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# Harnessing Cultural Capital for Sustainability: A Pan Africanist Perspective

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### Traditional religion, Sacred Places and Sustainability in Africa: The Role and Contribution of Sacred Places in Nigeria

*Akiti Glory Alamu*

#### Introduction

From a traditional African perspective, there is the belief in one world of visible and invisible dimensions. This is because a handful of Africans believe that tangible and intangible phenomena dwell in the visible world and act on it but are unseen by humans. Thus, the unity of the environment and the complementarities of its dimensions are no doubt based on African metaphysics. Traditional African people believe that a philosophical inquiry into the fundamental nature of reality is a generic feature exhibited in experience, with the attendant essence of existence and reality (Alamu 2009: 229). As further argued by Alamu (2011: 22), the essence of this existence and reality “is to be acquainted with the unknown within the orbit of the known: to observe the unobservable in the sphere of the observable; and, to see the unseen in the world of the seen.” In point of fact, Africans strongly believe in metaphysical dimension of essence and reality. As a result, they use their African bird’s eye view to observe the unobservable in the realm of the observable and to as well see the unseen in the ‘world of the seen’. Within the ambit of the sacred and the profane, hierophany – sacred appearance seems to connect humans with the Divine. As a matter of fact, the invisible dimension within the visible world constitutes spirits that inhabit sacred places which can be described as metaphysical apparitions of supernatural beings and sacred geography.

Therefore, as essence of existence and reality, contemporary scholars such as Idowu (1991), Awolalu and Dopamu (2005), Magesa (1997), Imasogie (1985), Gaiya (2004) Gyekye (2002) and Ogunbodede and Ikotun (2010) of religious enterprise have engaged themselves in probing into sacred places, esoteric and environmental nature of religion. The sacred and the environmental nature of religion are seen as spiritual resources needed to sustain our existence. More often, we see the physical realms from the spiritual through African metaphysical eye bird's view. Durkheim (1912: 48) and Weber (1958: 59) observe that the most profound values of societal beauty are being connected with the religious institutions. To this end, these profound values of societal beauty as well as the sacred demonstrations serve the schema of understanding religious and practical nature of reality and significance of existence. Consequently, the thrust of this chapter is to explore sacred places within the context of African religion and sustainable environment in Nigeria.

### **African Traditional Religion: A brief account**

Dopamu (2005: 1) asserts that African Traditional Religion (ATR) embraces all aspects of all life. He attests to the fact that Africans do not know how to exist without religion. Religion plays a leading and major role in their lives. According to him, "traditional Africans do not know how to live without religion. They celebrate life religiously and they never embark on anything without bringing in religion" (Dopamu 2005: 1). The foregoing reveals that traditional Africans heretofore Africans are incurably religious hence they bring in the understanding of God and His vicegerents in the theocratic rule of the universe. Africans start off from religion and their lives terminate at the point of religion. Put differently, Africans live and transit with religion. Thus, African understanding of the universe points to the fact that there is one universe that accommodates the

tangible and intangible, sensible and super sensible, material and immaterial.

For traditional Africans, religion is simply life and life is all about religion. This assertion critically supports Kungs' (1993) interpretation of religion thus:

A believing view of life, approaches to life, way of life, and society, humankind and the world, through which a person, though only partially conscious of things and experiences, thinks and feels, acts and suffers, everything. It is a transcendently grounded experience and immanent operative system of co-ordinates by which human beings orient themselves intellectually, emotionally and existentially (p. xvii).

The above means that for Africans, religion is a far more exceeding way of life or an approach to life as directed by a holy writ. It is a way of life and life itself, where there is no dichotomy between religion and human nature and existence.

Gaiya (2004: 32) emphasizes that a study of the beliefs and practices of the African peoples lead to the theological understanding that African Religion is a religion of salvation and wholeness. As a matter of fact, African Traditional Religion is careful in analysing both worldly and spiritual salvation. Africans believe that life is a complex web of relationships that may either promote and preserve life or diminish and destroy it (Gaiya 2004: 33). According to Gaiya (2004: 33):

The goal of religion is therefore, to maintain those relationships that protect and preserve life. For it is the harmony and stability provided by these relationships, both spiritual and materially that create the conditions for well-being and wholeness.

Therefore, the condition for well-being and wholeness depicts religious credential and tonality of African Traditional



Religion. As is the case of Idowu (1996: 128), religion is the keynote and keystone of the people's cultures. No wonder scholars like Hopfe and Woodward (1998: 55) assert that "a basic understanding of African Religions will provide knowledge of customs and attitudes toward the family, society at large, the environment, and death and the life beyond." The above elucidates the essential features of African Traditional Religion, but African Traditional Religion is not many, we only have one African Traditional Religion. It is wrong for Hopfe and Woodward (1998) to think that Africans have many religions. However, it is true that there are varieties and diversity in African beliefs. Dopamu (20006: 18) nevertheless argues that varieties in African Traditional Religion must not be taken to mean a diversity of fundamental beliefs rather he assuringly avers that these varieties are underlying affinities running through them. Corroborating Dopamu's statement Magesa (1997: 17-18) writes:

Varieties in African Religion must not be taken to mean a diversity of fundamental beliefs ... Much has been made of the differences within African Religion based on the distinctive lifestyle of the peoples of Africa. It is not possible to deny that these lifestyles affect the religious symbols of the people. Yet to conclude that there is no internal essential unity in the various expressions ... is to exaggerate ... if we study African Religion in a special place among a special ethnic group, as many scholars have done and still do and, indeed as it is necessary to continue to do it is for the sake of depth and should not be used to support the argument that African Religion is not a generic whole.

African Traditional Religion has actually had sizeable proportion of effect with the incursion of proselytising religions of Islam and Christianity. Gaiya (2004: 35) observes with precision that the arrival of Islam and Christianity in

Africa, the whole scenario of Nigerian perhaps African religious wholeness and experience metamorphosed into series of changes. Thus, the religious structures or institutions that held the African people together into various communities went through drastic form of transitional experience. It is an irrational and inadvertent experience that created and thus creates tension, mutual suspicion among ethnic and religious groups that make up the continent. Through this obvious fact, religious wholeness of the Africans has been tampered with severely. Despite the current trends, many values of African Traditional Religion will continue; the emerging Islam and Christianity in Africa have distinctive African qualities (Gaiya 2004). As long as the religion continues to speak the language of the people, it will survive. Nevertheless, it is not all aspects of human civilization that is negative and condemnable in human environment.

### Understanding sacred places

The word 'Sacred' is connected with God, or a god or considered to be holy (Hornby 2000: 1034). Sacred places therefore mean a particular holy site or holy spot, building, temple connected with God or a god. In traditional African belief, sacred places or sacred spots are a matter of course and reality. Idowu (1991: 165-179) the doyen of African Traditional Religion correctly asserts the beliefs in Divinities, spirits and Ancestors as some elements of the religion of the Africans. On their own, Awolalu and Dopamu (2005: 157) categorize these Divinities into triadic departments. Suffice it to say that Awolalu and Dopamu (2005: 158) emphasize Primordial, Deified and Personified divinities. No doubt, the duo argues that in the category of the primordial divinities are pantheon that are said to emanate from the Supreme Being from creation and are saddled with various responsibilities and portfolio. Some of which according to Awolalu and Dopamu (2005: 159) are *Orisa Nla*, (Yoruba sculpture god), *Orunmila* (Yoruba god in

charge of destiny), *Esu* (Yoruba Inspector General of Rituals and Sacrifices), *Olokun* (The Owner or god of the sea) and *Ogun* (god of Iron, smithy and chaste). Under the province of the deified are those who once lived as human beings with spectacular and extra-ordinary feats coupled with powerful and mysterious lives on earth, and after their death, they were canonized. *Sango* (Yoruba god of thunder and lightning), *Sokogba* (Nupe God's axe) and among others are in this category (Awolalu and Dopamu 2005: 157-159).

Lastly in the category, which is our *nitty-gritty* are the personified divinities. Awolalu and Dopamu describe this category of divinities as objects of natural phenomena which inhabit sacred places such as Hills, Grooves, Rock, Forest, Creek, Lagoon, Streams, Sea, Trees and so on. Examples are Oke-Ibadan, Olumo Rock, Osun grooves, Orosun forest, and Akoko creek.<sup>21</sup> They are all dedicated to the divinities and spirits inhabiting these sacred spots. In fact, these sacred places are actually inhabited by the supersensibles and they remain sacred because people are not allowed to tamper with them. In strong terms, Priests, Priestesses, community leaders, cultic functionaries, guilds of hunters and concerned citizens place taboo in these sacred places since the spirits are said to occupy these areas. This must have formed the background against which *The Forest of God* by Fagunwa was written. Thus, the forest of God is believed to be peopled by supernatural creatures and remained sacred, void of deforestation (Bamgbose 2007: 8).

Sacred places are spots and spatial locations in African Traditional Religion that have special and peculiar attributes from timeless immemorial to the present generation which mark them as somehow extra-ordinary. Usually, sacred places bring about awesome feelings of the mysterious and transcendental power that merits special attention and treatment. A handful of persons could experience the manifestations of the sacred places in different manners as sites of fascination, connectedness, attraction, danger, ordeal,

healing, ritual, meaning, identity, revelation and transformation. Sacred places cut across many natural elements and phenomena that are considered as sacred in many cultures and regions.

Ecologically, these sacred places are regarded as part of the ecosystem right from the pre-historic period to the present. Historical, cultural and spiritual aspects of the ecology of indigenous societies are grounded in the biodiversity, ecosystems and landforms in their habitat. The historical people did not separate the sacred spots from biodiversity and conservation. Consequently, the entire environment becomes holistic to the people and must be conserved. The concept of the sacred was a tool in the hand of the people in antiquity to preserve their environment. The indigenous cosmological views of life in which humans live close to nature and recognized the connectivity and interdependence of all living things have received the attention of scholars. The notion of the sacred creates the impression of an innate idea in the perception of man that it is life-sustaining. Therefore, life-sustaining effects of sacred places have positive effects on ecosystems.

In African religious environment, totem and taboo are synonymous with sacredness. Essentially, these areas dedicated to the divinities, spirits, ghosts and other supersensible entities at times including the animals inhabiting these areas. And where these totemic animals are found in African environment, taboo is associated with them. Thus, Totem means "a person or thing treated with very great or too much respect" (Hornby 2000: 1263). While, Taboo depicts "a cultural and religious custom that forbids people to do, touch, use or talk about a certain thing" (Hornby 2000: 1213). The implication of this is that, where totemic animals are found, such environment is sacred, and no harm will come upon such areas or animals. Consequently, these areas and animals flourish in their environment and again, the supersensibles which inhabit these



areas enjoy the environment and as well the areas are conserved for convenience, and the people are better off for it.

Idowu (1996: 128) opines that certain rocks, trees, plants, lakes, rivers, streams, the heavenly phenomena become to him unmistakable repositories of the presence, which are deliberately marked as sacred spots by community. Thus, these sacred spots discovered by the whole community as a result of common beliefs come into existence. Idowu (1996: 129) further buttresses that:

Social character of worship inevitably results in the putting up of sacred buildings or places to hold such emblems of the divinities as should be kept secret and preserved from the common touch or the weather ... They exist in all places which are traditionally connected with the presence of the divinities, or such places as have been consecrated to them. Therefore, they are found in traditionally sacred forests. There are divinities which people believe should be better worshipped there than in the towns or houses. Several species of trees are regarded as habitual residence of certain spirits; prominent among these are Iroko...and Egungun. While certain sacred trees are more often than not associated with incorporeal, though powerful spirits, there are others which are usually the sacred emblem of certain principal divinities.

It is strongly believed that these sacred spots inhabited by the divinities are central to the wellbeing of the community and more or less part and parcel of domestic life which cannot be ignored.

Again, Idowu (1996: 130) still believes that there are certain sacred grooves connected with spirits of Masquerades, such as *Oro*, *Ogun* and *Egungun* among the Yoruba, *Igue*, *Irepa*, *Uchi*, *Ukpako*, *Okpujoro*, *Ohimiyin*, *Obazu*, *Uda*, *Igbo* and *Otu* among the Edo; *Mnuo* in Igboland and *Adae* among Akan, of which in the main, their cults are secret (Alamu 2006: 52). In these cults,

like every other area, women are excluded while men become members through initiation. Idowu (1996: 130) adds that "usually the simple grove is a clearing in the bush; this holds the shrine, and only the initiates may enter there. Often the sacred emblems are kept in a small mud building into which only the Priest, or the priest with one or two co-officiants usually enters." Here, it must be mentioned that the sacred place which holds the most sacred emblems is a place forbidden to all except a very few highly privileged people. In fact, Idowu (1996: 130) appositely asserts that large communal groves may have up to three 'apartments'. The first entrance is an open place, where all and sundry may come. But the second and the third, is a place for the initiates and officiates.

### An evaluation

Despite the fact that these environmental features such as rocks, highlands, trees, streams, rivers, waters, forest and among others become abodes of some spirits, they are not in all cases beneficial to their host environment. They are capable of striking fear into the hearts of people. Awolalu (1981: 48-49) observes that trees like *Iroko* (*Chlorophora excels*) are held as sacred and believed to be inhabited by some powerful spirits. People are afraid having the trees close to them because of the fact the spirit makes terrible sounds at interval. The trees cannot be felled unless special rites are performed.

Imasogie (1985: 49-50) opines that these sacred spots inhabited by spirits and divinities become mysterious to men thereby creating fear among them, because they believe that their machinations are impregnated with evil. Often, it is their nature to prowl around in search of prey either because they are hungry or in the service of one's enemies. In fact, since men live a world pervaded by spirits, ghosts and their human allies, they are constantly exposed to danger (Imasogie 1985: 56).

Traditional religion relies more on soil minerals, flora and fauna resources of the forest, thereby tampering with the

environmental resources. In this setting, traditional ceremonies like festival celebrations, relaxation, and the use of kolanut are all products of the environment, which we often tampered with and which are also capable of promoting unfriendly exploitation of natural resources. Oyesola (2008: 18-19) avers that other forest products include natural dyes which are used for clothes, body decorations, and for masquerades. In some cultures, all participants in cultural festivals must be adorned (Igho and Otu festivals in Otu and Irouke, Edo State). Also, in other cases, the clothes worn by priests are also decorated. Therefore, the environment that accommodates all things has become increasingly tenuous, and this has in turn begun to threaten the quality of life, both for human and non-human, on the planet. This environment is threatening the sustainable development and undermining the integrity of fundamental life-support systems that provide emotional and spiritual sustenance as well.

It is also evident to say that the roots of our environmental problem are so largely religious, because from the 20<sup>th</sup> century till now, Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred places or groves, which to them are idolatrous, fetish and anti-development. Christians believe that sacred places are alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the West. As a result, the spirit in natural objects, which formerly had protected nature from man, migrated and the old inhibitions to the exploitations of nature crumbled (Schaeffer 1972: 108). However, the remedy must also be essentially religious. On the other hand, in the traditional thought pattern of Western society wherein nature is concerned to be a separate substance—a material-mechanical, and, in a metaphysical sense, irrelevant to man. Whereas, in traditional thought pattern of African society, nature houses both the visible and invisible phenomenon (Schaeffer 1972: 125). Nevertheless, it is not all aspects of human civilization that is negative and condemnable in human environment.

## Benefits and relevance of sacred places in Nigeria

In demonstrating the religious benefits of the spirits of masquerades and their sacred spots, Imasogie (1985: 36) opines that it is a veritable demonstration of the Nigerian belief in reality not only of the spiritual realms, but of the unbroken intercourse between man and the spirits. The form in which the worship is conducted bears this out. With some variations in various parts of the country, this worship is usually conducted by the male members of the ethnic groups especially the initiates who constitute themselves into a sort of secret cult for this purpose. Imasogie (1985: 36) again recalls that:

Once a year, at the stated period lasting from seven to fourteen days, the selected members of the cult dress up as masquerades and, accompanied by followers, parade the streets. Among the Yorubas the most representative of the cult of the dead is called Egungun. These Egunguns or masquerades are supposed to be 'materialized' spirits of the dead; hence the identity of the men behind the Masks is kept in top secret.

Sequel to the above, the spirits of the masquerades and their sacred spots are essential for religious relics and beauty which give us reason to think of things sacred (Alamu 2007: 106). These religious values are institutions deigned to serve the schema of a religious ceremony celebrated among the people. Some of these religious ceremonies are Osun Oshogbo festival, ritual and cleaning ceremony and Uda festival all in Nigeria.

Buttressing further of the benefits of these spirits as well as their sacred sites, Awolalu (1981: 46) affirms that these spirits are revered principally by those who dwell near rivers, lagoons or the sea, and who believe that the spirits, if suitably provided and cared for, can in return provide man's needs. He lists out the benefits that may be derived by people if the pride of place



of these riverine and littoral spirits is recognized. According to him, "they control abundance of fish, they prevent the capsizing of canoes and river accidents; some of the spirits supply children to the barren" (Awolalu 1981: 46). From the foregoing, it can be briskly deduced that personified divinities are objects of natural phenomena which inhabit sacred places of the Africa. These sacred places are dedicated solely to them and these areas are highly preserved for their well-being. Meanwhile, we registered the fact that where totem and taboo are found, such environment is sacred both to the supersensibles and animals. Likewise, the environment blossoms, flourishes and remains ever-green. In addition, sacred places inhabited by these divinities, spirits and ghosts become essentialised because of the pride of place occupied by them, coupled with the blessings of the divinities received by the people or community, and the preservation of the environment in which both the sacred and profane as enunciated by Rudoff Otoh in his *Idea of the Holy* become a meeting point without syncopated rhythms.

As a matter of fact, it is argued that the relevance of the sacred spots was for solution to problems of all kinds within the realm of humanity. The belief is that somewhere beyond the known world; there exists a power that can make right the difficulties that appear so insoluble and intractable here and now. Besides, it has been observed that one common denominator amongst these places is what we might think of as their spiritual Magnetism. That is, the power of the place to attract devotees. This spiritual Magnetism is developed through association with various combinations of miraculous cures, apparitions of supernatural beings, sacred geography and difficulty of access. It is of interest to note that those who visit these sacred places are pilgrims. These pilgrims show their love to God, get near something that is really sacred, and show god their gratitude and loyalty. In fact, a handful of people visited these sacred spots in order to maintain an identity, while others

tried to satisfy the feelings of nostalgia to experience the transcendent or to fulfil the teachings of particular faiths.

No doubt, these historical or sacred sites have spiritual, economic, social and environmental significance. Spiritually speaking, human beings believe that there exists a power that is greater than them which can make right the difficulties that appear so insoluble and intractable here and now. Of a truth, these powers are the resources needed to sustain and maximize our existence so as to have meaning. Economically, people perform pilgrimage either annually or once life time. During this period, the economic activities of the host of the historical or sacred places bloom and bumper harvest is received which contributes to the economic development of the environment. On the social aspect, marital vows are being exchanged, strained relationship is settled during this period and a strong re-union is maintained. Lastly, the environmental significance is imperative because it helps to preserve the environment. This 'eco-ethics' which is regarded as ethics of ecology, has greater respect for the ecosystem right from the pre-historical period to the present. All the aspects of the ecology of indigenous societies are grounded in the biodiversity and ecosystems. Therefore, sacred spots did not separate themselves from biodiversity, conservation and preservation.

### **Environmental sustainability: A conceptual meaning**

The concept of the environment can be traced to the evolution and growth of geography as a discipline. In the early geographical research, concern was primarily on recognising the laws of nature. Therefore, environment was studied with open eyes, seeking as objectively as possible to identify the forces that governed the formation of landscape, coastlines and general phenomena, apparently, a more pronounced view was taken of human activity – the relationships between nature and man were considered to be primary interest, particularly in early geographic writing even up to the present time

(Ogunbodede and Ikotun 2010: 257). In the same vein, Ogunbodede and Ikotun (2010: 258) posit that "our environment has been veritable sources of creativity, innovation, imagination, abstraction, and intuition of human existence cum development." From inception of discovery, Nigerian environment includes all dominated by evergreen or deciduous trees with a canopy cover of greater than 60% and a height exceeding two metres and the leaves of trees were once in the heart of the tropical rainforest.

Ron Elsdon (1973: 9) sees the environment as a natural preservation within us because we have treated the earth, which is responding through, not upsetting ecological resources, and subsequently avoiding the impending exhaustion of some vital physical resources. Man must interact with his surroundings and natural habitat such as animals, the plants, the trees, the air and urban world so as to keep his environment secured and intact. Schaeffer (1972: 98) comments that ever since man became a numerous species he has affected his environment notably. People, then, have often been a dynamic element in their own environment, but in the present state of historical scholarship we usually do not know exactly when, where, or with what effects man-induced changes came. As we entered the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, concern for the problem of ecological backlash was mounting feverishly.

Therefore, environmental sustainability as a concept is a notion around which legally significant expectations<sup>39</sup> regarding environmental conduct have begun to crystallize (Oyeshola 2008: 17). Citing Lele (2004) as quoted by Oyeshola (2008: 160) environmental sustainability is "a new way of life and approach to social and economic activities for all societies, rich and poor which is compatible with the conservation of the environment." In fact, Pearce and Watford (1993: 8) correctly and assertively demonstrate environmental aspect in sustainable development in the following paradigm:

Sustainable development describes a process which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate. It emphasizes the hitherto unappreciated role of the environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income and quality of life.

Following from the above, Oyeshola (2008: 162) argues that sustainable development has three fangs, which are economic, political, social and environment. An economically sustainable system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis and maintain manageable economy without truncating sectoral balances of economic activities of the country (Oyeshola 2008: 162). Environmentally, sustainable system must maintain a stable resource base, while avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resource systems or environmental sink functions and depleting non-renewable resources only to the extent that investment is made in adequate substitutes. This involves maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classified as economic resources (Oyeshola 2008: 162). The last factor must of necessity attain distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, political accountability, transparency and participation. This must be with the understanding of human rights on healthy environment and sustainable development (Oyeshola 2008: 162).

Environmental organizations such as conservation bodies, friends of the earth, neighbourhood associations and various levels of government should be integrated in the course of sustaining environmental development. And since environmental sustainability revolves around legal expectation as earlier stated by Oyeshola (2008), it becomes important that this legal process should be enacted by the government, which must produce laws to protect the environment from abuse and exploitation and to restrain greed, arrogance and ignorance in



man's dealing with nature. Ron Elsdon (1973: 146) further comments that:

Such laws would deal with the problems of resource depletion, pollution and the like in ways whose combined cumulative effect would be to move society gradually along the road to a new order [...] creating reclamation and recycling activities of considerable magnitude. Such a tax would also place a higher value on thrift and durability, a lower one on rapid obsolescence [...]. The possibilities for imaginative and enlightened government are endless; and while we probably cannot know in advance which ideas will work well, surely such creative experimentation is worth our best public efforts.

#### **Sacred places and sustainable environment in Nigeria: A symbiosis**

Ogunbodede and Ikotun (2010: 259) argue that environmental features such as hills, mountains, rivers, plants, animals, and forests are a matter of cosmic necessity for religious activity and development in the universe. As a matter of fact, these environmental features are often seen as sacred spots or places accommodating and preserving the gods or spirits. And such an environment becomes sacred for objects or animals. To buttress the sacredness of these environmental features further Ogunbodede and Ikotun (2010: 259) again demonstrate that:

More importantly, that practical demonstration of environmental impacts on religious development can be observed and established from different dimensions of worshipping on and of hills/mountains, worshipping besides and or inside rivers, or water bodies, as well as worshipping in the forests and other environmental features. These are more pronounced in the traditional or

African belief system as these features are often used as places to commune with the god in worship/prayer.

Of course, indigenous or traditional religion embraces environmental features as means to an end, and not ends in themselves. These environmental features listed earlier are used to determine suitable places and sustainability.

It is vital to note that these environmental features which are couched in sacred spots are catalysts for sustainable environmental development. It is evident that hardly would a fire engulf these areas, because people and the community are mindful of their safety. Today, no doubt, Osun groves still remain evergreen; a place you see various animals playing and moving freely without the fear of the unknown. For the water or stream, the fishes remain golden and totemic because nobody tampers with them, rather the people watch closely against miscreants who would want to bring calamity to the community by killing any of these totemic animals. Apart from the people, the priests, priestesses, community leaders, other cultic functionaries, and guilds of hunters corporately guide against any fire outbreak in order not to incur the wrath of the gods and other setbacks.

Masquerades in these sacred groves are also preserved. The initiates keep vigil while the non-initiates guide the groves against fire outbreak, deforestation and degradation. As a result of certain taboos associated with them, and calamity that awaits the defaulters people ensure adequate protection of these sacred places. People hardly destroy the trees, the inhabitants and among others. In timeless beginning, every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit. These spirits were accessible to men and would constantly show their ambivalence. But before a man could cut a tree, mine a mountain, or dam a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation. Evidently, these sacred spots are distinguished by their environmental nourishment and flourishing because their trees

are evergreen and preserved and the environment is protected, preserved, sustained and maintained by the community and other stakeholders. Even today, these sacred spots attract tourist centres and historical sites which are of benefits to the host community and government in terms of revenue generation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has x-rayed sacred places in African religion and sustainable environment in Nigeria. It has shown that in traditional African society, some environmental features like hills, rocks, mountains, forests, grooves, trees, seas, plants, lakes, lagoon, and among others remain sacred for the habitations of divinities, spirits and ghosts. As a result of these sacred spots, the entire environment is conserved, sustained, flourished and bloomed. It is praiseworthy to say that this entire environment is not deforested, degraded or tampered with. No doubt, it is noteworthy that today, these sacred centres as a result of their peculiarity become tourist centres and historical sites that even generate revenue for the host community in particular and government in general. This is in consonance with the geography of African Traditional religion. In other words, the environment determines spiritual sustenance through man-environment friendly relations. It is, therefore, the submission of this chapter that environmental features where sacred places are found play significant roles in entrenching sustainable environment and religious sustenance in contemporary Nigeria.

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