

African (IGBO) Traditional Religious Thoughts and Modern Nigerian Environmental Crisis: A Reconsideration

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Abstract: The danger that the environmental crisis is posing to Africa is alarming. The crisis is holistic, thus man and nature are at the verge of obliteration. This catastrophic experience of the environment is the outgrowth of human conscious and sometimes covert violation of the natural environment. Mankind has engaged herself on the selfish use of the natural environment to satisfying her cupidity, without considering the consequence. Now that the consequence is fatal, it has engaged the attention of all the fields of human learning and yet the solution seems a mirage as the crisis looms large. Against this backdrop, this paper takes a hermeneutical, sociological and documentary survey of African (IGBO) traditional religious thoughts with a view of finding how it could be harnessed to bringing the required solution. The paper notes that Igbo philosophy is couched in symbols rather than in abstraction. By means of symbols the Igbo progenitors created an environmental friendly philosophy that suited their cosmology. Here they placed sacredness on natural phenomena, such as water, forest, land, animals, birds, fishes, mountains, etc. With the sacredness attributed to the natural phenomena, the Igbo person revered them. This attitude constrained them from mishandling the environments. Therefore, this paper concludes that- if the contemporary African environmental crisis must be solved, the traditional knowledge system that has a cosmic view of nature must be adopted.

Key words/Phrases: Africa • Traditional • Religious • Thoughts • Modern Nigeria • Environmental Crisis

INTRODUCTION

There is great danger looming over the horizon as nature is at the critical stage of obliteration due to environmental crises, which have become a general experience of all the people in Africa and by extension entire global community. The 21st century has witnessed in all the zones-developed, developing and underdeveloped-world great structural development, however most of these structural developments have come at a great cost on the natural environment. Therefore, original vegetations have been modified, degraded and most often removed through the natural disturbances and human interferences. Thus viable biological diverse forests have been replaced with less complex ecosystem. The consequences of the holistic degradation of the natural environment has been observed by [1] as increased water runoff, soil erosion, fire damage, overall lower rainfall and lower availability of

forest products [2], Against this backdrop [3] notes that Africa due to her position of dependence-in world socio-political and economic ladder is the worst hit and shall continue to drink the dreg of the effect of human violation of nature. In his own words:

Africa, as a developing continent contribute little to climate change yet it will be the continent among the first ones to be hit hard by the impact of various climate turnovers. More than 180 million persons could be affected by the consequences of climate change in sub Saharan Africa by the end of this century.

He continued his dirge of Africa near demise as he pointed out that African climatic ordeals are as a result of the activities of the industrial (developed) nations, with the overall effect of environmental pollution, deforestation, erosion of soil, drought and flood [4].

In his holistic consideration of the ecological crisis of the 21st century, which seems most inescapable by all humans, [5], maintains the planet has 'continuously sent warming signal to all her inhabitants as the level of the sea rises. He avers that the ecological footprint is so great that reliable statistics has shown that by the middle August 2010, the planet had exhausted its capacity to renew itself naturally. Accordingly, [6] affirms the statistics as he notes that if the tendency of human exploitation of nature continues that they would be between 150-200 million climate refugees by the middle of the present century. Hence, global citizens are beginning to pay a renewed attention to the issues of environment protection/crisis. Truly, individuals, in different life threatening situations have confessed how small they appeared to themselves and how great the mother-earth is whenever, 'nature disaster struck. Some incidences that pose as dangerous to the natural environment were actually consequences of human interference with the harmony of nature. Either by omission or commission, humanity has consistently devastated the environment, tampering with the marine and aquatic lives. Therefore, whenever nature decided to react, the manifestations 'are evident in the form of epidemic, flood, marine pollution, disease, pestilence and sometimes Carole storm. Attributing the African environmental ordeals to the western capitalists and their allies in Africa, [7], asserts that Africans are still consumers of polluted goods and behave like toys in the hands of great economic powers of the world as they exploit nature for profit purposes and this has resulted to cataclysms and catastrophes of history because of non-respect of the norms of natural resources exploitation. [8] attributed the phenomenon to other socio-political sources, taking cue from the South African experience, he interposes

...the political and military crisis in the great lake region (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda) has terribly affected the environment in this part of Africa. The immigration of Rwandan 'refugees into Congolese territory in 1994 seriously worsened the environment of Democratic Republic of Congo. Forests and animals of the area where the refugees were living were the first victims. They devastatingly cut trees to cook their food or warm themselves up and indiscriminately kill animals either for food or to start a small business. They would sometimes destroy the environment for fun.

The Nigerian environmental crises is attributed to unplanned structural development and human cupidity resulting to poor swage system, closing of water way, lakes and dams. The experience of the environmental crisis in Nigeria in the recent days is quite pathetic as well as embarrassing, as the years 2012-2019 are nightmare for all Nigerians due to over flooding. It is noted that about 16 states out of 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria were covered by flood between the months of May and September 2012 and the situation continue to worsen. The consequence therefore is much loss of live and property. Just to mention few cases, on July 2, 2012, Lagos was covered by flood that caused a gridlock on major roads, which made many people to cancel or postponed appointments, while thousands of stranded commuters had to pay increased fares for few bus drivers, who were willing to risk traveling on the roads. Again in the middle of July, flooding in Ibadan Metropolis caused some residents of Challenge, Oke-Ago and Eleyele to flee from their residence and save their lives. The flooding prevented some Christians from attending church services in the morning, while a few bridges carved in. In late July, at least 39 people were reported killed due to flooding in Plateau State of central Nigeria. Here heavy rainfall caused the Lamingo dam to overflow near Jos, sweeping across a number of neighborhood and approximately 200 homes were submerged or destroyed. Here at least 35 persons were missing, the flood left about 3,000 people homeless and many took refuge in government building (primary and secondary school buildings) in Jos. In mid August, the tragedy reoccurred in the same Jos, where flood killed another three persons, destroyed roads and washed away bridge and it is reported that over 12,000 people were affected by the same flood in six districts of the state. Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, Adamawa, Taraba, Benue, Kogi and Anambra states shared great chunk of the flood bazaar. Ebonyi state was also affected, while, Abia state was not spared of the flooding ordeals as erosion washed away the major road that leads from Eluama-Isiukwuato to the' University at Uturu, making the area impassable till date. The 2012 flooding generally caused the loss of many lives, while millions of people were displaced and property worth of billions of Naira lost. The Nigeria flood tragedy statistics present the scenario thus; the 2012 Nigeria floods killed 363 people and displaced over 2, 100,000 people.

Accordingly, the destruction of the African (Nigeria) landscape-the Flora and Fauna-by aggressive armies, the looting of natural resources in all the zones by the

Western capitalist and their indigenous cohorts without calculating the ecological consequences of their economic choice are the major causes of the Africa environmental nightmare. Overtly, African environmental degradation does not have a single source origin and as such [9], opines that among the notable sources include several wars done in African- soil, supported overtly or covertly by the Western Countries, bad strategies of industrialization, deforestation, desertification, pollution of water, air, land, explorations, climate change and overall unplanned development strategies and management of natural resources. It is therefore no gain saying that climate crisis is now well recognized phenomenon in Africa, as it is a general experience of the majority of the people in the 21st century. Therefore, from all areas of disciplines and field, information born out of intense research has been streaming to the public with the aim of addressing the perennial problem. Therefore, this paper is born to contribute its own piece in addressing the contingent. It takes a reconsideration of Igbo traditional Religious thought with a view of finding how it was instrumental to preserving the environment in the past and how it could be helpful today in salvaging mankind from.

History and Nature of Environmental Crisis in Africa:

The Nigeria Experience: The environmental crisis 'that has hit Africa is not timeless. The origin could be traced in various source materials to the both Christianization and colonization' of the continent in the 19th century. This assumption is anchored on the basic western notions of the relationship between the people and environment. The Western/ Christian epistemology. considers humankind as fundamentally isolated from the rest of nature. This world view perceives humanity as superior and in charge of the rest of the creation [10]. Therefore, the Christian-worldview, which is the bedrock of western epistemology, considers nature as "a thing" rather than 'a being' and as such it should be dominated and exploited for the satisfaction of human greed. This assumption gave birth to the dominance and manipulative ideology as found in Gen. 1:26. Associating the African environmental crises to Western colonialism, [11] writes:

When the imperial powers stepped up... their colonization of African in the 19th century, they caused tremendous harm to the traditional farming and herding practices. For centuries, local farmers

had adapted to changing environmental conditions. In Niger, for example, small family group migrated every year in order to allow the fragile land regain fertility for future agricultural use. The European (French) considered the techniques wasteful and unsuited to the export crop they hope to cultivate. Therefore, throughout African continent, the imperialists grabbed the choice land and reoriented production towards cash export, like coffee, sugar cane and cocoa.

Notably, there are a number of inter-linked lines of analysis in recent Africa environmental history which bears a considerable imprint for this understanding of the relationship between the colonizers (West) and the colonized (Africa). Thus historians of modern period have explored the environmental consequences of the colonial mission which includes the appropriation of nature resources such as wild life, forests, minerals and land by companies and settlers. The process of vandalizing and violating the African landscape was at the heart of Europeans expansion from its onset (Beinart nd.) [12] gave credence to the assumption, when he asserts that a core myth of the foundation of Madeira, one of the first extra-European Islands colonized, was a seven-year fire by which this densely wooded landscape was cleared for settlers. In the same vein, [13] gave an eloquent testimony to the foregoing, as he writes, "Spanish conquistadores claimed tracks of the Americas not only by reading proclamations and warfare but by symbolically striking trees or lopping branches with their swords". The intent of the attack on the ecosystem was mainly for mercantile purposes, thus immediate gain was prized in favour of sustainable earth. Against this backdrop [14] writes, "...Large scale export agriculture led to massive environmental degradation. Western commercial interests cleared millions acres of bushes and trees for plantation agriculture, thus removing a source of organic replenishment". The intensive commercial farming of cotton, peanuts, tobacco and other crops leached nutrients from the soil. Therefore, soil erosion, deforestation and the expansion of desert became the outgrowth. Another outcome of the colonialist exploitation of the environment was that the peasant and nomadic farmers were pushed to a more marginal land that become over grazed and over exploited by the helpless local people.

Notably, many local farmers were victims of the land grabbing activity of the colonial west; hence many of them were squeezed out of farming (deliberately) by taxes

imposed by the Europeans, thereto many small famers holding onto land found themselves unable to compete with commercial agro-interests of the imperialists. Contributing from the perspective of East Africa [15], gave a somber account of how early colonial rule in Tanzania gave rise to war and diseases such as small pox and jiggers. In his own words; "...colonialism spread the endemic tsetse fly and trypanosomiasis, causing sleeping sickness among the people and effectively excluding cattle from large areas. Here ecological catastrophe was reflected in period of demographic halt or decline in perhaps comparable to the period of slave trade in part of West Africa. [16] using South Africa as a case study maintains that the predatory character of settlers and imperial hunting catastrophically reduced wildlife and was responsible for final extermination of couple of mammal species like the quagga and the blue antelope.

In like manner, it was noted that in Ghana, the activities -of the colonizers did not spare the sacred groves that the forbearers of the communities cherished and preserved. Thus in the Malshegu area, the sacred groves were desecrated, resulting to the cutting down of most of the trees and top soils were not spared of the machinations of the exploitative colonizers. Lamenting on the matter, [17] wailed:

Since the Malshegu groves and fetish lands were desecrated, most trees in the surrounding area have been cut down, much topsoil has been lost to wind and water erosion, the water table has dropped and other aspects of the resources have deteriorated. Drought in the 1970s and 1980s fuelled desertification in the region and has significantly and in some places, permanently, modified the environment. Evidences suggest that the forest may never be able to reestablish itself in some area in Northern Ghana.

[18] taking cue from the Nigerian experience maintains that the overall agendum of the Western Colonizers is exploitation. In his own words, colonialism therefore aims at the exploitation of the mineral, human and' agriculture resources of Nigeria. Against this background, all the politics, policies and amalgamation and the seeming development, were directed towards ensuring that Nigeria becomes a site for capitalists' investment from where their lots flow to the metro pole. In order to facilitate the exploitation essence of the colonial system in Nigeria, the pattern of production,

specialization and consumption in the colonies were deliberately changed. Whereas in the pre-colonial era, the European middle men changed Nigeria products for European goods, during the colonial era, the colonies were forced to send their raw material, only to Europe and were prohibited from fabricating their own materials into finished goods. To achieve this, the colonial powers deliberately promoted the cultivation of cash crops for the European factories and consequently discouraged the production of food crops for the domestic population. Consequently, peasants had two options to choose from, either to work on plantations producing export crops or to migrate to rapidly growing and crowded cities to seek employment. This flow of people produced a dividend of capital and cheap labour force for the imperialists.

Notably, the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is associated with the activities of the oil producing companies of the West in the area. Owing to the discovery of oil in commercial quality at Oloibiri in 1956 and consequent exploration in 1958, the area came under the pillaging activities of Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell) and in 1961 host of other multinational oil companies made their way into Nigeria-Niger Delta region. Today, the oil industry is highly visible in Niger Delta and has control over a large amount of land. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) alone operates over 31,000 square kilometers [19]. The region is crisscrossed by thousands of kilometers of pipeline, punctuated by wells and flow stations. Much of the oil infrastructures are located close to the homes, farms and water resources of communities. Often the only illumination that the village have is light from flares burning unwanted gas [20]. In the process of extracting oil in the area for the past five decades, ecological devastation and the neglect arising from crude oil production have left much of the area desolate, uninhabited and poor. To this [21] adds. The extraction of oil wealth from the zone benefited the Nigeria government arid the oil companies and on the contrary oil exploitation despoiled the regions environment and robbed the people their traditional means of livelihood'.

The activities of the oil prospecting companies in the area have resulted into oil spillage, which is a major destroyer of the environment. A reliable statistic shows that globally the total spillage of petroleum into oceans, seas and rivers range from 0.7-1 million, tons per year [22]. It is a general knowledge that oil spillage wrecks great environmental (physical, social, human) havoc to oil producing communities. Hence, the Niger Delta region of

Nigeria has become a victim of such hazards. According to [23] the quantity of oil spilled over 50 years is at least between 9-13 million barrels, which is equivalent to 50 Exxon Val dex spills. [24], also notes that between 1958 when shell B. P. began to prospect oil in the area on commercial bases and 2006 the Niger Delta area has hosted eleven (11) oil companies, who operate one hundred and fifty-nine (159) oil fields and one thousand four hundred and eighty-one (1481) wells in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The results of the activities of the oil companies are the depletion of 'biodiversities, coastal and riverbank erosion, flooding, oil spillage, gas flaring, noise pollution, sewage and waste water pollution, land degradation and soil fertility loss and deforestation, which are all major global environmental issues. It is noted that most of the oil spillage in Niger Delta occur in sensitive area of the environment- the onshore and offshore areas. The overall effect has been catastrophe in many respects. Thus, reliable statistics show that between 1976 and 1980, the majority of oil spill incidents occur 'in the mangrove swamp zones and the off-shore areas of the regions, which constitute the most productive biological area. The consequences are that within six months, mangrove vegetation started dying in the contaminated waters, crabs, molluses and periwinkles died, while associated fire hazards spreading to about 25 hectares of land occurred [25].

Overly, the human activities in violating the biodiversity in Africa, while being enormous, spells doom to the continents. Thus the United Nation Report on the millennium ecosystem, in 2006 warned that if the current human predatory activities on African (Nigeria) environment continues unchecked, that the hope to sustain future generation may simply be a mere dream [26]. While we bemoan the loss of birds, mammals, we note with nostalgia the great threat of aquatic diversity. Hence, fresh water fish has suffered greatly due to oil spillage, use of chemical, pesticides and herbicides. Notably, the molecules of these chemicals are constantly washed into the stream and rivers and either kill the aquatic life gradually or reduce their fertility [27]. With a holistic violation or exploitation of the African environment nay world ecosystem. It becomes a source of concern and avid challenge to spare our environment as to spare our lives and future, since the human life and existence are tied to the environment/the mother earth, which is the life central - support system. It is against this backdrop that this. paper considers the Africa (Igbo) traditional religious thought and system as a viable alternative for the preservation of our environment.

The Africa (Igbo) Traditional Religious Worldview on the Natural Environment: Unlike the western ontology, where man is I considered the Lord of nature and the entire creation and has powers to rule over the whole world. The Africans (Igbo people in particular, consider man merely as a tenant on God's earth. Therefore, Igbo people are always conscious of is tenant status and as such in Igbo traditional society, man is considered a cognate entity, who exists in a series of integrated relationship. Thus in Igbo culture, just as in many other African societies, man interacts rather than violates or exploits the nature. He maintains a direct relationship with the superhuman spirits, divinities and ancestors as well as inanimate and animate creations [28]. In other words, the Igbo people have a religious conception of the universe. They see their world as made up of two planes- the physical and the spiritual. However, in their daily activities, they strive to maintain the ontological harmony between the two planes. Thus they abhor any tendency towards a digital categorization of things. They accept that there is a dual traffic and interception between the inhabitants of the two worlds [29]. Accordingly, the people believe that the spiritual beings and cosmic forces highly intermingle in all their affairs. Consequently, the spiritual beings often directly impinge on the affairs of the human world. Thus [30], underscores the fact that in Africa (Igbo) thought system, the living and the dead with the gods form the one community, whose members are mutually interdependent. The close relationship of the two worlds is with the aim to maintaining the ontological harmony, which nature needed to operate fully and freely for the benefit of the social order.

[31] gave a further insight on the Igbo worldview on the nature, as she enunciates that in the Igbo cosmology; the human world is three dimensional-the sky and the earth and both are intricately woven, with water and the supersensible world. According to her each of the three dimensions operates as a viable reality or a place of inhabitation, with all three interconnected or contiguous and continues in non-hierarchical manner. The implication of such assumption is that although the supreme being is believed to live in the sky and the major divinities such as the sun, moon, lightning, thunder with him, there is nothing to suggest that the ancestors, who live in the ancestral world are inferior [32, 33] however, distinguished the relationship of class and nature between the ancestor and the divinities as he writes.

...Ancestors are regarded as spirits in the sense that they are no longer visible. However, they are not spirits in the sense that they are like divinities or

Gods. Africans distinguish between ancestors, divinities and Gods, deity and divinities are distinctly out of the supersensible world, while ancestors are 'related to the living community. In either words, ancestors are regarded as heads and members of their earthly families. Ancestors are therefore present among their earthly families.

However, the position of the ancestors does not disjoin the differential structure of the Gods and the divinities. Therefore, [34] avers:

Analytically, a structure of Igbo perception of the universe in terms of space presents a future of three-tiered arrangement in consonance with popular intuition, there is the sky above (Igwe) then the Earth, (Ala) and finally, we have the underworld, (Ime-Ala). Each of these layers is thought to be densely inhabited.

According to this categorization, the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria understand the sky as the palace of the Supreme Being (Chukwu or Chineke) Chukwu is believed to dwell -in the sky with His host of powerful divinities and primordial beings like the sun (Anyanwu), the God of thunder (Amadioha), the sky God (Igwe), however, some local major divinities are equally believed to live in the sky [35] In this perception, the earth surface is considered as the abode of human beings, the earth deity, minor divinities and personified nature forces. Finally, the ancestral spirits, myriads of disembodied spirits and other personified forces, which may be malevolent and capricious to the living, inhabit the underworld [36].

The spiritual ordering of the universal by the Igbo people defines their conception of the position/authority of God in relationship to human being. In this relationship, the Supreme Being orders and controls the universe to follow symmetric of mutually relationship between all creations in their ranks. Here, man though a tenant and steward of nature is not subservient to it. In defining the place of man in the seeming hierarchically universe, [37], writes... Yet, humans and their world are located at the centre of the traditional Igbo cosmic structure. This is because human life, for the Igbo people, although received from God is the greatest good to be fostered. In this way the Igbo traditional worldview is seen as heavily anthropocentric. In it the activities of the various categories of spirits as well as the happening in the others realms of the universe are seen as meaningful in so far as they relate to human life and the general welfare of human in the environment.

Nwoye's attribution of the Igbo cosmology squares up with Placide Temple's idea as he describes the Bantu ontology. Here Temple maintains that Bantu ontology differentiates between beings in their hierarchy. Accordingly, beings with greater forces rank higher in the hierarchy. Thus God who is the highest force, being higher up in the hierarchy strengthen or enfeeble those lower down. Accordingly, the created universe is centered on the human forces; hence the hierarchy of beings is highly anthropocentric. The Bantu, according to Temple, ranks forces in the following order: God, Spirit of Ancestors, Humans, Animal, Plants and animate objects. This ontology, Temple explains exists and permeates 'the whole Bantu universe [38].

Generally, Africans, particularly, the Igbo people consider the human world as a mirror of the spirit world. In this way, the traditional Igbo worldview inspires and as well sustains a religious this-worldly. According to Nwoye, in understanding, Igbo people consider human life and the general 'welfare of the human world as the central focus of creation. This ontology influences all religious rites, ritual and ceremonies in Igbo land. Hence the purpose of rites and ritual is centered, on the enhancement and promotion of human life and his total well being. Hence [39], maintains that in such cosmology, the human world itself is seen as alive and dynamic universe that humans share with host of malevolent human spirit, guardian spirits of various professions and the Earth Goddess. This understanding keeps the Igbo people in check that they ought to be careful on how the earth is treated, making case for the environmental friendly behavior of the Africans vis a vis the Igbo people. [40] write:

Traditional African religions as done in African communities are environmentally friendly and sustainable, thus contributing so much to nature resources sustainability and conservation. In Africa and Nigeria, the traditional religion holds the strength on the assumption of Psychic/supernatural powers to objects called gods and goddess. The major tenet of African traditional religion and belief system lies in the belief that the abode of the gods and goddess can be within the community.

Accordingly, the local gods in most Igbo community chose certain natural phenomena as rocks, streams, ponds, rivers, trees, land and of course any place they may desire for their inhabitation. It is no gain saying the fact that African traditional society places high premium on natural biodiversity more especially trees, rivers,

waters, lands, rocks, animals. Furthermore, certain trees, like Iroko, mahogany, silk cotton tree etc are considered in some Igbo communities as inhabiting totemic spirit and as such they are revered [41]. Notably, such trees have broad spiritual and symbolic importance because they are linked closely to number of spiritual concepts, including enlightenment, self reflection, moral behaviour and morality [42]. As a result of the importance attached to trees and other biodiversity, Igbo communities, designate certain forests as sacred. The designation of certain areas as sacred, especially those which are relatively natural is an intentional act to promoting the conservation of its associated biodiversity, [43] notes that a wide range of natural phenomena are considered sacred by different Africa communities, these include particular mountains, volcanoes, hills, caves, rocks, soils, waterfall, spring, rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, swamps, trees, groves, forests, plants, animal, wind, cloud, rain, rainbow, etc. The phenomena are not just limited to the ones enumerated since coastland and marine phenomena are also considered to be sacred.

What makes these natural phenomena sacred is their conscious association with deities, divinities and spirits or to totemic forces. Thus, [44], maintain that while the phenomena create a healthy and beautiful habitat for human beings, they also serve as the abode for a category of divinities. The essence of this belief in the assignment of these natural phenomena as abode of the Gods, divinities and spirits is implicated on the fact that the gods live among the community and protects its members from harm, famine, barrenness, impotence, drought, epidemics and wars. The gods also avenge their anger on whosoever omits or commits any flaw for which their presence forbid, hence the traditional system hold all precepts of the law of the gods to an irreproachable status

Hermeneutical Discourse on African (Igbo) Cosmology in Relation to Environmental Protection: Cosmology or worldviews could be understood as a unified picture of the cosmos explained by a system of concepts, which order the natural and the social rhythm and the place of individuals and communities in them [5]. Cosmologies are products of human experiences, which are couched in dramatic formularies that such experiences give rise to symbols. The symbols on their own give rise to thoughts or philosophy-creative intelligence and creative intelligence gives birth to customs, beliefs and laws of any traditional society, which are so internalized from childhood to adult hood, that they go unquestioned as a way of life [6, 7]. Accordingly, the Igbo cosmology is a religious one and seeks to maintain an ontological

harmony in the universe. Thus in African cosmology, there exist only one realm-the sacred or the religious-and perhaps, owing to Western influence, the Igbo people may-perceive a secular realm of life, however, it is still controlled by the sacred. Intrinsically, African god(s) do not live in temples, shrines, woods and holy place, they live in the souls of the adherents, since African God (s) are not separated from the life realities of the African people, the God(s) play vital roles in every department of Africa life, including the environmental management [14].

Africans, in order to preserve the ecosystem, since the God (s) actually do not take their abode in natural phenomena; have development the centric idea of the environment as to be able to preserve their environment from human violation. This philosophical system of the Igbo people that is based on the unified system of nature-, made them to treat the land and other natural phenomena with respect as everybody regards himself more as a tenant and caretaker rather than its owner and exploiter. Since Africans (Igbo people of Nigeria in particular), are not abstract thinkers, they tied their environmental philosophy to the belief in God (s) and their worship. Thus with a theocentric nature of environmental philosophy, the people maintain that the nature's power to regenerate itself physically and biologically has to be treated with respect and thus jettisoned any relationship with nature that is exclusively utilitarian [3]; [4] Therefore, in order to preserve the-ecosystem, the Igbo people developed certain beliefs and practices that are eco-friendly, some of these beliefs and practices are couched in the following idealities:

- The shrines
- The sacred places and groves
- The totems/totemism
- Common ownership of land

The Shrine: In the Igbo traditional thought since in actuality, the Igbo people do not really have the belief that their God (s) inhabit natural object and woods, what then is the significance of shrines that have dotted the Igbo landscapes? In answering this question, we have to reconsider the importance of shrine in the Igbo cosmology. The shrine is notably an indispensable social institution in the traditional life of the Igbo people. It occupies a vantage point in the Igbo socio-political, economic and religious-cultural life. [19], underscores the social impact of the shrine in the Igbo cosmology as he writes: "The social impact of the shrine can be considered mainly from the ethical, judicial, security, economic, festive, political and strategic point of views;" .

This assumption is implicated on the fact that the shrine is not merely a religious place but socio-political, economic and by extension environmental centre. Hence, [25] defines the shrine as "a spiritio-temporal ritual focus of African religion". Iwe further enunciates that the "shrine as visible, practical and material affirmation find expression of the Africa religious ideals and beliefs'. The shrine has therefore, become the symbol 'of ontological harmony that the Igbo people crave for in their interaction with nature.

Shrines are dotted with several images of the deities that they are dedicated to, which represents the union of the visible and the invisible world as living reality in their worldview. Hence there are several types of shrine in the Igbo social geography. Such shrines range from community, village, clan, family and individual shrines. Superficially, the shrine may look as merely a religious centre but in actuality it is not only religious activities that take place in shrines. In fact, if there is anything the shrine hosts, it is more of non religious activities than strictly religious. Therefore, in the shrine the sacred and secular unite in of non religious activities than strictly religious. Therefore, in the shrine the sacred and secular unite in an inseparable manner. This union of the secular and sacred enunciates the symbolic union of this worldly with the other worldly. The shine against this backdrop stands at the epi-centre of all activities-of the Igbo traditional belief and practice.

With regard to the judicial roles of the shrine, it is a known fact that the shrine and its acknowledged priests/servants perform judicial function from time to time. Before the shrine, the litigants and disclamnants over an issue are required to take an oath to vindicate the justice of their claims. Similarly, the accused and the accuser in any serious offence may be required to proclaim their innocence confess their guilt or complicity in the matter before the image of the deity in the shrine. The shrine plays the role of modern day courts, thus before the shrine, the people in their families bring matters and their differences to be settled by the cultic, officials and elders [33]. Therefore, in Igbo traditional setting the shrine is not only a religious or culture centre it is also judicial centre. The shrine, besides being a judicial centre, is also an educational centre.

The shrine facilities the process of human socialization and ethnical soundness [35]. Accordingly, shrine contains an innate socialization process by means of traditional educations. Just like the Jewish Temple and the synagogues, the shrine is the centre for moral and ethical formation and teaching. Here children at the early stage of development readily obey the

ethical arrangement of the society without question [38]. The unquestionable status of the ethical stipulations lies on the fact that they are taught in the shrine, an assumed presence of a deity. The ethical formation and education of the youth in Igbo traditional society are geared towards the maintenance of good relationship with human beings and with the "environment, it spells the ethics of corporate existence, social cohesion, promotion of human dignity, dignity of labour and the protection of the environment. The connection of customs and taboos with shrine helps to give them moral and spiritual backing. This connection explains the inter-relation and inter-dependence between the spiritual and material worlds in Igbo ontology. In the shrine the seeming autonomous ethics assumes sacred nature and become divine stipulations, hence the shrine becomes a check and guardian of public morality.

Further, the Igbo people celebrate every stage of life from cradle to grave. They celebrate seasons, periods and times. These celebrations are both religious and social. The celebrations are accompanied by much feasting and drinking. A typical example of some the festivals is the New Yam Festival. The festival is climaxed by the parading of masquerades and other traditional dancers in the shrine areas for the purpose of entertainment and social interaction. Therefore, [42] describes shrine "as the rendezvous for social interaction and socialization during the local festival". It is therefore the roles of the shrine in Igbo traditional society that bequeathed it with a divine identity. The divine identity status of the shrine overtly makes the shrine and its associate environment inviolable by the people as they fear the wrath of the deity the shrine is dedicated to. Through this means the ecosystem is spared of human violation and degradation in Igbo traditional society.

The Sacred Groves and Sacred Places: The major tenet of African (Igbo) traditional religion and belief system lies in the belief that the abode of the gods and goddesses can be within the community. The community gods may decide to have their abodes on the rocks, streams, ponds, trees, land and anywhere they may so desire [4]. A survey of the Igbo scenery reveals the obvious fact that the Africa (Igbo) environment is dotted with sacred grooves and places. This means that certain spots, trees, rocks, streams, mountains, hills etc, though not shrines are associated with one deity or the other which makes the nature object a sacred place and consequently forbidden for human violation and interference. Often, most of the sacred places and groves are associated with the ancestors. Thus [5] writes:

Those who are dead are never gone. They are in the thickening shadow. The dead are not under the earth; they are in the trees that matter. They are in the woods that groan. They are in waters that run. They are in the huts, they are in the crowd and the dead are not dead. They dead are not under the earth. They are in the fire that is dying. They are in the whimpering rocks, they are in the forest. They are in the houses. They are not dead.

The above Excerpt Gives Credence to the Belief That the Ancestors of a Given Race Are Alive Elsewhere:

Besides the ancestors, [27] associates the myriads spirits with hills, mountains, rivers, rocks, caves, trees, brooks, lakes and thick forests. In this direction [9], notes that in Africa and particularly among the Igbo people of Nigeria, some water bodies like seas, rivers, streams and swampy areas are regarded as sacred. Therefore, the surrounding environment is protected in the belief that the river gods/goddesses live in the area. This particular belief is not peculiar to the Igbo people, hence [25] notes that the Yourba and Benin people conceive the sea as God, known as “Olokun (owner of the sea) Olokun is worshiped in the coastal area. Similarly, Oyo is the goddess of River Niger and the first wife of Sang, when her husband committed suicides, her tears led to the formation of river Niger [39] spotlighted that the Igbo people of Ebonyi State worship Ebonyi River as a goddess. The Ebonyi River is said to be inhabited by a beautiful woman (goddess), who made some part of the river sacred and as such cloth washing, fishing and farming are prohibited with serious taboos. In the same vein, [41], notes that among the Ikwere people of upper Niger Delta, who live in hydrosphere environment with numerous creeks, streams and rivers, the “Owumiri” (Aquatic spirits) play dominant role in preservation of the ecosystem. Among the highlights of the belief and practices associated with Owumiri is the belief that each Owumiri has a song peculiar to it her and this is composed by her human associates through her inspiration. The Owumiri (Aquatic spirits) are believed to control the abundance of fish, prevent river accidents, give children to barren women, give people money, property and good luck and can also influence dance forms and styles. The beliefs and practices have affected the erection and decoration of shrines in this area. Today shrines are erected at various river banks and streams, in Ikwere land and their close neighbours. These beliefs and practices have tabooed the violation of rivers, streams and the associated environments for whatever reason.

In fact, the Igbo people have numerous sacred places that dot their environmental layout. Among the Ngwa people of Abia State, Ohaozara people of Ebonyi State, Awka people of Anambra it is a constant feature to have sacred tress in market places and other community assembly grounds, where sacrifices and consultations are made to the Gods and sometimes ancestors of a particular community. The species of such trees include but not limited to Uha, Oji, Orji, Ugba, Ofo, Akpu, Ukwa trees. Here the trees and vegetations within the environment of such squares and centers were prohibited from being felled.

At first, it might seem that the preservation of the sacred grooves and sacred places are based on religious and cultural seasons, however, recent researches have shown that the protection of wildlife and other biological resources have environmental backdrop. Thus the sacred groves served as watersheds for the catchments areas where they protect sources of drinking waters. The veracity of this assumption is shown by [1] as they conclude:

Trees, together with the vegetation around were preserved as sacred place for worship. However, Africans did not just attach much importance to the trees and herbs for spiritual purposes but also because trees, herbs and plants in general are useful in enhancing life. Trees barks, roots and grasses provide herbal medicine to human being and to wild and domestic animals, therefore God’s presence were attributed to them so as to make them sacred, respected and preserved.

Totems and Totemism: Totemism is one of the earliest religio-cultural beliefs of the indigenous people, be it Australia, Europe, Native America or Africa. It is defined as the intimate relation supposed to exist between individual or a group of individuals and a class of natural objects (in many cases animal birds and reptiles)- the totem, by which the former regard the latter as identified with them in a mystical manner and in a particular sense their on belongings, so that they bear the name of the totem and replicate the belief in certain customs [44]. If the union exists between an individual and a class of natural objects, we have individual totemism. When it exists between a clan and natural class, we have clan totemism. However, the conviction of the intimate union constitutes the religious aspects of totemism, while the customs which results from it forms its sociological and environmental aspects [40].

On the origin of totemism, early anthropologists like Spencer and Awebery, classified the phenomenon under animal worship and aver that it was associated with the primitive custom of naming children after natural objects from accidental circumstances or fanciful remembrance and also in confounding these metaphorical names or nicknames with real objects-the ancestors-consequently paying to the animal the same reverence they paid their ancestors. On his own, [35], views totem as nature worship and maintains that it arose from the practices of naming individual and then their families after particular animals, the individuals would look upon the animal first with interest, then with respect and at last regard it with a sort of awe.

In another direction, [10] proposed what he called the "sobriquet" theory. Here he maintains with [14] that totem names were imposed by the outsiders on- the tribal people in order to distinguish the individuals or families from one another. Therefore, totems were merely ethnic attributes, symbols and ensigns of a clan. In agreement with this theory, Max Muller, writes, 'A totem is a clan mark, then a clan name, then the name of ancestor of a clan and lastly, the name of something worshipped by the clan'. However, Lang situates that the names came into use before, not after, its pictorial representation, the clan mark. While [4], opines that totemism is in the naming and has its original germ not in religion but in radical every day needs of man. [11] avers that the totem is an ancient nickname, usually, derived from some animal, or the supposed founder of the exogamous family, now stripped of its personal association and merely remembered in virtue of the part it plays in giving effect to the rules of exogamy.

It was [34] that popularized the conception theory of totemism. He maintains that totemism has its sources in savage ignorance of paternity. It is a primitive explanation of conception and childbirth. He situates that the conception is due to spirit of an ancestor entering the body of a woman that she associates with the object which was nearest her when the child was first felt in the womb and this object is regarded as the deserted receptacle of the spirit. Since the spirit of the people of one particular totem is believed to congregate in one spot and the natives know these spots, the totem of the child can easily be determined.

Overtly, the bases of totemism are the animalistic conception of nature. Thus, life revealed in living things, the forces manifested by physical objects are ascribed to spirits animating them. Thereto, the feeling of weakness in the midst of power and forces greater than one's own

power leads one to seek union with one or more of these powers. The animal adopted as totem becomes one's guide and support, its power becomes part of one's own, its life or essence' or mystery becomes part of one's very life. One is called by the name of the totem and some-parts of its physical embodiment are viewed as one's valued possession, as the mark of one's spirit protector and the sign of one's strengthened life. Therefore, the native people believe themselves to be endowed with the qualities of their totem. It is on this note that one understands the respect or reverence which the community/ clan or individual has for their/his totem, the intimate relation existing between them, the fact that- he regards them as his brother, even father or grandfather or grandmother and identified with them. Whatever, the origin of totem and totemism may be and for whatever purpose, the phenomenon has come to solve certain environmental problems as it serves as a means of conserving the fauna in the Igbo society.

Accordingly, the conservation of wild fauna was steeped in the community based rules, belief and taboos [37]. This cultural practice promotes game conservative in many parts of Igboland. Today, the adoption of one particular animal or birds as totem either by the individual, clan, people group or community, is a general practice. Our cross-cultural survey among the Igbo subset reveals that among certain group in Awka zone (Awka town) and in some part of Imo state (Imerienwe) monkey (Enwe) is adopted as their totem. Izombe also in Imo state and Ndiokhimbe in Abia state adopt Tortoise (mbe) as their own totem. Among the Nnewi people of Anambra State, Nnchi (Grass cutter) and Ewi (Rabbit) are adopted as their totem. In some other part of Anambra and Imo, Cobra (Eke Ikputu) is revered as their totemic figure. The Igbo subset of the Niger Delta, being influenced by Aquatic spirits (Owumiri) adopted snails, snakes and pythons as their own totems In Afikpo zone, some communities, like Uburu, Okposi, Onicha, Akaeze, Isiagu etc all in Ebonyi State, adopt a special type of Green snake, known among them as 'aka' as their general totem, This they call nneochie (grandmother), because in their myth, the snake played not only a guidance but also a protective role during their migration expeditions. Besides this general totemic figure, individuals, families and communities have their own private totems. Our survey reveals that in Uburu community of Ohaozara, about 7 (seven) types of animal are adopted as totemic figures by different clans. Some of these animals include lion, tiger, crocodile, antelope, grass cutter (Nche) Cobra and a Fish type- cat fist.

The totem acted as a 'tag' a form of identity binding groups in one large related family. The communities with the same totemic figure (s) could trace their mythological origin to one paternity or one migration expedition, since the communities link their migration or mythological story to any of the animals, birds or fish and as such maintain filial ' relationship with the totem figure and with one another. Notably, these totems are not harassed, harmed nor eaten by the member of the group. This practice has aided in the preservation of the game reserve in many parts of Igbo society, since these totemic figures are protected from being hunted or killed even by visitors.

Common Property (Land) in Igbo land: The Igbo worldview on nature affects their attitude towards land and land related matters. The Igbo worldview on nature is primarily centered on power and relationship with the spirit than with ecological issues [12]. In this regard, the Igbo people believe that there is a connection between the moral condition of the community and the physical environment. Thus the real owner of the land is the tutelary and the various ancestral spirits. Against this background, the environment is regarded as sacred. The land is sacred because it hosts the remains of the ancestors and as such it is committed to the ancestral spirit. In Igbo worldview, human being also have unbroken relationship with the land through the burial of one's umbilical cord to the mother earth. Therefore, the land is the link between the dead, the living and the unborn members of the Community. However, the headman or most elderly member of the family or clan holds the land in trust for his kinsmen. In acting as a trustee for the land, he allocates the land to deserving members of the clan or community. In this regard [15] writes: "the land right are vested in a corporative group that have overriding authority over those of individual, thus it cannot be sold or transferred to another person of different clan or community". In the traditional society, the land cannot be commodified, hence land in this society does not have market value. Commenting on the corporative ownership of the land among the Africans, [23], writes, 'resources were managed on common property basis, either community or ethnically based land was generally communally owned by all people but invested in the king or chief, who held it in trust of all the people'. He oversees the distribution and allocation of land to individuals for homestead and plots. Pastures were also communally owned and used equally by all under a common property regime. This arrangement made the discriminate farming possible in majority of Igbo communities. The discriminate farming is a practice

in which a portion of land is cultivated at a time allowing the rest to lie fallow in order to regenerate itself also protects the land from violation resulting from overuse.

On residential areas, individual families retain usufruct rights on allocated land, provided they did not display political disloyalty, migrate, committed taboos or violate any of the traditional conservation rules and regulations. In the same vein, trees, wildlife and water belong to the whole community/clan. Accordingly, forests are viewed as wilderness, where all had equal access to collect-the multiple forest products on which the indigenous material culture was based [32]. However, in order to protect the forest from violation, the Igbo people mark some forest as evil forest, where people who died-of certain disease like small pox, leprosy, epilepsy etc, are throw to. By this means, the forest becomes sacred and entrance is prohibited from ordinary people but entrance through rituals is allowed to priests, cultic officials and native doctors. By this means, animals and birds that take their abode in these forests are preserved.

Generally, in order to spare the land from indiscriminate human activities resulting to violation, the traditional Igbo people attach religious sentiments to the lands, forests, animals, streams and other natural phenomena. Explaining, the religious' sentiment attached to the environments [26], writes, 'Land with its natural resources is owned by the ancestral guardian of. the land. This is because attitudes are strong when attached to ancestral ownership of land and the belief in the sacredness of. the land serves as common history that unite all generation of the same (Igbo) sub group' It is this religious sentiment attached to the natural phenomena that gave veracity to numerous rules, regulations, rituals and taboos in relationship to the usage and conservation of the environment.

Philosophical Review of Igbo Cosmology in Relation to Environmental Protection: The basic Igbo concept of environmental relationship is anchored on the word "synergy". They maintain that there is synergy between the ' living, the ancestors, the yet unborn and the environment. In this belief and practice the idea of 'community living' becomes alive [30]. This community relationship with things and each other invites environmental concern. Thus given this synergy, nobody or community will interfere in the ecosystem without affecting everything to certain extent. Against this backdrop, the Igbo people consciously put in place and consequently maintained a mechanism to check deforestation, pollutant to land, air and water [31].

The mechanism to controlling human conscious and indiscriminate violation of the environment is stipulated in taboos, customs and rituals. The taboos are designed to enforce positive societal attitudes. It is through the strict observance of taboos that the Igbo people were and still able to control indiscriminate harvest of forest products, water sources and species of spiritual nutritional and medicine values and even rare species. Taboos are designed in such a way that people fear even to make negative comments or ridicule anything they see in the forest or anything regarded as sacred [3]. Such social design for the protection of the environment through taboos symbolically means that the people express a critical concern for the conservation of the natural resources. Notably, this critical concern is part and parcel of venerable attitude that is more or less sacral in nature [7]. As already considered, some animals through the means of totemism are given honorific titles that are similar to those given to respected, elderly members of the society. For instance, green snakes (Aka) in part of Afikpo zone of Igbo subgroup are addressed as Nneochi (grandmother), while tiger in this same area is regarded as King (ezenwobodo). The title is implicated on its power of wisdom and protective energy. From socio-philosophical perspective, totemism helps to protect the environment as well as control 'personal behavior and social arrangement. The pattern of the natural resources utility among the people -is anchored on the fact that the Igbo people regard the socially selected species and the sacredness of the selected species with multipurpose intentions. This pattern is a byproduct of the veneration of socially selected sacred species and places as well as the roles of the species to human health as sources of food and medicine. Thus it is no gain saying the fact that the Igbo people have a complex system that fuses environmental management into social life.

With regard to the use' of land, the community ensures that everyone has a place to live and to farm. Such social living emphasizes collective responsibility that is extended to environmental conservation. People have a selfless conviction to conserve and safeguard the environment because they acknowledge that the community is the custodian of natural resources, while the individual belong to the community. As the land belongs to the community with the elders as the trustees, no individual member of the community, clan or family will apportion himself any portion of the land without reference to the elders, in whose care the ancestors have placed the property. Such custom has two implications:

- The customs mandate respect for the elders and
- It controls human greed and insatiable desire to convert community property for personal interest.

The cosmic vision of nature in which the Igbo ontology hinges on, considers the ancestors (Ancestral Spirits) as having more or less equal rights and role as the human more or less equal rights and role as the human members of the community with regard to both the utilization and conservation of natural resources. Nwosu (2010) echoes this assumption when he avers.

...According to this belief, human beings are one kinds of life in an ecosystem within which all elements are affected in exactly the same way by whatever action. The worldview is nearer to the Buddhist view, in which most people affirm rebirth. In Buddhist tradition all sentient existence, is thought to be interconnected and related by virtue of karmic ties from past lives and rebirth in non-human realm. Hence this similar belief system found in Okonko society provides insight for environmental sound practice

Therefore, through certain ritual the ancestors, who are part of the human community are consulted by the people to give advice and guidelines on how to share and distribute the community land in a way that reflect human values of equity, fairness and justice [18]. It is believed that wherever there is a lack or an infringement of these values, ancestors can cause mishaps to befall on the malcontent. However, it is noted that the desire to avert the wrath of these ancestors gave birth to elaborate customs and taboos. This practice justifies the claim that the Igbo traditional society values the natural environment and also expresses concern for it through disciplined habits, practices and some values that enhance its purity and beauty.

The argument is that the environmental challenge of today also engaged the attention of our ancestors though at different level. The environment under our forefathers, suffered various threats like drought, floods, pest, epidemic and diseases that affected human beings and cattle, which they tackled through the means of rituals and disciplined observation of natural laws and the instructions of the ancestors [43].

The (Igbo) philosophy behind the linking of the environment protection and management to the ' deities, ancestors and gods through the stipulation of elaborate rules, rituals and taboo is socially conditioned, since the Igbo world is; mainly religiously influenced and this informs its non strict demarcation between the secular and sacred realms. Therefore, to attach religious importance to environmental protection defines the veracity of authority and determines the degree of general adherence. Thus to maintain the rules, customs and taboos, the Igbo people

of various subset created a machinery to check the activities of the people in relations to keeping the rules and the taboos. In some subsets, the Okonko group act as the guidance of the rules and taboo. While in some other subsets, the Elders constitute the machinery and in some other places, secret cult are formed solely for purpose of keeping in check the activities of the people with regard to environment protection and its degradation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has made a critical attempt to show that the Igbo traditional religious thoughts have been responsible for the protection of the ecosystem in the traditional society. To this end, the paper finds out that the Igbo people did not leave their environmental challenge to fate. Therefore, they made conscious effort to device a philosophy that influenced their friendly attitude towards the environment. They protected the ecosystem or habitat, animal and plant species through taboos and regulations. It therefore suffices that before the Igbo contact with the West, they, had their own philosophy "that informed their environmental management practices. Therefore, to solve the present environmental challenges facing Nigeria and by extension Africa, the Igbo traditional knowledge system should form the bases for the environmental management. In this context, the holistic approach which involves the land, water, air and climate and how they maintain the balanced ecosystem should be attenuated. Notably, the sustainability of the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the climate we live in is the holistic panacea to sustainable environmental protection. This holistic approach in which all aspects of the environment are taken into consideration is believed, will proffer a lasting solution to environmental problems of the modern era. The Africans (Igbo people) have long standing culture of holistic view of environment. They live close to the raw nature; they cohabit in the same environment with their domestic animals, totems, plants and vegetation. Therefore, it becomes imperative to re-examine the environmental practices of the past, of which some are still alive in some parts of the (Igbo Community) and tap the knowledge, if we must achieve sustainable, environmental management in the contemporary period.

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