants 1 to 5. These informants were diverse in terms of distribution of five states of Igbo land, gender, occupation, and religious affiliation with particular regards to Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The interview questions were semi-structured. This allowed the researcher to follow up with similar groups of interview questions based on the respondent's responses. All relevant issues guiding the conduct of interview were followed. It was made known to the informants that the information gotten from them will be solely used for this research. The period of the research was from 2018 / 2020 when field work was conducted for the research.

African Traditional Religion's Idea of Mysticism

The term mysticism typically denotes a complex of beliefs and practices related to the immediate experience of the divine. Much, although not all, mystical thought and practices derives from or draw upon formal religious doctrines, emphasizing reflective, introspective, and meditative practices as the keys to cultivating perception and awareness that will ultimately lead to knowledge of and communion with the divine.

When one turns to mysticism in African thought, and specifically to the mystical tenets extant in indigenous religious beliefs and practices, the common Western definition is necessarily altered. Therefore, Mysticism continues to describe the realm of interaction between humanity and the divine or supernatural, but owing to the prevailing nature of indigenous African belief systems, the orientation and manifestations of mystical practices are of a different character (Kanu 2013). The orientation is social and utilitarian, and the manifestations occur within the structure of indigenous rites. Mystical practices aim at fulfilling needs in society, and they do not exist as a separate body of practices. This reflects the general African cosmology and understanding of arenas of interaction between humanity and the divine or supernatural

Violation of taboos and breaking of oaths as a means of disease causation

Many traditional healers and practitioners among the Igbo are of the opinion that violation of taboos is one of the ways people could become sick (Gyekye1995:133). Taboos form an important part of African traditional religion. They are things, or a ways of living, that are forbidden by a community or a group of people (Isiramen1998:186). Taboos are also a social or religious custom prohibiting or restricting a particular practice or forbidding association with particular persons, places or things

(Westerlund2006:139). Taboos exist to make sure that the moral structures of the universe remains undisturbed for the good of humanity (Magesa1997:76, 148-149). There are food- and meat-related taboos in various communities. Violation of taboos could lead to severe illness for the person(s) or community involved.

Although all these are termed as taboos, they have some moral and ethical connotations. The amazing part of many of these taboos is that, when one violates any of them secretly, the person does not go scot-free. The consequences always manifest either on the person(s) concerned or the entire community in the form of diseases, and possibly death. This is what Magesa (1997:51) termed the effect of life force. Magesa (1997:51-53) argues that moral behaviour maintains and enhances one's life force, but disobedience and disloyal behaviour towards tradition passed on by the ancestors will weaken the life force. This can, therefore, lead to punishment from the ancestors or the spirits in the form of diseases and misfortune.

Using oath taking as an instrument of securing life and property in African Traditional Religion Ugwu, (2007) recognised the involvement of the two characters, one taking the oath and the deity who acts as both witness and executor of the terms of the oath, to justify the truth or punish the one telling lies. He stipulated that the gods are believed to be in the position to punish or testify because they are regarded as impartial judges that means inflicting the individual concerned with some mysterious sickness or diseases like swollen legs, strokes etc.

The synergy between environment, oath taking and taboos in the midst of diseases causation

According to Informant 1 (Personal Communication April 2, 2020), the environment could defined as the entire surroundings,

and the influences on specific item of interest; the natural world (ecological community and its environment). Oath taking in the environment is an act to prove the authenticity of someone's sincerity and honesty as a way of life without any element of doubt. To be candid, when an oath is administered on someone, it erases doubt surrounding that particular person. Informant 2 (Personal Communication March 9, 2020), observed that Oath taking helps to establish truth and restore trust. Anyone who is a suspect of environmental crime, he/she would be required to take oath as to prove innocence, but if he/she refuses to take the oath, it's expected that the gods punish those who swear falsely while the community punishes those who decline the Oath showing they are guilty. If the person in question later admitted the crime committed, then cleansing ritual would be required due to sacrilegious crime. The cleansing could be done in the form of fine, ritual, payment and invocation of the spirit of gods to temper justice with mercy. When an offender or violator hardened his/her heart, the punitive measures are infliction of diseases or untimely death as the case may be. Informant 3 (Personal Communication April 22, 2020) said that the gods in the environment promote justice and harmony in the community.

For Informant 4 (Personal Communication May 10, 2020) Taboos in an environment, are various deeds that are termed to be taboos; much emphasis was laid on abortion and adultery, for example, whoever commits abortion and a married woman caught in adultery, receive instant punishment. Take for instance, abortion is a heinous offence which has claimed lives of so many people either directly or indirectly. A girl who commits abortion with the consent of the man who impregnated her, the mother, the father, and even friends are liable to the penalty of sickness and death if the sacrilegious crime is kept as secret.

Informant 5 (Personal Communication June 24, 2020) stated that the consequences of violation of taboos and breaking of Oaths depend largely on the magnitude of the offence committed in the environment (land). The penalty could be ailment, madness, mystical trauma, malefactor, and finally death. The consequences depend on the area one finds oneself, for there are variations of the spiritual invocations; some gods in a particular environment are silent and harmless while in other environment their gods could be hostile and harmful. In harmless environment, there are no hard and fast rules in the code of conduct, so they live carefree lives without anathema.

Summary and Conclusion

God carefully fashioned everything in opposite numbers. Thus we have the good and the bad, the physical and the spiritual, the material and non- material. In Igbo world-view, all these work in complementary fashion Madu (1999). As the material beings exist, so also are the spirit beings. Just as in Igbo belief system in violation of Taboos and breaking of Oaths constitute one of the mystical causes of diseases so also we have Western germ theory of disease causation. By nature of their enhanced influence and powers in disease causations, the spiritual forces continue to influence the lives of man for the better and to the worse when it is the worse, they cause distress, sadness, sorrow and diseases amongst men.

But one thing is certain which offer men some solace when these spirits like the consequences of Igbo Belief that violation of taboos and breaking of Oath effect man. They can be manipulated with the use of traditional techniques not yet open to Western laboratory analysis. These must not be brushed aside under any pretext by scholars, despite the pervasive influence of germ theory. By so doing, humans can venture into western

orthodox beliefs by scientifically diagnosing the cause of his/her sickness and disease and proffer solutions more holistically.

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Chapter Twenty

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL EDIFICATION AND THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT

Vincent Stephen KABUK, PhD
Department of Religion and Philosophy,
University of Jos.
kabukv@unijos.edu.ng

Executive Summary

This chapter argues that the African indigenous ecospirituality is largely a form of ethnocentric anthroposophy which evinces a consciousness about the relationship linking all beings in the ontological order. The traditional African society raised questions through the centuries on how humans ought to live in the society to foster a sustainable ecological community. As unsophisticated as the African society may seem there were attempts to avert some perceived ecocatastrophe in the community to keep harmony between the individual entities and the cosmic totality.

Keywords: African, Nigeria, Traditional, Indigenous, Ecospirituality, Environment

Introduction

In all the philosophies of the world none has suffered criticisms, and even rejection, like those of the African continent. The African sub-regional thinking has suffered acrimonious debates throughout the twentieth century. Some of these culture-bound thought among the indigenous Africans were denied without concerted efforts to understand the contextual historical

antecedents of the development of such line of thinking. The global resentments against the continental indigenous thinking were probably justificatory tendencies for the colonial incursion of the imperialists and their colonial projects in the region (Areji, 2005:63).

Conversely, Africa has navigated through turbulences for decades to assert a culture of belonging that expresses their identities. It behoves the indigenous scholarship to develop the feelings that, although, philosophy is a general enterprise, but it is not barred from having any cultural relevance or regional uniqueness; and if that is the case, other regional experts were exceeding their limits if they claimed the right to define what African philosophy (that is largely cultural thinking) is. Perhaps, philosophy in its character dethrones all sorts of methodological stereotypes and permits certain peculiarities that emphasize cultural or indigenous philosophies (Kabuk, & Torkwembe, 2019). Until this is clarified, the acrimonious debates on the existence of African philosophy will keep resonating endlessly.

Unless the above presumption is deemphasized, debatable issues in the indigenous philosophy within the African context would generate further controversies and re-enthroned chasms of destruction about the nature of African intellect. Indicatively, there are certain intelligibly discourses and theories that assert the indigenous thinking of the intimate interconnectivity between parts of a whole, which may not be understood without reference to the whole. Of course, this forms the basis for the new wave of ecological philosophy in the Africa context. It is in view of this realisation the chapter is born; which aims at generating more insights that will influence national, continental and global debates in philosophy on various perspectives regarding the evolution of ecological spirituality in Africa.

Cultural Edification in the African Society

Scholars who are familiar with the subject matter of philosophy in the African cultural context are not unaware of the fact that it is not likely to be the easiest subject in the world. This is because there is often misunderstanding and misrepresentation by others who choose to use other paradigms (particularly those of the West) to gauge it. Such deliberate misconstruing narratives about the African cultural thought are somehow intellectually dishonest. Issues concerning African cultural experiences are not fairly treated; certain presumptions and exaggerated narratives that are largely second hand sources attract attentions and even appear more authoritative than the real or original ideas.

The brand of thinking that originates from the cultural context of the Africans is often adjudged from the angle of its formality or non-formality, documented or not documented, and a request for other evidences; and its authentication depends largely on such considerations. Although, those holding such notions cannot be totally exonerated of their claims but they can be excused for lack of in-depth knowledge of some African cultural values. Becoming conscious of one's cultural values does not require any formal education, being in a particular culture automatically conscripts one to be part of that culture; a cultural experience that is uncommon to other races. This explains the facts of learning and enlightenment among Africans traditional societies, which must not have the semblance of other cultural models. Now, the big question the potential readers would likely ask is; how do African societies achieve certain edification within cultural contexts?

The answer to this question may take a twist, which experience has shown that certain tendencies of demand for literary productions, and the 'formal-informal' categorizations of

learning come to play, with which supposed “privileged” cultures feel superior; as if no certitudes can be attained beyond ‘formal’ knowledge acquisition. Perhaps, this has been the decades-long experience which Africa passed through in her quest for learning in the cultural context.

Indicatively, neither the concept of education nor learning is restricted to their formal usages. Each has its designated operational mode within certain contextual frameworks, which every culture finds congenial for learning. To start with, can any knowledge be derived from the traditional African culture? If the answer is in the affirmative, then, how authentic can that knowledge be? Various attempts to answer these and other related questions perhaps led to the reconstruction of a new pattern of thinking amongst African scholars in the last quarter of the twentieth century; which the various cultural values became the sources for raw material for such discourses. No African in the 21st century, whether educated or not, continually exhibits the cognition of inferiorly cultural thinking, waiting for a superior approbation from other cultures. Undoubtedly, people within the traditional African societies who are in tuned with the cultural values are integrally conscripted or integrated automatically as members of that culture. It is on this basis that certain determinations of culture-bound consciousness emanate, which primarily gives to each member a first taste of what their culture comprised of.

Such an understanding and the concerted action to resist the sweeping effects of the waves of neo-colonialism compelled Africans to become ‘self-conscious’; and, also the need to cultivate a culture of ‘belonging’ that is more demanding now than ever before in many African societies. Therefore, the collective determination of Africans towards decolonisation of their minds in recent times – struggles that have engrossed

Africa since the dawn of slavery, and perhaps colonial projects on the continent – made Africans to retrace certain contextual historical trends to understand their cultural values, and navigate them in the development of African philosophic ideas generally.

Cultural edification entails some kind of learning or becoming conscious of what every society commonly hold sway, which characterises or identifies them as a people differently from others. Michael Oakeshott (2010:108) gives a striking concise approach on the nature of learning in *The Concept of Education* that:

Learning is the comprehensive activity in which we come to know ourselves and the world around us. It is a paradoxical activity: it is doing and submitting at the same time. And its achievements range from merely being aware, to what may be called understanding and being able to explain. In each of us, it begins at birth; it takes place not in some ideal abstract world, but in the local world we inhabit; for the individual it terminates only in death, for a civilisation it ends in the collapse of the characteristic manner of Life, and for the race it is, in principle, interminable. The activity of learning may, however, be suspended from time to time while we enjoy what we have learned.

Oakeshott succeeds in establishing that learning is pre-eminently human characteristic, intelligent beings capable of choices and self-direction in relation to their own impulses and to the world around them. Hence, the African traditional society is not excluded from this commitment. Perhaps, this reflects Kabuk's view on traditional education that:

Traditional education, therefore, is the transmission of culture in form of beliefs, values, customs, ideas,

technology and others from one generation to another, in order for an individual to be conscripted and function within a given society. Traditional education may not exclusively mean 'archaic' or 'older' kind of education as others thought, but it implies loosely an indigenous system of education that is practised in a given 'simple' culture. Hence, traditional or indigenous education emphasises social responsibilities, job orientation, political participation and active participation in ceremonies and rituals. This system of education may not have to do with schools and books, no paid professional personnel etc. It is basically non-literacy as opposed to the western education, which is peculiar to simple cultures, such as the ones found in Africa; and the medium of transmission is through oral tradition (Kabuk, 2017: 193-4).

This indeed expresses the nature of African traditional education system. The concept "traditional" here implies a body of long-established customs and beliefs viewed as a set of precedents; often one that has been handed down from generation to generation. Nonetheless, as unsophisticated as the traditional system of learning in the African culture may appear it has some methodical pattern that are largely demonstration, imitation, play, and oral, etc; and its simple nature makes its evaluation less strenuous by mere observation and approval (Kabuk, 2017: 196).

By and large, every human culture has a pattern of learning certain values peculiar to it which does not necessarily has to be in a formal way. The culture however, is a repository of information in every traditional setting. Therefore, the informal system of learning constitutes the core of indigenous African education, under which every individual in the community is practically trained and prepared for their role in the society. This perhaps is the means by which the African society, like any other

culture (sophisticated or unsophisticated), explores its rich cultural repository. Such values are known through various means of cultural participations like rituals, signs and symbols, other ceremonies or traditional practices, music, folktales, etc. In some sense, this is how Africans become conscious of the 'self', which is part of, and as it relates to the environment which they live. This perhaps is transmitted through orals and other sacred and social traditions to younger generations for the preservation of the cultural-bound values and other fixed moral norms of the people.

Conversely, the field of philosophy of ecology is relatively new, which is increasingly receiving considerable attention. The general understanding is that the "area holds great promise for the advancement of both ecology and the philosophy of science" (Colyvan, M., Et al, 2009). However, it is a familiar model within the cultural context of the African traditional values. The environment and all that concerns it are normatively conceptualised into some sort of holism. What seems to make this claim defeasible is the pattern that the cultural inquiry among Africans trailed over the years which was never systematized or methodized. The simple reason why the new found area of philosophy of environment is a familiar terrain among Africans is simple; the cultural practices of the black race evinces a sort of realisation that there is a common thread that unites the nonhuman biological entities that deserves consideration too which is typically extended squarely to humans. This perhaps plunged them to develop some ethical concerns toward the conservation of the ecosystem for some traditional and perhaps ritual purposes. Most intriguingly, it is from this general consciousness of the unity and the interrelatedness of human and nonhuman bio-entities within the

environment that Africans manipulate the ecosystem for their own survival.

Ecophilosophy and the African Ecological Thinking

The basic concept of humanism and human autonomy, on the contrary, has placed through the ages a cultural boundary that echoes strictly human triumph without due consideration of interdependency of all other existence, as they relate within the environment. The breakaway of the ecological standpoint from this tradition has historical antecedents, which saw various environmental rights and ethical movements within various cultures of the globe that seek to preserve the ecology. On its part, deep ecology breaks from the supposed 'shallow' ecological thought that seemed to impose anthropocentric boundaries, which obliged the relevance of the environment so far as all that concerns it strictly benefits humans. Beyond this anthropocentrism is the contemporary interests that seek to demonstrate the importance of nonhuman biological entities and the environment that make up the entire ecosystem. Indeed, ecophilosophy is the birthwort of the conjoined doctrines of ecology and philosophy.

Ecosophy or ecophilosophy are basically neologisms contracted from the phrase ecological philosophy. The advent of the terms is attributed to a Norwegian philosopher and ecologist, Arne Naess. As a founder of *deep philosophy*, Naess assumes that there can be an intersection between philosophy and ecology, where philosophy would provide the wisdom to guide the actions necessary to foil some impending ecocatastrophes that are anthropogenic in nature. Ontologically speaking, the new found thought of "deep ecology" posits that the reality of nature is such that humans are inseparable from nature itself. Hence, ecophilosophy is essentially an area of interest that unites philosophy and ecology which emphasises that human beings

are intrinsic part of, and inseparable from nature itself. Therefore, ecophilosophy as a critical study of ecological issues assess critically the human-earth rapport and advocacy for friendly treatment of the environment.

Naess construed ecophilosophy as a discipline, just as philosophy, that is based on some kind of analytical thinking, reasoned argument, with carefully examined assumptions on ecological praxis. He however attempted to distinguish between ecosophy and ecophilosophy, which in some sense the former is portrayed not as a discipline (as in the sense of philosophy), but as personal philosophies that guide our conducts as they affect the environment. Ecosophy is nonetheless a set of beliefs about the interrelatedness of nature and people in the various environments (Naess, 1989). Such ecosophic thinking is believed to vary from an individual to another, but may share certain fundamental elements, based on some norms or assumptions that seek to conserve it.

Conversely, Naess' ecosophilosophy is widely seen as a model or a sort of general framework that guides individuals' ecosophies (eco-beliefs); this emphasises certain *intrinsic values* about nature in general, and the significance of cultural and natural diversity, which provides a methodological pathway for a systematized reflective thinking about the ecology. The contemporary discourse on environmental philosophy seems to express this even deeper; this line of thinking is scientifically designed as a discipline to put emphasis on the basic fact that all lives have independent values that are free from human perspectives or uses, which of course, must not be tempered with, unless it should be done for the sake of survival (Naess, 1989; Hedgpeth, 1996). Perhaps, the understanding of interconnectedness of facts of human existence and the

environment prevents all inclinations of ecocatastrophism. Hence, this trend of thinking is to redefine the position of the human species and reposition the importance of the entire environment and the interdependence of organisms as an ecosystem.

The African ecological thinking demonstrates a cultural unity that explores indigenous socioecological praxis; a continuous cross-cultural practice that is not based on some ecological theory or any philosophical system that explicates it as afrocentric ecophilosophy. Although, recent researches have demonstrate this, and provides more informational data that contributes to the reconstruction of an African-centred ecophilosophy in modern terms. Prior to the modern ecophilosophy discourses in Africa, the established customs that may probably have resonated from the habitual practices of conserving the ecosystem among Africans is consistent with the ecosophic beliefs that are inherent in virtually all Afro-cultural practices. Despite its traditional mode the Afro-ecological belief is not found to contravene the basic principles of the most recent global environment ethics. Even though, just as much other non-western environmental wisdom are excluded in the theorisation and deciding global issues, there is indeed non-recognition of African traditional ecological knowledge at the global stage. Such negation amounts to a superficial knowledge about the reality of African traditional ecological thinking which existed for centuries before the echoes of the voices of the western frontiers were heard in the 1960s.

There is no doubt that Africa as region has indeed suffered all shades of acrimonious debates through the ages, probably due to problem of nonconforming its thought pattern to those of the West. The relatively recent found ecological thinking of the globe demonstrates this even more. The African traditional ecological

consciousness is far beyond the Western paradigm of mere ecological conservation and environmental justice. This is due to the fact that the Afro-cultural wisdom incorporates a united consciousness that determines the destinies of the various individuals, and also aid in interpreting the purpose of all biological realities within an environment. Perhaps, this involves some level of spirituality; a form Afrocentric anthroposophy that evinces African earth-based spiritual traditions and practices. In some sense, there is a point of intersection between spirituality and ecology within an environment.

Afro-cultural Edification and Ecospirituality

The concept of culture has various meanings depending on the context in which it is used. It could imply the basic idea of enlightenment and sophistication obtained through education or some exposures. It could also denote a people with a shared beliefs, values, customs, practices, or social behaviours; while in some instances it implies a particular set of attitudes that characterizes a group of individuals. However the concept of culture may be conceived, central to it is the basic understanding that it is the lifeblood of a lively society, which enhances and even preserves a community's identity and other intrinsic values through some intellectual and emotional experiences (Gilmore, 2014).

Culture in the African context provides a veritable platform for cultural consciousness, where each individual within it derives certain intellectual and moral values that help shape and broaden their thought about life generally. The African people's cultural values however elicit the traditional knowledge of the Africans which depends largely on the cultural and environmental situation of the people. Hence, the African people's cultural values include various sources of traditional

knowledge through reflections, and interactions with nature imbedded in their proverbs, wise sayings, taboos, ritual and other institutions. Indeed, these were the means which the Africans became conscious of their environment and of course, their various traditional values. This shows clearly that transmitting, and conserving indigenous knowledge is fundamental to cultural identity for an indigenous people.

It is truism that the entire cultural and environmental situations of a people illicit their traditional knowledge, which perhaps the African traditional ecological knowledge is part of. The various cultures within the Africa sub-region have however advanced their knowledge, innovations and practices that educe ecological knowledge within the indigenous context in their local communities. Nonetheless, there was that desire for searching deeper questions about the human relations and nature. Such an indigenous ecological concern among African cultures was aimed at preserving the natural environment, even though for purely anthropocentric reasons. Perhaps, the traditional ecological thinking of Africans has never evinced some biocentric concern as it is with the modern 'deep ecology' doctrine. The indigenous African ecological consciousness reveals some interconnectedness between human and non-human entities, and such intersection is educed from an explicitly metaphysical point of view, rather than some psychological feelings. Ikenga-Metuh (1987) expressed this deeply in his concept of "harmony of beings", where he explained that:

The goal of interaction of beings in African world-views is the maintenance of the integration and balance of the beings in it. Harmonious interaction of beings leads to mutual strengthening of the beings involved, and enhances the growth of life. A pernicious influence from one being weakens other beings and threatens the

harmony and integration of the whole. Thus one of the bases on which the African mode of life rests is participation or profound communion with the universe.

Ikega-Metuh further explained that:

The main objective of an African is to live a life of harmony with humanity and with nature. Man strives to be in harmony with God, deities, and his fellowmen both living and dead. He feels himself in intimate rapport and tries to maintain harmonious relationship with the animal, vegetables, and other elements and phenomena in the universe. For him, the first evil is disintegration for this would spell disaster both for himself and his immediate world. The ideal thing is integration, communion and harmony.

The view of Emefie Ikega-Metuh (1987;78-9) seems to demonstrate deeply the indigenous African concern about the ecological spirituality. Metuh is not unaware of the fact that man in the African context must “constantly consult oracles and divination to assure himself that he is in relationship with all forces in his world.” His indulgence in frequent ritual would reinforce his communion with the forces and “repairs any interruptions that may have occurred.” Indeed, Naess (1989) deciphered this in a simple argument that becoming conscious about human and nonhuman entities’ rapport within the environment may prevent harm to nature, because in doing that we simultaneously harm ourselves – since there is the understanding that humanity is inseparable with nature.

The case with the tradition African ecological thinking is rather ethnographical praxis than a concern for some principles of environmentalism as it is practiced among the Western scholars. Metuh (1987;79) reiterated on a man’s wellbeing that consists in maintaining a constant harmony with the cosmic totality. Metuh

seems to re-echo John V. Taylor's account of his conversations on indigenous culture with many different African people. Taylor (1963:67) believed that, in keeping harmony with cosmic totality, man is communion with other realities, hence, when things go well with him, he is conscious that he is at peace with the scheme of things, and if things go wrong, then he knows somewhere he has fallen out of steps.

Although, the African worldview is naturally anthropocentric, but it somehow displays some ontological link between the spiritual realm and other beings in the temporal order; this demonstrates in some sense a sort of network of relationships that link all beings in ontological order. Nonetheless, the ecological spirituality in Africa evinces the fact that they are united by the consciousness that our individual destinies are caught up with the health of the natural systems.

Conversely, there were elements of ethnographic ecological concern among Africans which could be scout through cultural adage, folktales, songs, oral instructions, and other cultural practices. This demonstrates the fact that all natural entities (biological and non-biological) were perhaps morally considerable which is not in conflict with the modern construct of normative ethic. The moral concern of Africans is the actual concern about the place of other realities and their meaning in human cultures rather than engaging in some abstract ethical reasoning on how we treat them, since they too form part of the ecological order. This realization however stirs up a sort of consciousness on ecological spirituality and conservation for sustainability of the natural environment; except doing otherwise is aimed at man's survival.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, the African indigenous ecospirituality is largely a form of ethnocentric anthroposophy which evinces a consciousness about the relationship linking all beings in the ontological order. The traditional African society raised questions through the centuries on how humans ought to live in the society to foster a sustainable ecological community. As unsophisticated as the African society may seem there were attempts to avert some perceived ecocatastrophe in the community to keep harmony between the individual entities and the cosmic totality.

Although, there is general believed among indigenous Africans that the universe was created and man became the dominant being within it, but it does not mean that man can misuse the earth; hence, it is within the purview of the indigenous African belief that humans are to act as friends and stewards of nature, respect the moral order in the universe, and prevent any form of ecological destruction (Mbiti, 1991). Perhaps, one thing should be clear, the African cosmic knowledge is not based on mythical imagination, it emanates from African experience of the universe, and has indeed enabled Africans to navigate through their environment in a sustainable manner (Ikeke, 2018; 234).

Ikeke's view succinctly expressed the traditional ecological knowledge; according to him, the indigenous ecological knowledge helped Africans in time past to preserve water supply sources, control erosion, preserve grooves and shrines, rehabilitate endangered animals, overcome drought and famine, etc. Ikeke therefore recommended there should be a place in ecophilosophy for African traditional ecological knowledge, since Africans protected their environment through the years. Ikeke (2018) wondered how African developed taboos to protect

medicinal plants and animals, religious myths to protect some environment. Indeed, the African traditional eco-thoughts have through the years eduved cultural values that helped in the preservation of the environment.

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