

Chapter Nine

AMADIOHA IN IGBO-AFRICAN RELIGION AND THE QUEST FOR ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

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Executive Summary

In African traditional religion, in virtually every facet of its expression there is an emphasis on the environment or the world in which humanity has found herself or herself as a gift from the Creator and ultimately His property. This introduces the sense of stewardship and responsibility on the part of the human person in his or her relationship with the environment. This is a gift reserved for the human person as a result of his or her distinctive spiritual nature, of which when properly harnessed will lead to the achievement of the purpose which the Creator has ordained for humanity; however, if not well managed could lead to the destruction of the peace of humanity. Human beings form a dialectical totality with the the environment with each side affecting, and being affected by, the other. The elements of the universe are understood as manifestations of great spirits with which the human person must negotiate for his or her own existence. This relationship and negotiation is possible because of the spiritual point of contact between the human person and nature. One of such elemental forces is *Amadioha*, the God of lighting and thunder. It occupies a very important place in Igbo religion. While there are a few papers written on *Amadioha* deity, there is hardly literature that discusses its relationship with the

eco-system or its ecological relevance. The question that burdens this work, therefore, is its contribution to the preservation of the environment in precolonial Igbo society. This piece will, therefore, study *Amadioha* as a spiritual force among the Igbo-African people and its ecological relevance. For the purpose of this piece, the phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches were employed. It submits that the relationship of the traditional Igbo society with *Amadioha* communicated a concept of nature in which the human person and the material world and other dimensions of the universe constituted a dialectical totality.

Keywords: *Amadioha*, Nature, Environment, African Eco-spirituality, Ecology, Balance

Introduction

In African traditional religion, in virtually every facet of its expression, emphasizes that the environment or the world in which humanity has found herself in is a gift from the Creator and ultimately His property. This is a gift reserved for the human person as a result of his or her distinctive spiritual nature, of which when properly harnessed will lead to the achievement of the purpose which the Creator has ordained for the human person; however, if not well managed could lead to the destruction of the human person. Referring to the ecological spirituality of indigenous traditions, Gottlieb (2006) avers that:

Indigenous traditions for the most part saw the natural world as “peopled” by beings with whom it was necessary to cultivate mutually respectful relationships. Daoism viewed humans as an essential part of nature, eschewing as well any fixed distinction between the mind or soul and the body. In Hinduism the entire universe is God, and for Buddhism reincarnation as an animal in a

future life is fully compatible with being a human in this one. And in any case the goal of a realized Buddhist (at least in the Mahayana tradition) was to ease the suffering of “all sentient beings,” not just of people (p. 1).

Recent developments showing itself in global climate change, the accumulation of chemical, heavy metal, biological and nuclear wastes in many places, overuse of chemical agriculture and the destruction of forests, the decimation of habitats through expanding human settlements, logging, mining, agriculture, pollution, killing of animals for sport, loss of wilderness, devastation of indigenous peoples (Buell 2004 and Gedlicks 1992), unsustainable patterns and quantities of consumption, etc., have generated the fear that the earth may not be healthy for habitation in the near future (Joanna 1991). Gottlieb (2006) argues that these problems have arisen as a result of a wrong understanding of nature outside the spiritual parameter:

The sheer scope of this crisis means that *nature*—however it was thought of before this time—has been transformed into something new: the *environment*, that is, a nonhuman world whose life and death, current shape and future prospects, are in large measure determined by human beings (p.1).

Within the context of African traditional religion, there is no distinction between the human person and the environment. Human beings form a dialectical totality with the the environment with each side affecting, and being affected by, the other. The elements of the universe are understood as manifestations of great spirits with which human persons must negotiate for their existence. One of such elemental forces is *Amadioha*, the God of lighting and thunder. It occupies a very important place in Igbo religion. The question that burdens this piece is its contribution to the preservation of the environment in traditional Igbo society. This piece will, therefore, study

Amadioha as a spiritual force among the Igbo-African people and its ecological relevance.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that will be employed for this work so as to determine its framework is the Africanization theory. Africanization simply means 'to make African', and this could be applied in various contexts like Christianity, naming, civil service, etc., depending on what is being africanized. In relation to naming, it implies the modification of the names of places in such a manner that they reflect the African identity. For instance, Dahomey Republic was africanized to Benin Republic, Zaire to Congo, Middle Congo to Congo, Spanish Guinea to Equatorial Guinea, Gold Coast to Ghana, French Sudan to Mali, Northern Rhodesia to Zambia and Southern Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, etc. Regarding the civil service, africanization is the process of incorporating indigens into the civil service.

In relation to the indigenization of Christianity in Africa, Mwasaru (1978) points out that Africanization is not all about replacing personnel, as in having indigenous bishops, priests and sisters, it is not all about putting Africans in the positions formerly held by the whites, it is a process that will involve living and expressing the Christian message in accordance with African traditional cultures. He agrees with Mihayo (1970) who sees Africanization in terms of Africans establishing their own forms of ministry best suited to their own way of life.

In the area of eco-spirituality, African eco-spirituality is a process of the Africanization of eco-spirituality. It is in this regard that the incorporation of African traditional religious thoughts and images such as *Amadioha* is introduced into the discussion on eco-

spirituality. The purpose of introducing *Amadioha* into the discourse is to communicate eco-spirituality in the language that the Igbo-African understands; thus, using categories that are common to him or her, or a part of his or her worldview. For a better understanding of the process of Africanizing eco-spirituality through the employment of *Amadioha* as an Igbo-African religious category, there is the need to understand what *Amadioha* stands for in Igbo traditional religion.

Amadioha in Igbo Religion

Amadioha also known as *Igwe* is the son of *Chineke*, and sometimes referred to as the husband of *Ala*. In some parts of Igboland, it is referred to as *Amadiora* or *Kamalu*. The colour of this deity is red, its symbol is a white ram and its day for worship is the *Afo* market day. This explains why during sacrifices to *Amadioha*, a white ram is always preferable. It is a god of justice, in that it carries out vengeance for the weak; it is the god of love, peace, unity and the messianic hope of those who are in great need; and also, the god of enterprise that brings personal wealth.

Amadioha stands for the collective will of the people. This is derived from its etymology which means ‘man of the people’. Its associate is the *Anyawu*, the god of the sun, and the sun, astrologically, is its governing planet. This explains why, while *Anyawu* is popular in the northern part of Igboland, *Amadioha* is well revered in the southern part of Igboland, however, *Amadioha* remains a very popular deity in the entire Igboland. It is similar to the god Shango in the Yoruba religion, who is also considered as the god of thunder and lightning, and also *Sokogba* (Nupe) *Ogiuwu* (Edo); *Eto*, *Itiri*, *Egba* (Urhobo) (Kanu 2015).

Amadioha is considered the “Owner of the Sky.” Whenever lightning kills a person or strikes an object, the event is often

considered a sign or message from *Amadioha*. Lightening was believed to have its track and so the Igbo would always avoid those tracks. It is also referred to as the husband of *Ala*. Just as a husband fertilizes his wife so does *Amadioha* fertilize his wife *Ala* through rainfall. *Dibia*, or priests, are, therefore, asked to determine what wrong has been committed by the victim or the owner of the object. Not minding the violent image that thunder and lightening carry, *Amadioha* is presumed to be a gentle deity who gets violent only when provoked.

Amadioha is an agent of *Chukwu* against undetected crimes and who brings divine blessings to people. Through his intercession, *Chukwu* nourishes the green vegetation of the earth, sees to the health of the living, lightens up the world and gathers evidences as well as bears witness for good deeds and against evil deeds. It can pull down or up trees that have evil hidden in them, and such events is usually understood as an exposure by *Amadioha*. It can also destroy farmlands where people have buried charms to harm their enemies or kill their opponents. It ensures that the natural order as set by *Chukwu* is not upset. Its principle is simple, 'eye goes for an eye and a tooth goes for a tooth'. Whatever one sows, one will reap" (Kanu 2013). *Amadioha* is, therefore, referred to as the deity that manifests the wrath of *Chukwu*.

Apollos (2002) avers that in the shrine of *Amadioha*, there is usually a long bamboo pole normally suspended horizontally in the air by two strong big forked sticks, one on each side. Some charms and medicinal grass are tied to the suspended pole, smeared by blood of a fowl, and pasted with feathers. It is believed that any evil doer can never pass under it and go free without being struck to death or afflicted with an incurable

disease. Big trees and thick bush normally surround the *Amadioha* shrine, with antiquated objects like broken pots, boxes, bottles, mirrors, iron pots and cups found inside the grove. Other special instruments found in the shrine include: *Ogu* (hoe), *Mpi Okpu* (animal horn), *Opi ele* (antelope horn), *Igbugbo* (metal gong) and *Nma* (knife). Animals dedicated to *Amadioha* include: *Ebulu Amadioha* (ram of *Amadioha*). *Aturu Amadioha* (sheep of *Amadioha*); *Ehi Amadioha* (cow of *Amadioha*). These are regarded as the daughters and property of *Amadioha*. Nobody dares harm or kill them to avoid the wrath of *Amadioha*.

Ecological Significance of *Amadioha*

Amadioha is not just a deity among the Igbo people. It is *Amadioha*, symbolized by the Sun that owns the Igbo people. This explains why the Igbo are referred to as the Children of the Sun, who will always rise again. By 1970 when the Nigerian Civil War ended when there was a declaration of No Victor No Vanguished, the Igbo let down their arms and left the trenches with feeling of excitement. When they headed to the houses they build in different cities in Nigeria, their property were declared abandoned property that has been shared as spoils of war; when they headed to the banks where they saved their money, they were handed over only 20 pounds each no matter the millions they had saved. When they went back to their jobs, they were turned away as their former positions were already filled up with all kinds of personnel. They were, therefore, homeless, penniless and jobless. However, today, as children of the Sun, they have risen, germinated, grown stronger and better.

The ownership of the Igbo people, the Children of the Sun by *Amadioha*, introduces the sense of stewardship and responsibility in the use of the earth as every Igbo will have to give an account of his use of the environment. In fact, in some Igbo traditions,

Amadioha is considered a Creator God who made human beings through bolts of lightening sent down to the earth to strike *Ani*, the Earth Mother. This sense of stewardship provides a basis for a more balanced and healthy relationship between human beings and nature and so helps the human person to assign non-instrumental identity to natural realities but spiritual, aesthetic and cultural values (Callicot 2013, Worrell and Appleby 2010, McShame 2007, Barrel and Grizzle 1999).

The consequences of the mismanagement of nature staring us all at the face is an indication that religion has a responsibility as an alternative approach, that is, if a remedy must be gotten. For hundreds of millions of people, religion remains the arbiter and repository of life's deepest moral values. It is in this regard that basic elements in African traditional religion, which is very fundamental to the African people is introduced into the discourse on ecology. This importance becomes clear when we know that *Amadioha*, the deity studied alongside the need for the preservation of the eco-system is the most popular Igbo deity among the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria.

The symbol of *Amadioha* is the ram, and often represented in the form of a man carrying a sledge hammer. And although represented in the planetary form of the sun, *Amadioha* is referred to as 'the man of the people' and 'the will of the people'. This expresses that *Amadioha* is a part of the people, and not far from the people. The sun might be in the sky but it is a part of the people's daily life. Thunder and lightening might strike with terror as a sign of the activities of *Amadioha*, but it is depicted by the people in the form of a human being. At some point, it is understood as the hope of the people, since it is a god of justice. That *Amadioha* is symbolized with the sun, a ram and a human

being shows that human beings and nature constitute a dialectical totality.

Amadioha provided protection for nature in traditional Igbo societies. The *Afor* day (the third market day in Igboland) was a day dedicated to *Amadioha*, and on that day several human activities that infringed on nature were not engaged in, therefore, providing an opportunity for nature to recuperate from over use. This protection was provided through the taboos that were associated with *Amadioha*. All the taboos associated with *Ani* deity regarding the land was enforced by *Amadioha*. What gave force to these taboos was the power of the force associated with it. Thus, people kept these taboos because they feared the consequences that would come from *Amadioha*. This encouraged a sense of responsibility in the use of the environment.

Conclusion

The advent of modernism, with its relations of consumerism and capitalism, belief in these sacred beings began to diminish, and as this belief diminished, so did the human society become sick ecologically. The death or disbelief in these divinities meant spiritual death for the African people, for life was ignited in their world through the presence of these deities (Burger 1990). In the contention of Dickie (2005):

With the arrival of modern colonialism and the Europeans, major impact took place on the indigenous people. Fueled by consumerism, the colonizers brought with them invasion, disease, violence, loss of home, urbanization, discrimination, and an attack on cultural, religious, and personal identity. Soon to follow, the indigenous people become caught between their traditions and the changing surroundings. Not only was the impact felt on a humanitarian level, but it was

detrimentally felt by the land and sea, through such actions as transmigration, deforestation, reaping of the resources, economic occupation, damming, logging, and mining (p. 1).

The emergence of eco-spirituality in the West is only a sign that in spite of the fact that she has colonized and destroyed indigenous cultures, the west is truly craving for something more, something lasting, something beyond the material world: it is a craving for the spirit. This spirit is found in African eco-spirituality where nature, the great spirit is in a perpetual embrace with the human person. In *Amadioha*, we see again as before that nature is a spirit to be related with, respected and preserved for the preservation of the life of the human person.

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