

**AFROECOLOGY OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES: AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF ECOTHEOLOGY, ECOPHILOSOPHY AND ECOSPIRITUALITY OF THE YORUBA**

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**Abstract**

*The study offers an anthropological perspective on aspects of afroecology of traditional African societies, using the Yoruba as a case study. Data indicate that the world is facing immense ecological crises and that unbridled human activities have aggravated environmental destruction to a dangerous scale. However, not much study has focused on afroecology and its dimensions of ecospirituality, ecophilosophy and ecotheology. This study offers traditional African approach to ecological sustenance. Methodologically, the study is based on ethnographic fieldwork among traditional communities of the Yoruba, which have maintained critical aspects of autochthonous culture. Findings show that contemporary African societies are bedevilled by monumental ecological problems and as a result have lost large swath of their environment to the assaults of foreign imposed technologies and philosophies. The problem is compounded by westernization, globalization, sinocism (Chinese influence) and influence of foreign religion which imposed consumerist philosophy on the people. This study provides scholarly field-sourced approach to ameliorating the ecological crises that menace the world. The study is primed for its scholarship on the richness of the Yoruba in their response to the environment and its sustenance.*

**Keywords:** Afroecology, Anthropology, Autochthonous communities, Ecological crises, Yoruba

**Introduction**

The prevalence of environmental disasters that emanate from desert encroachment, oil exploration, mining and quarrying, erosion, unmitigated pillage of earth's resources, unlimited degradation of the environment, which are compounded by and near-total annihilation of non-human species which present a dark reality for humanity and its survival has made afroecological studies to become imperative. The

ecological menace according to Pope Francis (2019) is sin against humanity; Hufnagel (2020) and McDonagh (2010) identify it as horror of extinction, Taylor (2019) states that it is the major human dilemma of our time, while Tubi (2020) calls it ecocide.

This paper proffers that Africans possess authentic ancient pristine ecophilosophy, ecotheology and ecospirituality that are capable of providing explanation for the peoples' interconnectedness with their natural environment. Africans are highly rooted in their ecological milieus with rich earth-based spirituality and philosophy. As a result of this rootedness, autochthonous African communities have rich traditional ecological practices and beliefs which have sustained their cultural, religious and philosophical worldviews with high degree of admiration in the past. However, the advent of foreign influence has caused immense cultural shocks to these communities, and the once hallowed ecological underpinnings of their culture have been bastardised, uprooted, obliterated, diluted and compromised, (Olaniyan, 2003; Oyewole, 2003; Tubi, 2020). It is incumbent on scholars to critically examine, understand and document aspects of these afroecological practices and beliefs before they are completely lost to westernisation, globalization and *sinocism*.

### **Location and Peoples of Yorubaland**

The Yoruba are groups of autochthonous people living in western parts of Africa. They are found in Benin Republic, Federal Republic of Nigeria and Togo Republic. They traditionally call themselves *Omo karo*, *ojire* and *Omo Oodua*. The ideal Yoruba person is qualified as *omoluabi* (quintessential person). They form one of the largest ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. They speak dialects such as Awori, Ekiti, Egba, Ibolu, Ijebu, Oyo, Igbomina, Okun etc, of the same language called Yoruba. Popular oral tradition among the people acknowledged that they were descendants of a strong personality called Oduduwa, who gave identity to their culture. Their origin revolved around Ile Ife, which is acclaimed as the "source of creation" where *Olodumare* the Supreme Deity began the creation of the world, (Kanu 2015a&b, Fadipe, 1991; Idowu 1994). Their rich culture and traditions have survived onslaughts of foreign influence and perhaps they might be the best ethnic group in Africa to have successfully preserved greater aspects of their pristine culture among others.

### **Ethnographic insertion**

The study is an ethnography of traditional ecological practices and beliefs of the Yoruba. Ethnography is here defined as scientific field observation and description of cultures, behaviours and tenets of customs. It is an active field qualitative research which involves direct insertion and participation-observation. It aims to make cultures “speak” directly to the researcher and the world, by eliminating the biases, prejudices and opinions of the researcher. Ethnography is a veritable form of culture-speaking and culture-writing.

The study adopts ethnography which offers a field-sourced anthropological perspective of Afroecology. The study focuses on some communities which are primed for maintaining critical aspects of their pristine culture to a high degree in the face of massive onslaught of foreign influence. Tubi (2015) has described ethnography as the most relevant methodology for researching into traditional communities. This involved personal visits to communities to notice human-environment interactions, document ecological disasters, and interview aged informants and acclaimed informed personae such as *olode* (hunters), *aworo* (chief priests) and *agbe* (farmers) who are abreast with the changing fortunes of the environment in their locales.

### **Global Ecological Crises**

The world is inundated with severe ecological crises. Studies point to alarming ecological disastrous activities that are taking place across the globe such as deforestation, oil spoilage, excessive mining of earth natural resources, near extinction of nonhuman species, oceanic acidification, despoliation of the earth, air pollution, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, etc (Aptekar, 1994; Hufnagel, 2018, 2020; McDonagh, 2010). The assemblage of world scientists has been giving regular warnings on ecological crisis of the world. The latest of July 28, 2021 offers a cataclysmic ecological horror as they identified several planetary vital signs of environmental destruction, (<https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/climate-warning>). Similarly, the United Nations (UN) in September 2021, calls on the world to come together to radically effect the way human beings are damaging the earth, (<https://news.un.org>).

Recently, Pope Francis (2019), the Catholic pontiff, observes that humanity is facing a frightening exploitation of creation, both persons and

environment and he describes the scenario as sinful. Pope John Paul II (1990), sees ecological crisis as a common affront to all humanity. Pope Benedictus (2009, 2010), gave several ecocentric homilies in which he drew attention of humanity to the global ruins and devastation bedevilling the planet. McDonagh (2004, 2010) argues that environmental degradation affects all humanity and Aptekar (1994), argues that humanity is menacingly facing the scourge of degradation and Hufnagel (2020) presents data on global ecological crises of immense proportion that have the capacity to wipe all beings off the earth.

Traditional societies of the world, are frontally confronted with ecological challenges like other parts of the world. Shehu (2017), and Tubi (2020), provide a close study of African situation with their focal discussions of the sociological, archaeological and anthropological dimensions of ecological crises respectively. Scholars like Shettima (1997), Olaniyan (2003) and Oyewole (2003) have provided insights into ecological issues in traditional African communities by exploring aspects of environmental management, cultural response and demographic challenges occasioned by ecological crises.

### **Afroecology of the Yoruba**

This paper defines Afroecology as an integration of studies which seeks to recover indigenous African environmental practices, document traditional ecological practices and the re-evaluate African's autochthonous relationship with the natural environment. Afroecology has the capacity to enhance earth's sustainability and its management. It provides basic earth-based approaches to soil management and it stimulates eco-friendly methodology for human-environment relationships. In addition, it is capable of furnishing scholars with the needed data and knowledge of the past ecological practices of African communities.

Due to pervading imposition of foreign influence, Africa is massively losing an irreplaceable amount of its natural ecological system, (Tubi, 2020). Having come under the severe shocks of doses of globalization, westernization and *sinocism*, the continent and its natural resources have been severely despoiled. It is therefore incumbent on African scholars to thoroughly engage in afroecological studies.

In assessing the Yoruba and the ecological dimensions of their beliefs and practices, the prime of place goes to their culture which admirably

evolved a unique society where philosophy, spirituality, and religion are interbred with ecology present a deeply rooted afroecology. Scholars observe that The Yoruba possess a deep anthropological understanding of the whole gamut of ecology, in which there exists a delicate interconnection between persons, philosophy, religion, and natural environment, (Fasina, 1991; Idowu, 1994; Olaniyan, 2003; Oyewole, 2003). The study observes that the Yoruba “communicates” with the environment because it is treated as a being. The earth “speaks”, trees “talks”, hills “laughs”, the sky “cries”, animals “mourn”, grass “sleeps”, etc., in their anthropomorphic understanding of the world of natural order.

The Yoruba, like all traditional communities of Africa, have rich ecological understanding of their environment in relation to human positions in the ecosystem, (Olaniyan, 2003; Oyewole, 2003, Tubi, 2020). Within the realm of anthropological perspectives of Afroecology, this study identifies three important pointers to the close nexus between ecology and human beings within Yoruba cultural milieu namely (a) ecotheology, (b) ecospirituality and (c) ecophilosophy.

#### **(a) Ecotheology of the Yoruba**

Ecotheology (ecology and theology), is the study of a given people’s religious concept of, and their interconnectedness with the natural environment and everything in it. Ecotheology provides a detailed study of the interconnectedness of the ecosystem, its problems, management and sustainability in relation to humans, and their religious beliefs. The Yoruba possess a rich traditional ecotheology (Fasina, 1991; Idowu, 1991; Tubi, 2020). The indigenous concept and relationship of the Yoruba to their environment and the response to it, emanate from their religious beliefs. Thus, their theology influences their interaction with the natural environment. Among the Yoruba speaking peoples, *oro* (traditional religious system) has clearly marked out ecotheological dimensions.

The creation story of the Yoruba also portends ecotheological background. The story relates how *Olodumare* (Supreme Deity) sent Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba with sixteen assistants to form the earth. Using a snail’s shell full of soil and a giant bird, the soil was poured at a spot now called Ile Ife, while the bird scattered the sand haphazardly. *Olodumare* eventually sent human beings to dwell on the earth. The second story also

revolves around *Olodumare*, who sent *Obatala* with a bird and chameleon to build up the surface of the earth at a spot now called Ile Ife. The bird and chameleon spread the sand as best as they could which formed the surface of the earth. After this, *Obatala* and *Orunmila* were sent to administer the earth. To populate the earth, *Olodumare* sent other persons to join them, (Ajakaiye, personal communication; Akande, personal communication; Oju, personal communication).

In the story the prime of place is ecologically aligned with *Olodumare*, human beings and other elements of the planet acting in synergy. Ile Ife is central to the emergence of the earth and human beings. Animals played active parts with human beings in creating the world. These stories carry immense ecotheological backgrounds. The emphasis for this study is that *Olodumare*, being the creator, is construed as the ultimate Source of creating animals, plants, physical features, water bodies, and human beings. In creation, *Olodumare* deployed the omnipotence of his power at the service of all things on the planet. Creation, for the Yoruba, was not described as having a form of chaos as in the Bible (Genesis 1:1-3) that needed to be pacified. For the Yoruba, at the beginning of creation, *Olodumare* was actively in charge, directing and influencing the whole gamut of ecology. Ecotheologically speaking, in the traditional worldview of the Yoruba, human beings, deities, and nature were designed by *Eleda* (creator) to live together in mutuality within a given environment, such as Ile Ife, (Idowu, 1994).

The research notes that *oro* (traditional religion of the Yoruba) as conceived by the people, is the expression of the human relationship with deities and everything in nature. For this reason, there are numerous deities (*ebora, orisa*), which are aligned with the environment. In traditional Yoruba existential world, nature is divinised, so that natural elements such as sun, moon, stars, hills, rivers, trees and animals are animated with spirits and have divine aspects inherent in them. Because nature is divinised, the environment is respected, pampered, and cared for. Ancestral worship has strong ecotheological base as the accoutrements and paraphernalia of masquerades are environmentally sourced. Due to this fact the people hold the abuse of natural environment in total abhorrence, (Aina, personal communication; Olayemi, personal communication). Among the Yoruba, it was observed that taboos are attached to natural environment to keep abusers away. Environmental-

polluters are punished and restitution must be made to appease the deities, (Olaniyan, 2003, Oyewole, 2003; Tubi, 2020).

The study concludes that the crux of Yoruba's worldview is creationism that is deeply illustrated in strong ecotheological terms. In the creation story of the Yoruba there is a convergence of religion, society, and environment. Both came at the beginning and they are interwoven at the beginning of time and space. This has ecotheological implication. Human beings and the entirety of nature environment for the Yoruba are primarily conceived as creations made at the instance of *Olodumare* (Supreme Deity). The basic ecotheological underpinning of traditional Yoruba worldview lies behind the concept of creation by *Olodumare*, the Supreme Being. Their concept of the earth, the planet, and everything in general is based on creation, (Akande, personal communication; Obahun, personal communication).

Next, the study notices the usefulness of religion, philosophy and ecology playing useful roles for human beings as they are symbiotically related. The natural environment and human beings are useful to one another as they give meaning to the world. Also, since both originated at the same time, they are therefore destined to coexist forever. In the mind of the Yoruba, there will never be a time when any of these will cease to exist. Their worldview posits that all creations must necessarily coexist, (Arupe, personal communication; Ajiboye, personal communication). It is thus to be understood that as presented in the creation story, which conveys a great ecotheological lesson namely the creator does not desire the annihilation of a specie nor envisages the disruption of the world. *Olodumare* envisaged an alliance between human beings and other parts of creation. In the creation stories of the Yoruba, the lesson to be imbibed is that, an ecotheological perception that accounts for the beginning of the universe and its sustenance is well demonstrated.

The researcher observes that creation is in turn interpreted ecotheologically by using four principles; anthropomorphism, apotheoses, deification/divinization and environmentalism. Anthropomorphism makes the Creator to have human attributes such that *Olodumare* has hands, speaks, makes decisions, sleeps, talks, and behaves like human beings. The principle of apotheoses makes humans to become divine beings, so as to be relevant among their families after death whence they are venerated as ancestors or deities (*orisa*). The principle of

deification/divinization, makes natural elements to be considered as spiritualised beings possessing human attributes. The principle of environmentalism makes the deities and everything in nature to be aligned with and interpreted within the confines of the physical natural environment of Yorubaland.

Due to the ecotheological underpinning of traditional Yoruba's worldview which is rooted in the principle of deification/divinization of nature, it is apropos to examine it in some detail. The principle means that the people see every part of creation as having a spiritual dimension. First of all, the three major constellations in the sky namely *orun* (sun), *osupa* (moon) and *irawo* (stars) are considered as deities. The people know that the sun marks the circle of the day and the moon determines the monthly circle. The stars reflect divine presence for the people. These three are seen as deities, but they so far removed from the people that do not receive concrete worship from the Yoruba people, (Akande, personal communication, Yakubu, personal communication). Apart from the three constellations, natural features like hills, rivers, and trees are considered as the personification of deities or are seen as the abode of deities and spirit beings. It is therefore apparent that divinization of nature features prominently in their culture as indicated in this study. The divinization of nature by the people illustrates the relevance of ecotheology to traditional communities in Africa like the Yoruba.

It was observed that the concretization of deification/divinization of nature among the people is seen in the prevalence of nature-deities in all their communities, (Tubi, 2020). The cardinal nature-deities of Yorubaland are *ile* (ground/soil), *igi* (trees), *omi* (water), *oke* (hills) and *eranko* (animals).

**(i) *Ile* (earth)**

The Yoruba speaking people conceive the earth (*ile*) as one of the primary nature-deities. Land is the most prized possession of the people. The spirit of the lineage lives on in the land, even when leased for farming or housing. To be landless in a community means that such a person is not considered as an original settler and it makes one to be disadvantaged politically, socially, and economically. *Ile* is the deity of fecundity, life, progress, and wellbeing. *Ile* is the mother goddess that sustains human beings, animals, and spirits. Rituals are considered complete only when *ile* has received a portion. Libations are considered accepted when they

touch the earth. Votive offerings are hallowed only after they have been accepted by the earth. *Ile* receives regular but the simplest forms of sacrifices, (Obahun, personal communication). At Ayedayo, an Okun community in Northeast Yorubaland, the researcher noticed a sacrifice made to *ile* by an aged man who poured clean water on the ground in the morning and said, "*Ile kowuro. Gba, mu*" (Earth, good morning. Take and drink). Earth also receives sundry forms of sacrifice and appeasement. For instance, connoisseurs would pour little wine on the ground for the earth to taste before they drink their wine, libations are poured on the ground for it to be accepted by the deities, and blood of votive animals must touch the ground before the sacrifice can be considered as pleasing to the deities.

According to *aworo* (chief priest) Akande of Ogidi, the earth is also the final abode of humans. Funeral rites are closely associated with the earth. Earth burial/internment is the only appropriate method of corpse disposal among the Yoruba. It is the sum expression of their filial relationship with *ile* that makes it to be regarded as a mother and deity. The new yam festival, which is one of the primary festivities of the people, is the epitome of the peoples' expression of gratitude to *ile*. The new yam festival is the celebration of the motherhood of *ile*. Agriculture is primarily based on root crops and yam is the most significant of them all. Yam, as must be reiterated, is the extraordinaire crop of the Yoruba. It is the best gift of the earth. Other traditional farm produce of the earth include palm oil, groundnuts, beans, sorghum, and cassava, amongst others. They confirm their belief in *ile* with personal names like *Ilegbemi* (earth supports me), *Ilemuyiwa* (earth brings this) and *Ilegbayi* (earth receives this one) amongst other.

**(ii) Igbo (forest)**

One other aspect that indicates the close nexus between religion and the environment among the Yoruba, the study observes, is their particular attention to forests (*igbo*) and trees (*igi*) which they consider as abodes of spirits and deities. Forests are said to be inhabited by hundreds of inanimate spirits (*irunmole*). Among the people, in every community, forests are sometimes named after particular deities. Forests play important roles in their religious system and they have several sacred forests called *igbo irunmole* (forest of spirits), *igbo Oluwo* (forest of Oluwo),

*igbo ebora* (forest of deities), amongst others, (Oju, personal communication; Yakubu, personal communication).

Also, the communities pay particular attention to some trees that are said to be the favourites of deities/spirits. Such would include *iroko*, mahogany, baobab, and silk cotton. There are three forms of association, which the Yoruba have with trees because they are considered useful for religious purposes. The first are trees, which are considered sacred and useful for religious purposes such as making masks for masquerades and some trees are valued because they are useful in making drums for traditional worship. Second are trees in market squares that are considered as abode of witches and wizards. In traditional Yoruba ecotheology and religious system, sacrifices which are made for peace, progress and tranquillity of the communities are offered around trees at market squares so as to ward evil and the calamitous effects of witches and wizards. Third, some huge trees are considered highly relevant because they are abodes of deities/spirits. The traditional way of identifying such trees is by seeing a piece of white cloth tied around the trunk. Apart from these strictly religious purposes, some trees are used for preventive and curative medicines, (Akande, personal communication, Obahun, personal communication). The people give expressions to this belief with personal names like *Igisore* (tree assisted me), *Iginla* (big tree), *Segilola* (rich wood seller), *Osegbemi* (Ose tree is my strength), amongst others.

**(iii) Omi (water bodies)**

Geographically, Yorubaland lies within an ecozone that is embedded within the Guinea Savannah and the forest zones of West Africa. It is characterised by two sharp distinct dry and wet seasons that run from early March/April to September/October respectively. There are few important big rivers such as *Oya*, *Ohe/ose*, *Osun*, *Oyi*, *Ogun*. There are also streams and ponds found all over the area. The rivers and streams provide portable water and are used for other domestic purposes. They are also the sources of fish for consumption. However, most of these are seasonal rivers and streams. Due to this factor, water has a high premium among the people. The geography of the area, which lacks all year-round abundant water, gives a clue to the reason why water is divinised among the people. In fact, drought is dreaded by the people so much so that to be accused of preventing rainfall is considered a serious offence in

Yorubaland, (Adewumi, personal communication; Akande, personal communication).

Informants claim that river-spirits and naiads are acknowledged by the people and offered propitiations as part of their traditional rites, (Yakubu, personal communication). Ponds hold an important place in the supply of water for daily consumption of the people due to the fact that all rivers and streams are seasonal. Ponds are held sacrosanct and they must be placated lest they dry up. Fish in the ponds are considered as “children” of the deity, and as a result of this, fishing in ponds is prohibited. Some streams are considered sacred for their curative powers, some for childbirth, and some are considered as portents for success. The combination of these factors makes rivers/ponds to be propitiated and offered sundry sacrifices by the people. *Olokun* (river goddess) is worshipped as a principal deity in some communities, while generally all communities revere stream and ponds as places, which are inhabited by spirits. Water is primed by the people as can be seen in their personal names like *Omidina* (water stopped me), *Omipidan* (water causes havoc), *Omisore* (water helps), *Oyatola* (*Oya* river is wealth), *Osungbemi* (Osun river is my strength), *Omiyale* (flooding), amongst others.

**(iv) Oke (hills)**

The topography of Yorubaland comprises huge inselbergs, highlands, and hills amidst low plains. These natural endowments have ecotheological significance and have been appropriated for religious purposes. These hills instil awesomeness and reverence on the locals, so it was not difficult for the people to associate them with religious ceremonies. Monoliths are used as shrines and effigies. Ethnographic fieldwork by Tubi (2015) reveals that this practice has antiquity among the people. Major Yoruba traditional deities are aligned to highlands, rock-overhangs, inselbergs, and monoliths. There is the prevalence of *oke ebora* (hill of deity) and *oke egun* (hill of masquerades) among the people, (Akande, personal communication, Oju, personal communication; Yakubu, personal communication). The hills, apart from their religious purposes, served as refuge sites during the pre-colonial interethnic wars. The study notices that the Yoruba place importance on hills by identifying themselves with names like *Okediji* (hill becomes a place of refuge), *Olokede* (owner of hill is here), *Okeyomi* (hill delivered me), *Okeniyi* (hill is precious) *Okesola* (hill gives wealth), and *Okedara* (hill is good).

**(v) Eranko (animals)**

Yorubaland has a variety of animals that thrive in the environment. The landmass offers an extensive assemblage of animals, which has been given religious interpretation to form part of the pantheons. Two types of animals of ecotheological relevance are noticeable and for this ethnographic study are classified into theriomorphic animals and totemic animals. This study identifies theriomorphic animals as those which are divinised and are considered as sacred. In the tradition of the Yoruba people, such animals are considered as direct manifestation of deities. All communities have theriomorphic animals like monkeys, crocodiles, snakes/pythons, etc. To these can be added fishes and birds, which are objects of worship and are offered sacrifices. Totemic animals are those that are aligned to the various component lineages or families. Totems are animals that a group of people adopt as emblems of their lineages. Among the Yoruba, totems form integral identity of lineages and are mentioned in their *oriki* (cognomen/praise name). A lineage which is aligned with a particular totem is forbidden from harming, killing or eating parts of the animal, (Adewumi, personal communication, Obahun, personal communication). The Yoruba concretise their belief about divinised animals with personal names like *Ajanaku* (elephant), *Angulu* (vulture), *Erin* (elephant), *Ekun* (leopard), *Igunu* (eagle), etc.

**(b) Ecospirituality of the Yoruba**

Ecospirituality (ecology and spirituality) is here defined as a particular form of spiritual expression which is aligned with natural environment. The Yoruba people have a concrete expression of ecospirituality. Ecospirituality of the Yoruba indicate the essence and profundity of their communal spirit. The research discovers that their ecospirituality is concretised by the enactment of certain *eewo* (taboos) that are meant to preserve the environment and life in general. An *eewo* is a prohibitive act in respect of a place, person, or thing so as to regulate human behaviour, maintain equilibrium in interpersonal relationships and nature. Taboos are cultural prohibitions instituted for social control and are vitally important and relevant in Yoruba's socio-religious system. They serve as transmitters of moral values and are preservers of a traditional community's moral precepts (Omobola 221). As moral agents, taboos also curb anti-social behaviours. Taboos among the people serve as agents of

socialization because whatever one does affects the welfare of the community and the environment.

It was observed that taboos have serious ecospiritual import for the study of traditional societies like the Yoruba. Their relevance in maintaining a balanced ecosystem in traditional communities cannot be overstressed. They exact great significance in the communities and they exhibit a grandeur of the traditional ecological respect with which the local people treat the environment. These show the nexus between society, religion and ecology of traditional society, which unfortunately have come under the throes of modernization and foreign religions and as a result are on the verge of total obliteration. Thus, in traditional communities of the Yoruba, what is considered as *eewo* is perceived as having the role of preventing inherent danger to the life of the community and the environment. Therefore, purifications, appeasements, and ritual cleansings are necessary rites performed by violators of taboos, (Joledo, personal communication; Oju, personal communication).

Among the people, the study notices that there are taboos on various aspects of life. There are taboos on morals and crime control, on protection of life, on the preservation of the environment, on chieftaincy issues, on matrimony, and on agriculture, amongst others. Some specifics include the followings; it is a taboo to kill fish in ponds which are sources of water in dry season, it is a taboo to eat new yam before the celebration of the new yam festival where the necessary appeasement is made to the earth-goddess, and it is an abomination to deliberately kill an animal which is nursing its kids. These can also be included: invasion of sacred forest, maiming or killing of totemic animals, etc. The study examines few taboos in the society-religion-environment relationships that have immediate relevance to this discourse, which are aquatic taboos, agricultural taboos, animal taboos, forest taboos, and totemic taboos, (Adewumi, personal communication, Akande, personal communication).

**(i) Aquatic taboos**

Water is an essential commodity among the Yoruba people. Water itself is hallowed and thus various sources of water are guarded. Due to the location of Yorubaland, it has steady rainfall for only 5/6 months in a year. The remaining months of the year are without rainfall or spatial rainfall. There is overflow of water in the rainy season, but the people eke water in the dry season, especially in the northern parts of Yorubaland.

They sometimes go far into the bush and hills to find portable water in the dry season. Most of the rivers and streams are seasonal except few like Osun, Oya, and Ogun amongst few. Water bodies such as streams, and ponds are the main sources of portable water, fish, and other aquatic creatures for human consumption and they dry up at the peak of the yearly dry season. There are several cisterns in all the communities that also supply steady water to the people. Due to these ecological factors, water sources are hallowed by the people and treated with great care.

To have water throughout the year and specially to salvage water in the throes of dry season, the people enacted series of marine taboos that are meant to conserve, purify, and ensure regular water supply. They enacted several taboos on the approach of water sources, methods of fetching water, and human interaction with water bodies in general to safeguard the supply of clean water for the community. Field study shows that in some cases, particular ponds or streams are approached with barefoot while in some cases it is a taboo to catch fish in ponds, which are sources of water in dry season. Chief priest Akande, (personal communication) and Obahun, (personal communication), an aged informant, revealed, it is believed that these fishes are “children” of the deities of the ponds, and killing the fish will make the ponds to dry up and consequently put the people at the risk of thirst. Another taboo is that it is forbidden to pour harmful chemicals like gamalin, izal and other powerful insecticides into water sources as means of fishing. Defaulters are dealt with by heavy imposition of fines and persistent defaulters might be banished from the town. These taboos are important because they protect the sources of the communities’ water supply from pollution.

**(ii) Agricultural taboos**

The Yoruba people are primed as farmers. Subsistence farming still predominates among the people. Though there are other occupations like hunting, cobbling, weaving, brewing, and smithing, yet, these are adjuncts to farming. They rely heavily on the benevolence of nature to have maximum produce from their farms. In a community where farming depends largely on traditional methods of farming with hoes and machetes, the people are very careful with their agricultural practices, soil management, and forest preservation. A period of poor crop yield means a time of starvation for the people. Low crop yield implies hunger for them. Thus, to have fertile arable soil and bumper harvest, the people

designed some taboos on agriculture, (Adewumi, personal communication; Obahun, personal communication; Oju, personal communication).

There are specific taboos placed on farming and harvesting of crops among the people. The best illustration is associated with the New Yam. *Usu/Isu*, (yam) is the *extraordinaire* crop of the Yoruba. The people cultivate several types of yams. These are divided into six types: *olo* (yellow yam), *isu funfun* (white yam), *ehuru* (bitter yam), *ewura* (water yam), *omino* (aerial yam) and *koko* (koko yam). The white yam is the most preferred type. Ethnographic study among the northeastern Yoruba by Tubi (2015), notes that they cultivate a dozen of subtypes of white yam such as *ewusu*, *kege*, *okumodo*, *aga*, *anilokoja*, *oloka*, *ogunmole*, *boki*, *sebukere*, *awala*, *lolo*, and *ipe*.

There are four ecospiritualised rites that are associated with new yams, which are held sacrosanct among the people. These are rite of planting, rite of harvesting, rite of eating and rite of celebration, (Aina; personal communication; Obahun, personal communication; Yakubu, personal communication). Each of these rites are carefully marked. The rites of planting begin with bush clearing, making of heaps, and tending the plants. Rites of harvest comes next. The hardworking farmer must not harvest any of his yam produce before the community has performed the rite of the new yam festival (*odun isu tuntun*). Thus, it is a taboo to eat new yam before the celebration of the new yam festival where the whole community makes the necessary appeasement to the earth-goddess. No one is permitted to bring new yams into the community before the celebration of *odun isu tuntun* by the entire community and thereafter yams can be brought into the community at will. People are not allowed to bring new yams to the market for sale until after the celebration of the new yam festival. Finally, the rites of eating and celebrating yam, which form one celebration. In this, the pride of place goes to the king, who eats the first yam. Those who break the taboos are ostracised. Informants said that the reason for the taboos on new yam is to enhance community celebration and engender communal spirit.

### **(iii) Taboos on animal life**

The Yoruba also have taboos that are associated with the protection of animal lives, (Adewumi, personal communication). The study discovers that among the people, it is forbidden for one to kill animals

indiscriminately because the locals know the need to balance the traditional ecosystem. In fact, it is an abomination to deliberately kill a female domesticated animal which is nursing its kid(s). When wild games are caught, the kids are not killed, unless inadvertently, but are left to go away or they are nursed by the hunters. Birds are hunted by the people, but there are rules governing the hunting of birds. Birds are not killed with their hatched kittens. One may pick up eggs of birds for rearing or consumption, but when they are hatched, the kittens are not killed but nursed or allowed to roam away. It is said that defaulters will grow beaks like birds. This cannot be confirmed as all taboos are meant to teach moral lessons and not to be accepted as scientific truths.

**(iv) Taboos on forests and trees**

There are taboos associated with forests. The land is divided into *aluju/ofe* (open grassland), *akuro* (waterlogged), *igbo* (forest) and *aginju* (thick forest). Their ecological condition produces forested areas within the region, which are useful for agricultural, religious, economic, and social purposes. For these reasons, forests are protected with taboos, which curb excessive foraging into them. Religiously, thick forests are conceived as the abodes of (*iwin*) spirits by the Yoruba people, and for this reason, some forests are specifically reserved for religious purposes. Among the Yoruba in general, it was noticed that terms such as *igbo Olodumare*, *igbo Irunmole* and *igbo Iwin* are used to describe the untouchability of some forests which have been dedicated for religious purposes and such groves are forbidden to the public. Thus, the recent invasion of sacred forests by herders and lumber contractors has become worrisome to the locals who viewed this as a grave form of desecration. The forests provide sources of hunting, farming especially cash crop plantations and potent herbs, (Akande, personal communication; Oju, personal communication).

Apart from forests, some important trees are considered as having spiritual benefits to the community such as *ayun* (used for making drums), which is considered as beloved by the deities. Furthermore, some isolated big trees are held sacrosanct within the communities such as those at the market squares that the people hold as abodes of such spirit beings like witches and wizards. In addition to these are some big trees, which are held as spots of sacrifice for particular deities. The folks easily identify such trees because the traditional priests always mark out such trees by tying palm on them or by tying white cloth around them. It is

considered an abomination to cut down such trees, Adewumi, personal communication; Obahun, personal communication).

**(v) Totemic taboos**

This refers to taboos on sacred animals that are aligned with lineages or group of people. Important part of the tradition of the Yoruba which enriches their ecospirituality is the enactment of taboos placed on animals that are considered sacred with totemic importance. There are two degrees of totemic animals among the people; first degree refer to totems held by the whole community and the second are held by lineages. Totems are held as sacred beings that must not be harmed or maimed, killed or eaten. Among the Yoruba, the maiming, killing or eating of totemic animals or fish is considered an abomination, (Adewumi, personal communication; Oju, personal communication; Yakubu, personal communication). The identification of totems among the Yoruba is indicated in the *oriki* (cognomen) of the lineage or communities.

**The Ecophilosophy of the Yoruba**

Ecophilosophy (ecology and philosophy) is the philosophical reflection of a group of people on their natural environment. Ecophilosophy plays important roles in the lives of the Yoruba people. Data from this study show that ecophilosophy plays three great importance roles; it provides cultural identity to the people; it strengthens their social organisation and it forms the basis for their ethical norms and morality.

**(i) It gives cultural Identity**

The ecophilosophy of the Yoruba forms part of the basic cultural identity of the people. Their beliefs and practices give meaning to their "Yorubanness". This study identifies that ecophilosophical elements permeate their cultural identity such as the general acceptance of *ile Oduduwa* (land of Oduduwa) as incorporating Yorubaland and peoples, and the believe in their pantheons, which are unique to them. Rivers in Yorubaland have indigenous name, hills are named by dialects and forests are so named by indigenous nomenclatures, Aina, personal communication). As this study shows Yoruba deities are peculiar to them and they are conceived as specifically made for them by the Creator. Thus, their ecophilosophy greatly enhances their Yoruba identity.

**(ii) It provides Social Organisation**

Another major impact of ecophilosophy of the Yoruba is that its forms part of the basis of their social organisation. The notion of life which is engrained within their culture derived from their ecophilosophy which identifies interactions of human and non-human beings as constituents of the created order. Their social organisation is conceived as binary oppositions in line with structuralism, in which human and non-human, male and female, sacred and mundane are acknowledged in nature, (Olayemi, personal communication). These binaries define the social roles and cultural limitations of all individuals and material things in Yoruba culture. By the nature of Yoruba's ecophilosophy, their social organisation, inter-human relationships and interconnectedness with the natural environment are ordered for total synergy.

**(iii) It provides foundation of ethics and morality**

The ethical norms and morality of the Yoruba are largely defined and sustained by their ecophilosophy. This study discovers that ecophilosophy gives legitimization to their culturally imposed taboos and enactment of abominations about the environment. Without ecophilosophy and its sanctions, moral issues about non-human lives will be treated with levity and will be less effective. For the Yoruba people, their philosophy of life in general offers the basis for moralising and sustaining ethical behaviours which upholds the dignity of human beings and non-human beings in nature, (Oju, personal communication).

**Conclusion**

The study concludes that afroecology offers a synthesis of the study of human-environment interconnectedness within African milieu. It shows the richness of human-nonhuman relationships in Africa. The study of the Yoruba showcases the combination of religiosity, spirituality and philosophy as intertwined within traditional societies of Africa. The study observes that traditional African societies have great respect for the environment and that this derives from their hallowed pristine tradition of communicating with the environment as a being. In the face of mounting and unremitting ecological crises that is bedevilling the world, traditional communities like the Yoruba offer some pristine methodologies for ameliorating the menace.

As humanity totters along the path of extinction, it is recommended that the adoption of being eco-friendly, traditional Yoruba afroecological

mechanism, together with modern scientific methods are highly apropos. It is germane to the issue of ecology to recover, distil and deploy autochthonous afroecological philosophies and methodologies to confront the current environmental crises. The Yoruba word, *omoluabi* (child sired with excellent conduct), which encompasses the best virtues in human beings, is thus recommended as the most suitable conduct to be adopted in human-environment relationship. An *omoluabi* will cherish all species in creation, and seek to nourish the earth and everything on it. Such a person will not despoil and desecrate it. Afroecology is the most suited tool for ecological study within African cultural milieu.

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