

**THE HUMAN PERSON, TREES AND SPIRITUALITY IN IGBO
COSMOLOGY**

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Abstract

This work argues that the human person in Africa interacts with ecology (trees, animals, groves and others) in his or her daily living. The ecology for him or her (is not just existing on its own), but has a lot of relationship which enhances the interactions for the betterment of man and the society. The researcher is advocating for planting sacred trees will no doubt improve the environment and make it more conducive for human habitation.

Keywords: Man, Person, Trees, Spirituality, Igbo, African Society

Introduction

The central implication of the meaning of society as rightly observed by Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) is that there can be no society without man. In other words, the society is made up of the individual persons, and without these individual persons, there will be no society in existence. In furtherance to that, man in order to survive needs companionship and company. African man is not solitary, and life is meaningless for him if he lives in solitude. He needs fellowship with other men; he wants wholeness, solidarity and tenacity of purpose; he also needs deliverance and protection from the dangers and troubles of the world. He may not be able to achieve this without the co-operation and assistance of his fellow men and other natural forces. Thus, man's spiritual and physical needs and elements become one that cannot be separated, making him to engage other natural creation like trees in his daily life.

Turaki (2000) describes this relationship of man and society (including his environment) as Holism or Organism – the law of harmony. According to him, the law of harmony simply means “a state of agreement or peacefulness”. The traditional African seeks to live in harmony and to balance his life in a harmonious and peaceful existence with his entire world, the spiritual and other natural

phenomena, like tree which also serve his spiritual and physical needs (Kanu 2015).

Stayne (1990) uses this term to further describe a world that interacts with itself. The sky, the spirits, the earth, the physical world, the living and the deceased all act, interact and react in consort. From this conception, the African man stands face to face with the 'physical', the 'material' and the 'spiritual' dimensions of his world. He interacts with them and they in turn interact with him. Stayne observes that man feels at one with his world and his world mystically and naturally reciprocates. Man does not differentiate strictly speaking between the physical and the spiritual. They are but knit together in a whole. The spirit world is all the same tacitly understood as inclusive in nature. African traditional world-view is a unity, not a confused world of non-integrated parts, holistic, mysterious and putting into use natural objects for the full realization of all the potentials of life.

Interaction of Beings in African Traditional Religion

The interaction of beings in African world-view is best seen against the background of the African concepts of being and African concept of time (Metuh, 1987). Generally speaking, in contrast to modern western outlook, being in African thought is dynamic not static, it is animated and not mechanical. It is like the concept of time in Africa which is cyclical and not lineal. Referring to many aspects of the Bantu philosophy of vital force, Tempels (1969), elaborates such vital force content of the African world-view which most African societies have in common. The second international congress of Africanists in Dakar, 1967, proposed the philosophy of NTU, which they chose after taking it as a philosophy which covers all Africa. Most of the ideas which reflect the African art of living are contained in the NTU philosophy (Secretarius Pro non-christianis, 1969).

According to Tempels as quoted in Metuh (1987), the concept of being in Bantu though is essentially active, is at all times acting and being acted upon by all other beings. No being is completely static, not even a stone or a piece of metal. A being that does not act is a non-being. It does not exist. Secondly, being is alive, it is seen, as a "He rather than an it". Being is capable of being strengthened or weakened through interaction with other beings. Being maintains an intimate ontological relationship and constantly interact with one another, transcending mechanical, chemical and psychological interactions although such interactions or forces either strengthened or weaken one another. In these interactions, there is an ontological hierarchy of beings, from God to the least elements. They form a chain,

through the links of which the forces of the vital force come in contact with all the forces, animal, vegetable and mineral. All creatures are found in a relationship according to the laws of the hierarchy. Temples puts it this way “Nothing moves in the universe of forces without influencing others by its movement. The world of forces is held like spider’s web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network”.

The Interactions of Man and Trees

It was Adibe (2008) who said that in the Igbo individual thinking cap, ideas and spirituality must conform to what the Igbo society cherishes and respects as true and beneficial to the entire Igbo persons and for the advancement of their well-being. Enekwe (1987) agrees to this fact when he says that even though Igbo individualism is highly developed, however, that must not negate the Igbo concept of communal humanism that is found in most of Africa. The Igbo like his African brothers live as a group, see things as a group, and do things as a group. The Igbo life style would never tolerate any individual venture. The Igbo man is very well down to earth with sharp but acute thinking. His perception goes beyond natural environment to metaphysical realm. Vegetation is just not vegetation but something beyond nature. Some animals are classified as sacred or non-sacred. Ede (1985), alludes to this fact when he asserts that Igbo people’s close attachment to the soil and nature stems from their personal relationship with nature extending to anything that gives life. He observes this natural interaction of all beings in Igboland when he posits that supra sensory entities- Plants, trees, animate or inanimate realities can possess human attributes, for instance, Appetites, Vitues and Vicas. Animals and spirits are involved in competition like human beings. The human and non-human beings like animals and trees interact and communicate in a lively way. Indeed, Igbo metaphysical life is consistent with the concept of natural religion. Everything and everything is connected: The secular and the sacred, the natural and the supernatural, are a continuum (Enekwe, 1987). Mbiti (1970) is emphatic when he asserts that nature (including trees) is not an empty impersonal object as it has religious significance for the Africans and the entirety of human existence and societal survival. Africans see God in and behind nature and its phenomena. This invisible world manifests itself in the visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature including the trees. The African believes in spirits as self-existing entities who however could also inhibit material objects (Nwala, 1985). The good value of nature could lead to many speculations, hence Nnabuchi (1987) would say that trees live in season and possess various functions as spark of life from the divine. They therefore possess

spiritual as well as material relevance (Adibe, 2008). Adibe gives a vivid account of Nnabuchi who is an Igbo 'dibia' of repute who alleges that "Anunu-ebe" which is a rare tree has both spiritual and physical selves; a tree which no bird dares fly over or perch on it. In the same vein, no animal walks under it nor stay under it when its spiritual forces are at home with physical counterpart. But when there is a separation between the physical and the spiritual bodies, birds and animals can get near it. However, on the return of the spiritual counterpart, those things in, on or under it become dead. Nnabuchi (1987) states further that if by chance a person touches 'njuofi' (another type of mysterious plant), he automatically loses his senses and therefore strays into the jungle and would remain missing until a search party is organized. Fishes also possess varying spiritual qualities and attributes.

Obianika et al (2015) observe that every society, however, primitive or remote in history, has a philosophy that underlies and guides her definition of reality, direct her actions and interactions and inspire her epistemology, giving rise to certain practices like the giving of living names to certain objects in the natural environments. Some of these natural objects include but not limited to trees, groves, lands, animals, rivers and even public places. In traditional Igbo society, the practice of interaction of beings has led to the practice of giving special names to certain trees, besides a philosophical base of defining Igbo cosmology, such practice also serves as a means of defining the economic nature and structure of the primitive and even the present Igbo society. Being an agrarian society, Igbo consider nature and natural environment as part of their economy.

Nwosu (2014) observes that in Igbo (African) culture, plants possess magical and or mysterious powers, which are believed to have been endowed by their Chi (god). Thus, traditional religion is intertwined with the culture and lives of these indigenes. Therefore, the health and progress of every individual is predestined by his or her Chi (god) and further predicted on it. Plants feature prominently in the Igbo religious ceremonies. Nwubani (2013) adds his voice that trees in Igbo society are important in her spirituality as symbols of life and channels to the earth force. Trees are symbols of life and channels to the earth force and are often at the centre of shrines. Ohia (2019) posits that Igbo culture extends significance to trees. These trees feature in representing the mystic, giving longevity and also serving as traveling portals. Most of these trees are perennial in nature – having the ability to survive adverse conditions and to live for a very long time. Mbiti (1969) observes that in Africa, mythical trees feature in a number of stories. For example, the Herero speak of their 'tree of life' said to be located in the other-world

(spiritual) and believed to be the source from which all life emanates. Some, like the Nuer and Sandave, hold that man originated from a tree. Others narrate about the forbidden tree whose fruit God forbade the early men to eat. When man broke the law and ate the forbidden fruit, death came into the world and God withdrew Himself from man. The wild fig tree is considered sacred by many African societies and people make offerings, sacrifices and prayers around or under it. There are also sacred groves and other trees, including the sycamore and the baobab used for religious purposes or associated with God and other spiritual beings. Some societies like the Maqsai, Meru and Mao, use grass in performing rituals, saying prayers and making offerings to God.

We have seen from the discussions that the man of Africa and indeed the Igbo society interact with ecology (trees, animals, groves and others) in his daily living. The ecology for him (is not just existing on its own), but has a lot of relationship which enhances the interactions for the betterment of man and the society. No wonder Nnabuchi observes that in this all important interaction of man and ecology (trees) that all trees or herbs have mystical powers. In his opinion, some trees are commonly referred to as symbolic representation of mystical or spiritual beings or powers. He writes that some herbs are associated with Lunar movement, while some are more powerful when the moon is not visible. For him:

Certain herbs are removed at a time when the nearest market is in full session or active. Some are removed on particular days. Also certain periods such as 6.00am, 9.00am and 12.00noon, 3.00pm, 6.00pm, 9.00pm and 12.00 midnight are vital times when herbs are removed. The first cock crow heralds the most active period of some very destructive herbs as well as reminding certain beings that it is time to begin a backward march to their respective homes. A sizeable percentage of herbs are nevertheless alert and active at every moment of the day, season or climate condition (Adibe, 2008).

In Igbo cosmology, man articulates the fact of spiritual entities of reverence from his interactions with nature, forming the core of his world-view. Then through an abstraction from the phenomenal objects within his active life experiences, he comes up with concepts for day-to-day life in the society (Nwala, 1985). In Igbo land as we shall soon observe, some trees serve some religious/Spiritual purpose for the people. The use of such object of ecology for religious practices is aimed at attracting the mystical power inherent in them. They therefore serve as great religious symbols and healing balms.

Trees, man and their Spirituality in Igbo World-view

Spiritually means so many things to a lot of people. There exist various definitions of the term spiritually. But for the purposes of our discussions here, three definitions have been identified as relating to the theme of our concern. Puchaskl (2001), agrees that "Spiritually is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred". This is very relevant given the interest of this work which anchors on the relationship between the Igbo man (African) trees (nature) in the expression of meaning and purpose which is basically for man's safety and all-round well being. Denyse and Mario (2007) posit that "Spirituality means any experience that is thought to bring the experiencer into contact with the divine (in other words, not just any experience that feels meaningful). Like wise when we talk about trees, Spirituality and the African man, we are referring to their contact with the divine and not just any form of relationship. Murry and Zentner (1979) add that the Spiritual dimension tries to be in harmony with the universe, and strives for answers about the infinite, and comes into focus when the person faces emotional stress, physical illness or death. This, in line with the reviewed definitions, the interactions and interrelatedness of humans and sacred or spiritual trees are clear cut manifestations of the inability of one to survive with the other. Hence trees depict a great degree of prominence in Igbo society as symbols of life, spirituality and channels to the earth.

They are conduits to the earth force, often at the centre of shrines and sacred places (Nnabugwu, 2021). In Igbo culture, a child's umbilical cord is buried with a newly planted fruit tree (103abelin); this becomes the child's 'tree of life' which secures lands, confirms the child's blood relation to the patrilineage, and forms a bond between the child and the mother earth, ala. 'Palm tree' and 'Uha' tree are believed by the people to have a life of longevity spanning over a hundred years. The 'Uha' tree otherwise known as African Rose wood leaves (*Pterocarpus mildraedii*) has about 60 species. Apart from its commercial values, it is believed among the people in reference here that it has a spiritual connection with the spiritual world which makes it live longer than most of the vegetable trees. The tree is one of the two where several umbilical cords are buried to attract longevity to the new born.

The researcher observes that a particular cite was cleared quite recently in Ikperejere community of Ihitte/Uboma LGA for building purpose. In the process

a retired Secondary School Headmaster from the neighbourhood refused the owner of the land under construction from pulling down a particular 'Uha' tree arguing that his umbilical cord was buried at the foot of that tree, insisting that cutting or pulling down that tree meant cutting his life short. The palm tree (*Ecaeis guineensis*) even in Zambia were used in prayers before administering a drug to ensure the effectiveness of medicine and successful recovery of a patient. Smith and Dale (1920) argue that the Ba - Ila healer used a rattle made of round palm fruits on a handle during ritual therapies. To the Lunda in Zambia, the red colour of the mesocarp oil from palm tree symbolizes power, but it is also interpreted as a sign of murder and witchcraft (Turner, 1967). On Mfangano Island in Kenya, the Suba and Luo still use the fruits to alleviate skin rash associated with HIV/AIDS. The disease - locally known as 'chira', and its ethnology is related to transgression of principles governing sexuality or seniority. These include adultery committed during a wife's pregnancy, having sexual intercourse during the harvest, or failure to observe the proper separation of sexuality between generations (Nagata, M, et al, 2011).

In Nigeria, to prevent miscarriage, Yoruba people used to roast a tortoise with a mixture of a bottle of palm oil from palm tree, after which the mixture is grounded to powder, then consumed in a corn flour pudding, taken every morning and evening during ones menstrual period, followed by sexual intercourse five days after finishing menstruating (Maclean, 1977). In Liberia, the Mano used red palm oil in the treatment of mysterious diseases. To awake a patient in coma, red palm oil was mixed with a burned knot of the parasite *Loranthus micranthus* and rubbed on the patient's cheeks towards the mouth in order to make him talk (Harley, 1970). Even the 'Omu-nkwu' (tender leaves of the palm tree) is a religious/mystical symbol of 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). The Ogirishi tree (*New Bouldia Leavis*) in Igbo land is often used for the deceased; the tree is regarded as the converging point of ancestor. Its use controls religious presence of the mystical power of the ancestors. As a very prominent ritual tree in Igbo culture, and perennial in nature, it is further used to indicate land boundaries, headsides of graves, and to handle ritual cleansing like washing of hands after handling corpses, digging of graves and burial of corpses. Oha (2019) reports that perhaps, Ogirishi tree is the most visible sacred tree in Igbo culture. The graves of those men who die outside marriage (i.e as bachelors) are traditionally symbolized with the Ogirishi "holding" the kitchen knife for them.

The knife in question is therefore representing lack of fulfillment and is placed in Ogirishi on the grave to mark the absence of a wife (to hold it, to mourn him).

'Anunuebe' tree literarily means that "no bird perches on it" or no bird has the courage to sit on it to rest'. This may be frightening as it has tremendous magical/spiritual powers. It is a tree that can transform and cause to transform. It is a tree that can do things in Igbo cosmology. It is, therefore not only social but also very sacred. In Igbo land, the mere mention of 'Anunuebe' tree is scary. Thus, the tree is descriptively named to warn and frighten, indirectly. The warning is analogical, if birds avoid it, which other warning does one need again; the tree is sacred because of the religious role it plays in the 105abeling105al Igbo society.

The 'Ngwu' tree (*Albizia Adcantifolio*) has many mystical meaning given to it. The tree is often seen alone in the large compound with no other tree nearby. It is regarded as unnatural tree. It is believed in Igbo culture to have mystical power of repelling other vegetation. In some areas like Nkpor (Adibe, 2008), it is believed that spirits abundantly reside in it. When activated, it is the symbol of Agwu deity. Naturally, it has many myths and even mystical in action. It could serve for many mystical functions for a knowledgeable traditional medicine man (dibia). As it is considered as a sacred tree in Igboland, Oha (2019) posits that it is not to be cut down and used for fuelwood at all. Infact based on a folklore, there is a strong point to the sacredness of Ngwu tree warning that it must not be cut down. It was observed in Black Orpheus of 21st April 167 as follows: "The Ngwu tree sacred and mystic; it is a symbol of magic and supernatural power". In some parts of Igbo land (Etiti Province), living near the Ngwu tree is total security. One near the 'Ngwu' tree has a protector, a shield of shields. The resident has no worries, for 'Ngwu' is safety, not just that it guarantees it. The tree in real social life is also revered. It is used in marking off land boundaries, partly because it is perennial as a plant. It is also used in other serious rituals. The human being is also metaphorised as 'Ngwu' or seen as being linked to Ngwu.

Oji tree is special and connotes some content and quality of spirituality in Igbo cosmology. The nut is used in so many rituals and ceremonies. Oji (the Kolanut) is highly revered and so its tree. In most parts of Igboland, Oji tree (*Cola Acuminata*) is a symbol of hospitality; it serves for mystical/religious communion with the spirit forces; it conceptualizes life and affirms it; enemies cannot share from same Kola-nut; it is food for the spirits; it could serve as the only sacrificial contact between a poor person and his elements of worship. It is a prayer point that links the living and the dead. It is classified as animate object because it must

be fresh before ritual use (Adibe, 2008). One person is not understood as the owner of Oji tree, although one person can plant it. It is always communally owned in some parts of Igboland, making many people share in its wealth. It therefore stands as the people's bond, just as the nut is used for traditions and spiritual communion. The branches of the tree are not normally cut for fuelwood, even if the tree could be pruned. The tree is not the only tree around, but is seen as symbolizing the connection of the past of the ancestors and the present of their survivors. It is the present that inherits the past, that continues the past and its narratives. In Igbo cosmology, the spirituality of the Oji tree manifests in its presence of the womb of life, the continuity of the narratives introduced in the distant past.

There is another type of Oji tree, most commonly known by the Yoruba name Iroko and known botanically as *Milicia 106abeli*. The Iroko tree in Igbo culture is linked to reincarnation of certain individuals. It is a general belief that a reincarnated individual buries his or her Iyi - uwa (a special kind of stone, which forms the link between an Ogbanje and the spirit world) with which his or her reincarnation was made possible under such trees. It ought to be noted that Iyi - uwa is an object from Igbo mythology that binds the spirit of a dead child (known as Ogbanje) to the world, causing it to return and be born again by the same mother (Okonkwo et al 2016). Nwaubani (2018) notes that Iroko tree is very large and considered to have many mystical power. The tree is always planted near shrines to give the same impression as a cathedral. It also stands as a metaphor for strength, mobility and resilience. Its wood is used for titled men's stools, compound doors/gates, and large Iroko slit drums, as well as other important rituals items. Iroko tree is about 186 feet in height, and is adored by Igbo people. Igbo in reverence to the tree bear names after the tree because of what it represents. Such names as Oji, Nwoji, and the likes are all treatment to true significance of the tree to Igbo people (Nnabugwu, 2021).

The Ofo tree (*Detranium macrocapun*) is the tree from which the staff of justice of the same name is hewn from. It is generally forbidden to cut or place a knife against a living Ofo tree or use its branches for firewood. Therefore, the Ofo branches had to naturally fall off in order to be used as a staff of justice, such sticks would have to be consecrated through a ritual known as 'Isa - ofo'. The Ofo serves as a connection between the living and the ancestors and the spirit world. The Ofo tree also serve as shrine in most Igbo communities. According to a South East Voice report of Vanguard News Nigeria, Ofo stands for truthfulness, justice and sincerity. It is a symbol of spirituality that connects people with the spirit of their

ancestor. It is the most unique tree in Igboland providing antidote for poison. It is a defender of the innocent and the oppressed. Like the Christian Bible, one does not carry it carelessly. Its spirituality manifests in its use to call on the Almighty God to intervene on issues before men. As a symbol of spirituality of the Igbo nation. From time immemorial Igbo people had close relationship with the God head, the Supreme Being. Each Igbo group had a symbol that connects them with the God head, that symbol is the Ofo. The Ofo can be ritualized as an item of prayer by speaking to it activate the efficacy inherent in it. As a mystical symbol of truth, purity, justice and authority, it has a spiritual dimension attached to it.

The 'Akpu' or 'Apu' tree known as silk cotton in English Language with its botanical name as ceiba Petandra (Okonkwo et al., 2006) or Bombas Buonopozense (Adibe, 2008) is another sacred tree in Igbo world-view. It is a tree of fertility due to the large expanse of its roots, trunk and branches. When it is ritually consecrated, it serves symbolically for religious mystical contact with the spirit world for seeking protection and progress in life. Even without consecration, it is regarded as abode of the spirits. In some Igbo localities, the trunk is covered with white cloth. Beneath the trunk, votaries offer sacrifices through priest agents for mystical communication with patron spirit for security and welfare. Simeon Okeke an indigene of Ikpenweafor community in Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State told the researcher in the year 2010 that during the Nigerian Civil War that lasted for about 30 months, natives of the area were running under the tree to take cover at the hearing of the sound of any aircraft or shooting of the gun. According to him, the community shrine known as 'Thu-Ala' was cited at the foot of the big Akpu tree and it later formed a thicket which covered about half a plot of land with a huge opening under the tree that can house the entire villagers. He recalled with pride that every living thing - goats, chickens, sheep, humans - ran to take cover under the tree at the sound of a gun or aircraft and that nobody under it was hurt nor hit by a bullet until the war ended in 1970. While writing about this tree, Nwaubani (2018) agrees that the tree is a sacred silk cotton which is a way to the unseen world of ancestors and spirits. It is where spirits of children stay and sitting under this tree is said to increase the chances of pregnancy. The leaves resemble cassava leaves, so it is possible the name was loaned to cassava when it was imported into Nigeria by the Europeans in the last 500 years. The tender leaves of the tree and its flowers are edible. The researcher recalls that soon after the Nigerian Civil War and up to the late 80s, the tender leaves and the flower served as sauce for yam and cocoyam delicacies in many communities in Ihitte/Uboma LGA of Imo State. Nnabugwu (2021) adds that in Igbo towns like

Igboukwu people refer the tree as the “Oghomgbo (bullet shield), in the ancient times, it is believed that any warrior that hugs the tree before going to war, would come back unscathed.

The ‘Achi’ tree is noted for its size and the amount of shade it provides. It has similar symbol to the Oji (Iroko) tree in terms of spirituality and ritual, but it is mostly prized for its fruit. Like many large trees, it houses spirits and is a portal for ancestors. It is a symbol of resilience, strength and virility. The Achi seeds are used for cooking and it’s still highly prized in the modern Igbo society.

‘Uburu’ or ‘Ubulu’ is a totemic tree which used to be central to many Igbo settlements and has lent its name to several people such as Ubulu Uku (the big Ubulu). The tree is highly revered in Delta state and it is reported that the original tree which the town is named after still stands in the middle of this town from where the first families spread out from hundreds of years ago.

Another major Igbo tree endowed with spirituality is the Udara tree also known as chrysophyllum Albidum. Adibe writes that it is a special fruit bearing plant. If fruitful, it has many adoring fruits on the branches. For its yearly yields, it is regarded as sacred tree with natural fertility. When it ritually consecrated, it serves symbolically for the religious mystical contact with the spirit world, while seeking for fertility. In some Igbo localities, the trunk is covered with white cloth. Beneath the trunk votaries offer sacrifices through priest agents. The fruits are never clubbed or plucked. It is left to fall on its own when ripe. It is sweet to suck. Religiously, it is often called mother, it must not be cut or felled without a ritual of appeasing the deity of fertility. Once the tree is consecrated, it serves as a symbol of fertility.

The ‘Ube’ tree (*Dacryodes edulis*) is another spiritual tree in Igbo world-view. It is used in the carving of Ikenga, Agwu, masquerade masks, royal stools and drums (Kramer, 2006). This tree is important to the people under study because it further affirms the people’s support for African cosmology and preference in carved objects which are used for religious and cultural purposes. The tree is also a source of many herbal medicines. It has long been used in the traditional medicine of some African countries to treat various ailments such as wounds, skin diseases, dysentery and fever. The extracts and secondary metabolites have been found to show antimicrobial and antioxidant activities (Conrad and Uche, 2013). Conrad (2014) writes that in Amichi village (Nnewi South) and its adjoining clans, a man dissatisfied with his wife would commence his divorce intensions with Ube leaves

by taking along with his wife a keg of palm wine to his father – in-law and covering the keg with the leaves upon reaching his in-laws. Where the woman commits adultery and the husband is unwilling to continue with the marriage, he sends her with a keg of palm wine stuffed with Ube leaves to her father, accomplishing ‘Ubebelu’ in the process, a condition of “never to return to her matrimonial home.

‘Aboshi’ tree also known as *Baphia nitida* is a sacred tree in Igbo land. The researcher’s discussion with Eugene Nwokenna and Nduemenchehie Ukagbaihe in Uboma and Ihitte revealed that spirits are believed to be attracted to this tree. No wonder the tree features prominently in locations of shrines especially in market places. Observing the Duruonina deity shrine and Dirimo shrine, the aboshi trees were seen amongst the trees that gave the location a feeling of awe and sacredness. One Amos Anyanwu who had a discussion with the researcher recalled when around the early part of the 60’s, his wife was accompanied to a local birth attendant for the delivery of a baby. As it were then, Amos who did not join the wife initially, later prepared to visit the expectant wife at the birth place about twelve kilometers away from his home. On his way, he told the researcher that he approached the Ihu-ala deity, cut a leaf of the aboshi tree, placed it on his folded left palm and hit it hard with his right palm. When the leaf exploded, he spoke to the shrine, informing it that he was on his way to visit his wife who was about to put to bed. That if it turns out a baby boy, he would offer to the shrine a cock and if a female, he would offer a hen. He then asked that the deity ala would grant him safe journey. When the woman put to bed a female child, Amos brought a hen before the shrine, tied it at the foot of the aboshi tree and left. On further inquiring on while he chose the leaf of aboshi tree, Amos emphasized that the tree and leaves attract the attention and presence of the spirit beings with its special odour and as a perennial tree.

As can be observed from the discussion so far, it is manifest that in African world-view, there exist an interaction of forces with the sole essence of the survival and betterment of all the parties and entities. 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 (Onyeocha, 1997). This interaction further affords the African to see humanity as in harmony with nature and in the task to love, nurture, protect and maintain it, since the African sees human survival as tied up with nature’s own survival and without nature’s survival the question of the fittest would be irrelevant.

Spiritual Trees and the Agents of Change

The colonization of Africa by the West and the accompanied missionary activities of Europe and other allies, modernism and so called white man's development in no small measures devastated the interaction of beings and the African Traditional Religion. Egbucha, (2007) agrees that the traditional religions of Africa have witnessed series of revolutionary changes, and that every aspect of the religion is involved. The New Encyclopedia Britannica (1981) explains change from the social point of view as an alteration of mechanism within the social structures characterized by change in cultural symbols, rules of labeling or value system. If this change is therefore applied to religious traditions of Africa, the consequences are tremendous. Though Beatie (1964) sees social change as a continuous process of events occurring over time and space resulting in modification, displacement and replacement of systems within a particular society, the type that affected the interaction of beings and spirituality of trees in Africa cosmology have done Africa no good. This externally induced religious change in Igboland according to Onwubiko (1991) made ancient law and custom not exist side by side nor intermingle with the principles of British Government and the missionary religions.

By the combined efforts of the missionaries and colonial government on the presumption of their responsibility of a superior culture/religion over an 'inferior' (African culture), the sacred trees soon witnessed demolitions and abandonment. It did three things in African cosmology.

- It changed the physical environment
- The thought patterns of the people and therefore,
- Changed the behavioral pattern of the African people.

In their quest to win converts, the missionaries religions attacked frontally traditional religious practices and belief system of the people labeling them as heathen, idol worship or juju. This was apparent because most of the early religious teachers of that time were not natives and therefore did not understand the exact practices and involvement of the spiritual belief linked to these trees and pants. The Churches in some areas engaged in a revolution against belief on deities who were thought to inhabit the trees. Consequently, these trees were cut down and destroyed. It is further in evidence that as the Churches continue to expand and win converts, they were given land in areas housing the shrines and by extension these trees where they cleared to erect structures or building for Church

services. For members of the new faith to be fully admitted into the Church and to partake in their services, natives must renounce their traditional beliefs and practices prompting them to uproot such trees from their locations.

As the attack from the missionary religions were going on, modernism was attacking frontally too. The culture of erecting modern houses made of corrugated iron sheets and blocks made of cement was gaining prominence among the Igbo people. As thatched houses were pulled down and replaced with concrete houses, the trees were brought down further to provide for their roofing needs. The researcher recalls that the Akpu tree that was standing with the Ala deity shrine in his village was brought down and used to roof the village hall. The same have been the fate of other trees in this category. In all the ecosystem has greatly been affected adversely. The modern day road construction and expansion of already built roads encourages the going into extinction of the sacred trees. The felling of such trees has been quite unprecedented as there seem to be no remedy or replacement of such sacred trees. In all of these, the Igbo man has been left and disconnected from the spiritual side of life and societal orderliness. The result being the uprooting of the traditional African from his religion and culture without an alternative as, the incidences of missionary religions and modernism are alien to the African soil.

Conclusion

In all, the Igbo including every African people and culture are in a dilemma of cultural decimation. Colonialism and its vestages had paved the way for today's cultural globalization by leaving Africa and indeed Igboland in a state of cultural disorientation and vulnerability to an unending cultural inversion. Western culture fuels globalization just as it did during the age of colonialism and imperialism. Similarly, globalized cultural structures and tendencies have taken over the traditional forms of creation, dissemination and preservation of culture (trees inclusive). This globalization had Westernised African cultural adjustment template- cloths, music, food, art, images, religion, spiritually and by extension social life. Under this predicament, Africa's indigenous culture's roles including the roles of spiritual and sacred trees as a spontaneous and integral part of people's life is eroded, ceasing it from serving as the means of constructing social values, reproducing the all important group identity, and thus building social cohesion, peace and stability. This predominant Western influence stifles the culture and traditions of Africa, forcing Africa to abandon her cultural Identity.

It will be proper to state here that granted that every society is dynamic, such dynamism should not be to the detriment of the people or against their survival. It is not in doubt given the place and the enormous benefits, spiritually and economically these trees afford the African, that we can't afford to continue to destroy our ecosystem in the name of foreign religions, modernity or development or globalization.

A time to beat a retreat and consider the health benefits of the people by planting such trees has come. The researcher does not advocate that people should revert to worshipping these trees. Rather, planting such trees will no doubt improve the environment and make it more conducive for human habitation. The time to do the right thing is now.

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