



THE CONSEQUENCES OF DISPLACING THE GODS THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

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Abstract

African traditional values have preserved the earth in one peaceful harmony between the gods and man before modernity. Some of these moral environmental values like offering of *èbò*, *ìpèsè* and *ètùtù* (all in the realm of sacrifice) are no longer appreciated. One major threat to mankind in this contemporary time is the final collapse of the structure that holds the earth. It is not surprising seeing the anger of the gods in fighting man back, in forms of earth quake, flood, famine, disaster etc. This paper therefore, discusses the implication of environmental pollution and the reaction of the gods towards it. In carrying out the research work, a qualitative research methodology was adopted in harnessing facts. The study revealed that the negative weather conditions like global warming, climate change, food insecurity, flood, etc. are all effects derived from the displacement of the deities that are ruling the natural environment of man couple with negligent of moral codes guiding these natural environment and the gods. It is therefore, recommended that man should respect these gods, *all-natural phenomena and spirits* by giving them what they deserve from man and nature so as to attain an ecological balance between the gods and man.

Keywords: African, Morality, Environment, The gods, Weather.

Introduction

The world was created basically for the adaptation of man which is the cure to every creation stories that ever existed. Some of the Yoruba deities were primordial in nature, identifying their personality with various element of the earth for example *Yemoja*, *Q̄sun*, (connected as water goddesses), *Oya* (connected with the wind and air), *Osanyin* (the Lord of all plants and the forest), *Orìṣà oko* (attendant of the earth and by excellence the keeper of agriculture)etc. Overtime, man began to relate with the deities as an intermediaries between himself and the unseen God. These deities communed with man, establishing rules of worship and mode of governance essential for both co-existences. These rules were in form of moral code underscoring an ethical balance of what is right and what is wrong. As noted by (Majasan, 1975: 19) that there is a close connection between religion and morality in an African traditional setting. African societies are structured within this framework of moral standards intertwined between the physical and the spiritual. The early traditional African man kept the moral code to his environment, preserving its nature and sacredness. The traditional African man understands nature; he possesses the ability to feel the earth, hear its heartbeats, perceive its pleasure and worries and respond adequately.

The revolution of the traditional man into the modern man brought about a turning point of environmental serenity to a chaos state of affairs. As beautiful and easy science has made things, the modern society is left with the burden to correct the negative impact of science to mother earth. For example, the negative effect of carbon monoxide emitted from auto-mobiles or industrial machine polluting the air. The indiscriminate dumping of refuse which obviously constitute products like nylon or poly bag, blocking the water ways and gradually finding their way to the farm land. The deforestation of the forest and gradual extinction of endangered species are issue associated with environmental devaluation. These and more are matters arisen that this work has analyzed. Thereby, looking at the negative side effects of environment pollution on some Yoruba Gods connected with air, water and land.

Water Pollution and the African Water/River Goddesses

In the African cosmological structure, the gods or *Orisa* are intermediary between God and Man. There are representative of various element on earth each having its unique functionality. These deities have their moral code of conduct, as an acceptable character which is distinct between what is right and wrong. The etiquette of moral behavioral representation is geared towards the sustainability of its energy.

The essential purity maintained by devotees of the water goddess in Yoruba space is basically to avoid inorganic, biological and radiological to the water, which can defile the energy and quality of the water. The sanity of the water is kept pure with regular traditional rites performed to sanitize it. However, this performance becomes difficult with the emergence of modern practices like, mining leading to land mutilation, toxic waste from industrial plants channeled to the water ways causing deficiency in dissolving oxygen in the water or underground water pollution. Its negative impacts are not felt immediately; however with time its damage become colossal. These indirect effects of human economic activities to empty nature resources and other forms of environmental pollution are done without the consequential

reaction of the Gods, who holds these territories together in the first place. The sad consequences to the defilement to the waters that logically stirs up the anger of the gods is that, the excessive amount of wastes into the water increases the mercury content. This in turn will cause disease in human and fishes with a large amount of dyslexia, cadmium poisoning. Polluted water with a little amount of dissolved oxygen makes it difficult for sensitive organism to survive. Other complications from polluted waters are the increase in fluoride leading to neuromuscular disorder, teeth issues, bones complications, and eutrophication (West, 2006: <https://en.wikipedia.org/>). The effects of land drainage, industrial waste and agricultural waste ending up into the waters, is the increases in nutrients which have a way of ageing the water bodies. (Ramamohana, 2017: 153-154)

As the world is filled with numerous sprits, so the Yoruba belief that some of these spirits dwell in waters, rivers or sea. Also, among the dweller within the water areas are experiences and encounters with these spirits beings. For most of the riverside dwellers is the belief that if these water spirits are worship and reverence, it can in turn provide for man's needs. Among these needs is the provision of fishes for the fishermen, protection of the seas for deep sailors, in some cases giving children to seekers. The Yoruba believe that *Yemoja* which is the goddess of all waters generally and from her springs out rivers, lagoons and sea, possess the power to destroy mankind with her powers. These sacred rivers are given elaborate worship through which the water flows, an example is Abeokuta in south western Nigeria were a pot filled with sacred water of *Yemoja* is given to people seeking for one favour or the other. Sacrifices of mashed maize or pounded yam etc. are offered to her. *Yemoja* will punish any person or community who pollutes her water, for example the use of negative charms, evil rituals, dumping of refuse or waste etc. are not allowed in some cases fishing is also prohibited within specific times or days. (Awolalu, 1979: 145)

Similarly, *Ọsun* is a water divinity of Osogbo and she is associated with the river that bears her name. *Ọsun* the goddess of the *Ọsun* River knows for the sacredness of the waters with her healing power through her cool water. It said that she invokes her spirit into the water from where she channels energy for strength and wellness. The possession of the ability to heal is based on the magnanimity caved out of compassion to heal. Her defensive nature is expressed on her children or worshippers, an evidence of which is seen in the testimony of her devotees. Within the higher realm of water spirits is also *Olokun* or *Malokun* the lord of the sea very much worshiped among the people of *Ugbo* and *Igbo egunrin* in Okitipupa division, *Itebu Manuwa* (an Ilaje town in Ijebu province) and in some parts of the Lagos State and in Ile-Ife of south western Nigeria. The river goddesses of the Yoruba land are emphatic of the sustainability to its water leaving them pure of any pollution and her devotees traditionally expectant of her blessing. Unfortunately, modern environmental practice of indiscriminate dump of waste has displaced the functionality of the Gods and negatively affected worship of the river goddess compared to the days of old.



Picture taken by Femi Amogunla/Al Jazeera at the dance, water and prayer celebration of Yemoja in Ibadan(Amogunla, 2020: <https://aljazeera.com>).

The above image shows the worship process of *Yemoja* as offerings were given to her by devotees to appreciate her assistance during the year before and expectant of her support in the current year ahead. However, a good look at the image reveals a hip of waste accumulated inside the river flow. According to Ifayemo a chief and devotee of *Yemoja* who has stayed in the community for over 50 years revealed that, many years back the current *Yemoja* River was pure, clean and beautiful. He further stated that there were fishes everywhere and the water was drinkable. However, with time the river was used as a refuse dump for passersby and defecation Centre by community members. Chief Ifayemo therefore argued that it is as a result of the influence of modern religions which lacks the knowledge and sacredness of the water that can do such. He finally concluded that, he hopes that in the future there will still be water flowing at the river for *Yemoja* worship.

Air Pollution and the African Divinities of the Air

Air Pollution can be defined as the infusion of contaminant into the atmospheric air space which can bring health issues on living beings. The two major sources of air pollution are manmade and the natural causes. The natural causes could be atmospheric compositions of salt particles, wing blow of dust, smog, acidic rain, volcano etc., on the other hand, manmade pollution created by human activities are subject to chemical processes, combustion of atmospheric substance like: refining, heating, roasting processes, farming, mining, quarrying process. Basically, the mixtures formed by these processes congest the air making it harmful to all living things.

Oya a Yoruba deity, who has been given the atmospheric territorial space to govern by *Olodumare*, possesses the ability ranging from the gentlest breeze to the raging hurricane and cyclone. Evidence to her destructive power is the ripping up of trees, buildings, roof tops, violent rainstorms; she is belief to restructure a place after her anger has been expressed. She is worshipped not only in Africa but in Brazil (Apata, 2017: <https://www.takemetonaija.com>). The obvious constant threat to the relevance of *Oya* is the displacement in the current modern air pollution which is

inimically, cutting of the natural atmospheric balance. The resultant effect of the global warming are conspicuous in the recent hurricanes experience is some part of the world. Air pollutions are pressured on the eco-balance leading to climatic change. According to the Nature Journal (Li et al, 2020: www.nature.com), climate change is a major reason for hurricanes and cyclone; this means that in the future, as the world continues to warm up, it likely going to affect area that has not been affected. Further analysis from, (Pinaki, 2020: <https://phys.org>), a senior author of the study and head of the Fluid Mechanics Unit at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University (OIST), advice that, policies should be put in position to reduce the global warming the world is emitting.

Modernity brought with its innovation wonderful ideas to easy man and make life better for him however; the processes of implementing this idea may not be environmentally friendly. For example, the invention of cars made it easy for man to move faster compared with the stone age were man needs to travel for months to get to a particular place. Nevertheless, the carbon compounds of Co₂ which is released into the air by combustion of fossil fuel and CO, a toxic gas from automobile engine is currently a threat to the existence of earth. Also, Sulphur compounds using coal form oil refineries, nitrogen oxides like NO, NO₂, HNO₃ are also released by automobile, power plants and industries into the air polluting it (Jason, 2016: <http://www.jasonmunster.com>). The worshiper of Oya, in a liturgical manner expresses a plea from her devotees not to visit them with her calamity, but rather blessing of good rainfall, the calmness of the air to thrive bodily existence both in air and land. However the infuriation of modern environment mishap has to an extent displaced the Gods associated with the air, polluting it spiritual abode. Therefore the spiritual traditional minds are not surprise with the climatic change in weather formation and its resultant effect on rainfall or it abnormalities, irregularities in winter, and the high impact of the sun on earth. The breakdown of ozone layer in the stratosphere will obviously results in reduction in the absorption of ultraviolet radiation. As a result, unabsorbed and dangerous ultraviolet radiation is able to reach the Earth's surface at a higher intensity. (Farman, Gardiner, Shanklin, 1985: <https://en.wikipedia.org>).

The devastating effect of air pollution are enormously dangerous both to living and non-living things as it make the spirits responsible for the air irritated. The wraparound effects on the Gods are conspicuously evident in the African traditional belief system. When the atmosphere is choked up chemical substance, distorting the spiritual balance, it affects the normalcy in weather conditioning. Its effects affect man's organs like eyes, throat, nose and respiratory system. Complications from air pollution are: respiratory damage either through tobacco smoke or toxic smoke, convulsion resulting into coma, radioactivity affecting generation unborn, the destruction of chlorophyll in plants disrupting photosynthesis leading to leaves damaging, premature fall of leaves, low crop production or yellowing of leaves. The non-living things are not left out of the devastating effect of air pollution. Acidic gas like O₃, SO₂, and NO₂ could affect the quality of textile material as well building materials. Similarly, the effect of air pollution on climatic change is worrisome to man's existence. When the carbon cycle is disrupted because of the cutting down of trees leading to consumption of SO₂, the release of CFC gases impacts on the ozone layer due to the depletion, cosmic rays reaches to earth increasing temperature of earth.

The violations of the space with modern industrial pollution are strange and have embittered the air Gods. Therefore the relationship between the Gods and man are essential to the substance of the universe. Beyond the scientific explanation to climatic change, and other weather abnormalities, is the effect of a displace of the air Gods like Oya who's anger needs to be addressed to avoid misshaping currently befalling the universe.



The organization revealed on its Twitter handles @WHO(Vanguard, 2018: www.vanguardngr.com).

Soil Pollution and the Earthly African Deities

Soil pollution is defined as the fertility loss or decrease in soil productivity as a result of waste or chemical component located in the soil. The barometer used in measuring the extent of soil damage is the yield of grains per unit of land. Also, indirectly the infection of crop or contamination can be observed. There are lists of sources of soil pollution ranging from discharge from factories, oil and petroleum leak, chemical from agricultural fertilizer, acid rain and intentional disposal of waste into the earth. Main sources of soil pollution are discharged from rain erosion carrying waste from markets places, sewage dumped into drainages and indiscriminate dumping of waste. The effect of soil pollution affects the safety of clean drinking water, poor agricultural produce and larger loss of soil and nutrients value.

The soil is respected in Yoruba terrestrial because it is held to be colonized by a spirit. The Yoruba ascribe prodigious rank to the earth. In conception of the earth, a myth says, earth was blowout on the face of the subterranean regions, given birth to landscape of massive land. It has been orally transmitted that *Obatala* use clay to mold man after which *Olodumare* gave him breath. When a new born baby is given birth to, the first place of contact is the earth and of all his sojourns on earth his final end point is back to mother earth. The earth is manifold of established covenant and most time are called upon to service as witness that can led to punishment or reward. In affirmation of powers land possesses, is the believed that sexual inter-course with a woman is forbidden on the bear ground. It is obvious that the bodies of ancient ancestor, who are buried into earth, are linked with essential power that dwells within the earthly surface, reverence to the ancestors is the pouring of alcoholic drink to the ground before any other person drinks. In the same vein, portion of food are also left over at specific area on the ground for the ancestors. Majority of sacrifices carried out in the Yoruba cosmology to the gods are both put in calabash or earthly vessel and

placed on the ground. Gratitude for the fertility of the soil is accompanied by the first crop from the farm issued as a sacrifice to the gods or ancestors before it is brought home or taking to the market.

It is agreed by Morton (Morton, 1960: 364) that since most of the Yoruba depend on agriculture for their sustenance, and crops are grown in the soil, Ile (the earth) obtain special sacrifice at the time of planting and harvesting. *Orisa oko* (*Orisa* of fertility, Progress and Evolution) an attendant of the earth and by excellence the keeper of all land agriculture produce are description attribute to *Orisa Oko*. Yearly festival and sacrifices are ritually carryout out in his name, with the intention of good agricultural increase. Beyond the physical ability of land preparation, tilling the ground, planting and weeding is the spiritual alignment with beings responsible for good harvest. The Yoruba deities associated with agriculture are exemplified in their ability to provide the natural use of magic, proffer sacrificial rituals for good farm yield. However, the modern use of chemical for agricultural plant production has made planting easier but the hazardous effect on man cannot be ignored. The challenge of land environmental waste has become a burden to man survival on earth. Likewise its displacement of the Gods associated with the land territories. The land pollution of waste dump which constitute a lot of poly-bags, nylon water packs, rubber bottles and other indecomposable items, eventually find their ways to the farm land and overtime the earth become un-tillable for planting. Obviously, when the land territorial Gods are not happy with the defilement and the indiscriminating dumping of refuges, it becomes imminent to have food shortage and famine. The picture bellow shows an accumulated waste during a sanitation exercise at the University of Ibadan beside the Student Union Building.



University of Ibadan beside the Student Union Building (SUB).

The modern trash dumps are constituent of modern waste materials, clearly one should not expect less. Some of these waste materials consist of poly-bags, nylon water bags, plastic water bottles etc. These items can find their ways to the soil, making it difficult to cultivate. These modern items are not easily decomposable and can take their original forms for hundreds of years. Eventually the Gods are silent and displaced

as they withdraw their presence and relevance in the affairs of man (Ramamohana, 2017: 153-154).

African Morality as a Solution

The morality of the traditional society to his environment is a duty and obligation to sacredness, this is basis to the fact that every action he makes led back to his reward or punishment. Therefore he is careful to ensure a correct approach to his environment with the belief that nature can always fight back if treated. Carlston (Carlston, 1968: 56) in his definition of religion as a system also expanded that it's the mixture of the supernatural and temporal world that create a relationship between man and God, therefore if misplaced, is a resultant effect of chaos. In conformity to societal moral standards to his environment are values derived from the historical records which are passed on from one generation to another. (Nduka, 1965: 3) affirms that morality in traditional African setting is routed in customary way of life. The enforcement of morality in an African traditional setting is automated in an exemplary manner the Gods react to ethical issue either by punishment or reward. Either ways, lessons are learnt and rules are enforced and generalized.

Moral lesson are taught from an early child-education via folk tales and stories. Some of these tales are exemplified in story lines with characters which are deliberately put together to achieve a mental moral engagement of the listener toward a behavioral reception which become accepted by the community. For example some of these folk tales can narrate the swelling of the stomach for a person who defecates indiscriminately by the roadside or into river or consequences for disrespecting nature. Parental guidance is been method with moral code which are generally accepted by the community. It also becomes automatic for a child to learn from how a member of the family was punished for an infraction of environmental societal rules and therefore learned to obey the rules. In a bigger societal picture, the judiciary system made up of king, Oba, Chiefs or elders can issue out open punishment melted on defaulters which can serves as deterrents to others. There are penalties that are more civil and are handled by selected high individuals in the society while minor or domestic faults were left to public judgment as a way of ridicule or social condemnation (Obidi, 2005: 24). Propped by (Fadipe, 1978: 124) the construction between society and morality in traditional Nigeria society was so extremely valued that an infringement of social custom was reprovved in various ways as suitable to the items of the moral code in question.

In an attempt to ensure the serenity of the African structure, measure can be attempted to fight back the modern influence of environmental waste. The effort of government authority to enforce tranquility has not been productive as specific areas of refuge dumps are well informed with sign post alerting people on the danger and punishment for defaulters. However, such effort by the government has been forfeited without any positive compliance. The moral codes imbedded in the African system to punish offenders or restrict them includes, the use of course, public correction, denial of rights, exile and sometimes death. These retributive measures have yielder positive outcome in traditional time past.

The government concerted effort to stop the indiscriminate dumping of refuse, to an extent has proven abortive. The use of offensive approach like issuing curses on defaulters can send a psychological fear to the mind. For example the picture below

shows a refuge dump cited within *Sabo* area of *Ibadan* close to the golf club, and ascribed on the wall are curses issued against any individual that will dump refuge within the area. In a random interview session with some of the resident of the community, it was revealed that some unidentified individual were fund of dumping waste indiscriminately without fear or conscience. This led to several warning sign boldly written instructing individual to stop the dump of refuge, but to no avail. Eventually, the suggestion toward a change of approach arose with the issuance of curses on any person dumping refuge indiscriminately. Resultantly, to an extent to those who can read the writing on the wall is a message that cannot be ignored or wave off.



Da Ile si ibi kio sofo tomotomo- (Dump refuge here and be wasted, inclusive your children) at the *Ibadan golf club Onireke Ibadan*

The use of traditional moral code to enforce a sense of discipline are employed in cases where regular rules and punishment are not working. Traditional African societies are pragmatic about the inference on environmental ethics that help in modifiable interactions with the natural environment (Shastri, Bhat, Nagaraja, Murali, & Ravindranath, 2002: 1080-1084) it is experiential that African Traditional religion (ATR) is a religion with environmental physiognomic structures and representation (Appiah-Opoku, 2007: <http://dx.doi.org>). The introduction of the modern system blew away the moral decency imbedded in the structure of the African traditional system and eroded the rich cultural values and religious diversities of African and also changed their belief and worship system (Smith, 2000: <http://dx.doi.org>).

Conclusion

Definitely, the relevance of the Yoruba Gods has been displaced beneath its actual dominance in the face of modernity. These deities are territorial as they govern the space of man within their rights. The Yoruba Gods are mostly called upon by subject, requesting for solution to a problem. It therefore becomes difficult to give solution when the platform to provide solution has been destroyed by the same man. The consequential result of environment pollution is displacing the Gods who are custodial

and guardian of these territories, therefore man should not be surprised seeing a gradual collapse of the structure that holds the earth. The current worries about weather change, global warming, famine, hurricane, flood, food insecurity, atmospheric imbalance, ecological disorder etc. are basis to the truth that spiritual realm that holds these structures have been displaced. Therefore a need to understand the relevance of these Gods and ascribe their position is necessary in the sustainability of mother earth.

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