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African Myths on Climate Change and Environmental Degradation and Challenges of Development in Africa

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Abstract- African religion is a collection of the belief systems of Africans. It is one of the oldest religions of the world practiced in both rural and urban centres in Africa. The religion is known to possess many myths which play profound roles and strongly influence the understanding of the African environment, history, geography, religious ideas, medicine, and their social organisations. This paper unearths some African myths that have led to climate change and environmental degradation. The research employed extensive library study in collecting data on African myths, especially of West African peoples, which relate to climate. The paper relied on the anthropological and comparative methods of data analysis. The article is organised into segments. The first section is the introduction while the second locates the concepts of climate change and environmental degradation. The third segment identified African myths that promote climate change and environmental degradation along with their effects on the development of Africa. The research found that, African religion, besides its principal function of helping humans to live in harmony with God, the deities and with nature, possesses a certain measure of mythological dispositions leading to practices that result in bush burning/smoke emissions, earthquakes/landslides, desertification, drought, excessive rainfall and flooding, greenhouse effect, and locust invasion among other things.

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Nina Perpetua Waapela

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I. Introduction

Colonialism has wiped out much of the African past and put on ground institutions and practices which are, to say the least, foreign to the African. However, many aspects of the African culture and tradition such as myths are still intact and provide an authentic way of understanding the African thought system, philosophy, religion, and world-view. A myth is a representation of reality. It is the moving history of transcendental entity, the sacred lore of the theological depositum of a people. Little wonder, Malinowski as cited in Metuh (1992 p.19) calls myth, "the pragmatic character of primitive faith and moral wisdom". Characteristically, myths are not usually dated, nor do they have specific authors. They are also narrated anonymously and defy any exact or logical thinking. Their message is forceful and their main aim is to produce immediate connection and acceptance.

Some African myths contain beliefs that are harmful to the environment but which are still tightly on to by Africans despite local and international efforts to preserve the environment. This is why UNESCO decided to deliberate on this issue and reached an agreement for member nations on protection of the cultural and natural heritage. Amokaye (2004) explained further:

> Although cultural and natural heritage is … regarded as an important impetus to conservation and biodiversity, the need for an international agreement for the protection of natural and cultural heritage is understood by the widespread destruction of many natural and scenic sites and historic sites of importance. (p.201)

To enable a better understanding of this discourse, the next segment throws light on the concepts of climate change and environmental degradation.

II. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

Climate change has been found to have direct impact on agriculture, bio-diversity, coastal and forest areas as well as water resources among many other things. The term climate change could be defined as:

> A long-term change in the statistical distribution of weather patterns over periods of time that range from decades to millions of years. It may be a change in the average weather conditions or in the distribution of weather events … and may be limited to a specific region, or may occur across the earth. (*Wikipedia*, 2010)

The causes of climate change are attributed to natural processes such as variations in solar radiation which, both in the long and short terms, cause changes

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in atmospheric conditions and denation in the earth's orbit. Further, ocean waves redistributes heat by a slow and extremely deep movement of water which in turn results in the seasonal distribution of sunlight reaching the earth's surface and how it is distributed across the globe. Climate change is also caused by anthropogenic (man-made) factors which could be direct or indirect. At present, there is a consensus that human activities are the main cause of the reported rapid global warming over the past few decades. Such human activities include burning of fossil fuels like coal, gas, oil and wood and other contaminations. These collectively lead to environmental degradation. Environmental degradation thus is a product of several inter-related activities by humans upon nature. Some are either slow or fast and even encourage degradation of natural ecosystems. The effects of these activities of humans include desertification, bio-diversity loss and ozone layer depletion among others.

a) African Myths that Promote Climate Change and Environmental Degradation and their Effects on Development in Africa

Humans are the head of God's creation. And, the object of the African is to live in harmony with God and nature. Any attempt to threaten or weaken this communion, the harmony and integration of the whole is what Metuh (2004) calls, "the first evil … [which] would spell disaster both for humans and [their] immediate world" (p.71). However, when this unfortunate situation occurs, Africans carry out divinations, consult oracles and engage in rituals to ensure that they are at peace with the forces of the world and repair any damage which may have occurred in their relationship with nature or the environment. In spite of these efforts by Africans they still hold unto, they have continued to hold unto some cultural and religious beliefs that disrupt nature's balance. A few of these myths that have informed Africans' habits and have impacted negatively on the environment, causing climate change and environmental degradation and posing serious challenges to development on the African continent are reviewed here under.

b) Myths on Bio-diversity Depletion

There are African myths that threaten the survival of bio-diversity in Africa. These myths connect the origin of the death of biotic elements such as animals, plants and humans. The myths depict God as wearing away, demolishing, destroying, disrupting and causing disintegration. Some of these myths contend that, the catastrophes came as punishment for men's evil doings" (Mbiti, p.85). In Zambia, for example, the Ila myth presents God as, "He who takes till there is only one left" (p 84). In Nigeria, a Yoruba myth explains death as the creation of God, and the Edo have a "king of death" who takes away people when the time to die has come. The people thus make sacrifices to him in the hope that he will delay his mission. To some other Africans, there is a divinity of death to which people are believed to go and report themselves when their human life is over.

Owing to such mythical dispositions, Africans unknowingly engage in practices that lead to bio-diversity depletion such as bush burning and burning of animals for sacrifice which brings about climate change and the challenging weather conditions that affect man, animals and plants.

c) Myths on Earthquakes and Landslides

There are African myths that explain the origin of earthquakes across African sub-regions. A myth among the Watumbutu of Zanzibar-Tanzania holds that, "Earthquakes occur when the cow, which is believed to carry the world, gets exhausted and changes the globe from one horn to the other" (Mbiti, p.145). The Shona of Zimbabwe hold that God walks in earthquakes while the Bavenda of South Africa take earthquakes to be one of God's means of self-revelation. In Kenya, the Nandi myth holds that earthquakes occur when God is taking a walk or when departed kings are moving around. Similarly, in Uganda, the Basoga myth reveals, "There is a divinity of earthquakes supposed to cause the earth to quake when God is traveling" (Mbiti, p.145). This is similar to the Ankore and Kiga of Uganda who have earthquake divinities thought to be responsible for causing earthquakes. Supporting this belief many Africans hold that, "Earthquakes are caused by the spirits changing houses" (p.145). Consequently, the Basoga have a shrine beside the rock thought to represent the earthquake divinity, where they take offerings and pray to avert earthquakes. With such beliefs and other similar ones, many other Africans, do not see themselves as having a hand in causing earthquakes. They thus continue to engage in unsuitable land use and management that results to landsides and erosions. Indeed, of the many physiographic factors that have increased the severity of flood in recent times, poor land use and management are the most common.

Earthquakes constitute 15% of the natural disasters (Ologunorisa, 2006 p. 33). In Africa, earthquakes occur fairly frequently in and near the region of the Great Rift Valley which stretches across Africa from Ethiopia through Kenya, Tanzania, and Malawi to Mozambique, with branches into Zambia, Eastern Congo (Kinshasha), Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the Southern Sudan. In reality however, earthquakes have man-made causes. In Nigeria, for example, a land slide and near-earthquake experience occurred in year 2011 and 2012 in an Igbo community known as Umusaukpu. Umusaukpu community is located at the fringe of Umusaukpu/Omiri River, in Igbo-Etche Local Government Area of River State. Revealing the causes of the landsides, O'neil & Nwisi. stated:

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> The … concrete drainage project initiated by Anglo Dutch oil giant, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), in the community in 2011. … rather than completing the job, the contractor stopped halfway after he had connected the rest of the community to the water channel,) … The flood continues to increase in strength, weight and speed as it makes its way into the river. Unfortunately, when it got to a point it lost sense of direction and since the direction it met at this point is a mere surface, which is helpless to the speed and weight of the flood current, instead of flowing smoothly, it eats deep and continues to expand with … time, creating the life-threatening gully around our residence. (p.21)

From the submission of these writers, the landside was a made-made disaster and not caused by gods or spirits as suggested in some myths. This erosion did not only wash away their homes and business premises, it also separated them from their kith and kin, posing a threat to their survival. For example, the erosion has cut off the main entrance to their community and stream. Also, fishing, which is their main source of livelihood, has bleak prospects because of lack of access to the river (O'neil and Nwisi p.20, 2012).

d) Myths on Desertification and Desolate Places

Desertification is experienced in every continent except the Antarctica. It is normally a very slow process and can only be assessed over decades of observation. Desertification has been generally agreed to refer to, "those formations and expansions of degraded soil, and not the advancing movement of the current deserts" (Amokaye, 2004 p.239). Desertification occurs in croplands (irrigated and non-irrigated), pasture and woodlands. The borders of the deserts expand and shrink cyclically with fluctuation in the climatic conditions and rainfall. Social processes such as loss of soil and loss of natural vegetation and natural processes such as long-term biological, geological and climatic evolution or fluctuations such as short rainfall all play important roles in causing desertification. In Africa, desertification is largely caused by human's destructive activities such as indiscriminate felling of trees. In Nigeria for example, Aimufia 2002, Umeh (1986), Ogigirigi (1986), their separate studies, all asserted that deforestation has wrecked untold havoc to the Nigerian ecosystem. Harris (1997), Udo (1990), Onumadu and Mbakwe (2001), Abu and Adebisi (2002), all are in agreement that the quality of many of the basic elements of the natural resource-base (air, water and soil) are deteriorating fast as a result of deforestation. According to Amokaye (2004):

> Nigeria is presently losing about 351, 000 square km of its landmass to the desert which is advancing southward at the rate of 0.6km per year. The outward and visible sign of desertification is the gradual shift in vegetation from grasses, bushes and occasional trees to grass and bush, and in the final states, extensive areas of desert-like sand. (p.240)

Some African myths and traditional beliefs encourage and promote desertification and/or desolate places. Many hold that God in His immanent aspect lives in desolate places and waste lands where people fear to go, build homes or make fields. Also, some hold deserted places as sacred and lonely abodes for the divinities. "Such places often become centers of African rituals, mythology and priesthood" (Mbiti, 1970 p.151). He further affirms:

> Before the Europeans came to this land, the Shona [Zimbabwe] had already made the Zimbabwe ruins a sacred place where they held solemn assemblies every two or three years. At these assemblies, which lasted for three days, the people approached God with offerings, sacrifices and prayers. (p.151)

Yet, among some Africans when one is about to become a diviner, he or she first retires into a desert for a period lasting from one day to several months. On returning home, he or she begins "the profession of receiving prophetic dreams, healing, combating witchcraft and curing barrenness" (Mbiti, p.151).

As a result of such myths, many Africans are blinded to the negative effect of desertification and/or celebrated deserted places. They do not consider activities like bush burning, careless land cultivation, deforestation, and over-grazing among others, which create such desolated places, as degrading the environment. The implication of such erroneous religious beliefs is that, it becomes increasingly difficult to deter the people from felling trees randomly- the major factor that is fast-tracking desertification with loss of farmland and water resources, leading to death of livestock in large numbers from hunger and thirst.

Another implication of such African myths on desertification is that, many Africans now are being displaced and population densities in certain geographical zones are rising, precipitated by mass exodus by inhabitants in search of greener pastures with the attendant problems of pressure on the inhabited zones. In the northern part of Nigeria, for example, especially in Borno, Cross River, Katsina, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara States, people are facing difficult times due to gradual encroachment of the desert on which. It has snatched their lands. In Borno State for example, desertification is ravaging Adadam, Kukawa, Gamboru-Ngala Kala-Balge and Mafa Local Government Areas among others. In Cross River State, Buanchor and Katbang Boki Local Government Areas are greatly affected while, in Katsina State, Batsari, Daura, Kaita, Jibia and Mai'adua communities and Zango and the communities sharing borders with Niger Republic are points of reference. The affected Local Government Areas, according to Muhammed, "are Isa, Sabon Birin,

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Gada, Ilella, Tangaza and Gada" (p. 15). These places are indeed the worst hit because 85% of the people rely on firewood for cooking. Also, the River Yobe is threatened by siltation with the attendant effects on fishing and irrigation. Similarly, the borders of Nigeria like the famous Lake Chad which enjoyed a high profile as a fishing centre and served as a bed of roses for over 30 million people in Borno and Yobe states in Nigeria as well as other communities in Niger and Chad, Cameroon and Central African Republic is a near shadow of itself in the last few decades, as it has equally fallen victim of climate change precipated by desertification. Statistics from experts show that:

> The lake has shrunk from 25,000 to less than 2,000 square kilometres. … reduced to less than 10 percent of its original size in the last 50 years (14). Indeed, desertification is advancing southward at the rate of 0.6 kilometres per year, especially along the Niger Republic/Nigeria border. (Idris, H. Yahaya, I., Yushha' u A. I. & Rakiya, A. M. p.14)

The trend will continue unabated as long as Africans hold on tenaciously to myths that encourage desertification and glorify desolate places. However, the situation may be controlled if the myths are put in right perspective.

e) Myths on Drought, Famine and Locusts

According to Ibrahim (2002) and Barau (2004), cited in Muhammed, B. & Muhammed, K. (2009, p.138), drought is associated with periods of inadequate rainfall and prolonged dryness. It causes people and animals to starve while vegetation wilts and dries to the point of elimination within the environment. There are different types of droughts. These include hydrological (decrease in underground water), meteorological (delay in rainfall expectation), agricultural (insufficient moisture at stages of plant growth) and ecological (imbalance in an ecosystem due to abnormal decrease in rainfall) droughts. Locust on the other hand, is very dangerous species of grasshoppers-like insects. According to Muhammed, R.A, *etal* (2012).

> When environmental conditions produce many green plants and promote breeding, locusts can congregate into thick, mobile ravenous swarms. Locust swarms devastate crops and cause major agricultural damage and attendant human misery-famine and starvation. Its swarm can be 460 square miles (1,200 square kilometres) in size and pack between 40 and 80 million locusts into less than half a square mile (one square kilometre …. (p.26).

The desert locust inhabits about 60 countries and can cover one-fifth of the earth's land surface. Locust invasion can be life threatening for humans, plants and animals.

There are African myths which explain the causes of droughts and locust invasion which bring about climate change and environmental degradation away from modern agricultural experts. In such myths, Africans regard God as both creator and destroyer. According to an African myth, drought is one of God's methods of revelation by means of which He punishes men when He is angry with their chief and/or "punishes disobedience" (Mbiti, p.84). The Azande of Sudan too associate drought with God. In times of drought, the Nuer of Sudan, like the Male of Ethiopia, Nyanja of Malawi and Zambia, Ngoni and Suk of Kenya, accept calamities as God's will and "they do nothing, as they are beyond human control" (Mbiti, p. 84). In some cases, they pray and make offerings to God, pleading for His help. Consequently, in some African communities, when there is drought, human beings are killed for purposes of purifying and restoring the environment to normalcy. The Shona of Zimbabwe, for example, "kill a child when they are in desperate need of rain" (Mbiti, p.188).

Africans myths on locust invasion are varied. One such myth holds that locust invasion and other calamities are a manifestation of God's power. According to this belief, locusts are kept in a box by God and/or a spirit which, when God bids, lets loose these voracious pests to spread everywhere, causing destruction upon the earth. The Bavenda of South Africa have a myth which holds that, "the locusts live in an enormous cage in the sky which God opens, thereby letting loose these voracious pests" (Mbiti, p.84). Similarly, the Sukuma-Nyamwezi of Tanzani, it is believed that locusts are kept in a box and when the lid is opened, they spread everywhere, causing destruction upon the earth.

Such myths influence Africans to perpetrate climate wrecking habits. The implication of drought is that farming, the main occupation of the African people cannot take place at any meaningful level. Drought, is a major environmental problem affecting most parts of the Nigerian northern states. According to Idris, H., Yahaya, I., Yushha' u A. I. & Rakiya, A. M., "… drought is responsible for the loss of about 351, 100 square meters of the nation's (Nigeria) land mass" (p.14). Muhammed, B. & Muhammed, K. revealed that, "Borno State has suffered from fifteen years drought from 1966-1999 resulting in famine. … During the 1972-73 droughts, about 3000,000 animals and farm yields dropped by up to 60%" (p.138). Desert locusts threaten the economic livelihood of one-tenth of the world's humans. Although they occur in many parts of the world, at present, locusts are most destructive in subsistence farming regions of Africa. In Nigeria, swarms of locusts have invaded farms in some parts of Sokoto State, having been chased away from Bauchi State from where they headed towards Jigawa state and finally moved into Niger Republic. In Sokoto State, according to Muhammed *et al* (2012), "large numbers of locusts have sacked some farmers from their farms in Wamakko,

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Silame, Gwadabawa, Wurno, Tangaza, Binji, Ilela, Goronyo, Bodinga, Gudu, Dange/Shuni and Gada Local Government Areas and taken over their farms" (p.26). In Kogi State, farmers are used to killing insects that destroy their farms even though they have never experienced locust invasion. They added that in case of any invasion by insects, they will still use the same chemicals to protect their farms. Apart from locust invasion, there are various other insect invasions such as tsetsefly which causes a disease in humans known as trypannosomiasis and Nagana in animals. The disease results in ill-health, shortage of farm labour, and rural poverty. In Nigeria, the situation is particularly alarming. According to Bello.

> Here tsetse fly population is so widespread. It is estimated to cover about 80 per cent of the country's total area. Much of this land is suitable for both crop and livestock production but rendered unusable by the deadly pests. This, in turn, has a negative impact on the country's ability to produce enough food, making hunger and malnutrition a sad but present reality. (p.49)

In Nigeria, it is worthy noteworthy that tsetse fly invasion had happened before 2003, but the areas were reclaimed. Unfortunately, the reclaimed areas reverted to infested areas. Also, in Nigeria, the Gambian sleeping sickness is a threat, mainly in Delta State. The net effect of drought and locust invasion is famine, hunger and malnutrition.

f) Myths on Fire and Smoke

There are a considerable number of concepts connected with fire in African religion. Many Africans believe that God gave fire to man as a gift when he said, "Let firewood be fetched that a fire may be kindled, and food be dressed" (Mbiti, p.152). To some other Africans, one of God's manifestations is that He eats fire. The Lugbara of Congo and Uganda believe that in God's immanence, He may be heard crying, "whee whee whee" in grass fires on hills or mountains" (p.152). The also hold that when God wants to communicate with their chief, He appears as a great fire near the Kraal and the fire always disappears before any person can reach it. With such a strong belief associating God with fire, and its negative implication is that it is not uncommon to hear Africans, particularly Nigerians, argue in favour of bush burning. Africans believe that burning of fields hastens the re-growth of grass for the grazing of animals.

Further, Africans have smoke generating practices which they use as signals for communication in the traditional settings. The thick clouds of smoke from the burning of fossils are used to convey cultural and political messages are uncommon. South African communities for example for example, a thick white smoke that goes straight into the air symbolises that, "A prominent son of the community had been either killed or kidnapped by an enemy" (Ayoo, 2007 p.125). Village council meetings are also summoned urgently through smoke. In Nigeria, among the Tiv of Benue State, a thick cloud of smoke on a hot afternoon symbolises a hunting expedition, while some African ethnics keep or use a "holy" fire for religious purposes. The Ganda of Uganda, for example, have a temple fire which burns both day and night and which is cared for by virgins. Among the Herero group of South Africa, there is a sacrificial place near the village centre which has a sacred fire burning on the altar. The people believe that, "the welfare of the village is connected intimately with that of the fire. It is never allowed to die, as this would symbolise the extinction of the nation" (Mbiti p.153). Mbiti further reveals a similar practice among Gikuyu of Kenya:

> When the crops begin to bear, the Gikuyu hold a ceremony to purify them. Part of the ceremony involves lightening the holy fire from all the sacrificial items like wood, bones, hoofs ... then four groups of the officiating elders carry this fire in the form of a torch to all the districts in the east, south, west, and north. The people look upon it as a 'purifying flame" and wait in their fields to catch it with grass and twigs, after which they carry it to their homesteads where the old fires have already been extinguished. The fire is not allowed to die out until the next season when a new based fire is lit and the ceremony repeated. (p.153)

Despite the arguments for such smoke and bush burning myths and practices, smoke and bush burning are serious causes of atmospheric contamination which reduce the quality of the air. These produce carbon dioxide which traps solar heat in the atmosphere, partly in the same way that glass traps solar heat in a survisom or a green house. Also, fire and smoke, though considered sacred and holy, emits carbon-dioxide and gases into the atmosphere increasing the earth's temperature which leads to global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer and depletion of phytoplankton--the earth's primary source of oxygen. Other effects of fire and smoke emitting practices on human health are that, they contribute to various respiratory and eye diseases, carcinogens and hasophargeal cancer common to women, especially those who have been exposed to fire and smoke from childhood.

g) Myths on Hail, Mist, Hurricanes and Wind

Some African myths portray hail, mist, hurricanes, storms and wind as manifestations of God. In some West African societies, the people interpret hail as God's punishment for innovations or departure from the established course of things. Yet, others hold that hail indicates that God is arming himself. The Tiv of Central Nigeria for example, holds that when hail falls, God is shooting darts. The Yao of Ghana and the neighbouring people have a myth on mist, which holds

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that mist is sent by God to keep the sun from burning up the crops. Others take it to be the manifestation of the queen of heaven who is said to come and move many at spring time.

A number of African myths use the metaphor of the wind to speak about some aspects of God. Some describe His omnipresence by saying that He (God) is everywhere– in the wind and whirlwind. Yet, some African myths hold that, "god descends on the wings of the wind. Others consider the wind to be one of God's vehicles by which means He travels in great power through the sky" (Mbiti, p.121). In Nigeria, a Yoruba myth, for example, conveys the belief that there is a divinity of heavy wind which precedes rain.

African myths on hurricanes indicate God's anger expressed in storms, through which He comes to make His wishes known to their chiefs. In the case of potent storms, the belief is that "they are caused by the swinging to and fro of God's beard which He uses to punish people for their wicked tasks and actions" (Mbiti p.142). This explains why, when Africans see a thunderstorm, they become frightened and burn incense to God, praying that He would avert the storm or command it to take another course. As a consequence, "storm deities exist in many parts of West Africa with temples, priests and religious worship" (Parrinder, 1974 p.46). The Ashanti of Ghana, the Ewo of Dahomey, the Yoruba and Igbo of Nigeria have storm pantheons. Among the Ashanti, thunder is associated with the Supreme God who has "thunder stones". The Ewo of Dahomey too has a borrowed idea of a storm god. There are thunder stones, double headed axes, and symbolical rams in their cults. In Nigeria, the Yoruba, *Sango* (god of lightning and thunder), is worshipped by the Yoruba. Annual rites are performed here. Before the yam harvest, chickens are sacrificed to *Sango* and shared among worshippers and the village chief.

As a result of the belief in such myths, Africans ignore the fact that, their own activities, especially indiscriminate felling of trees, eradicate storms. They now face the devastating effects of wind, storm and mist. Research reveals that, one of the negative effects of windstorm is that it blows away fertile soils thus rendering the soil largely barren such that it cannot support crop production or it becomes difficult to have a good yield. This may be why many African lands have become grossly infertile and have to be supported by artificial fertilizers for better yields.

h) Myths on Rainfall and Flood

The most frequently occurring natural hazard that causes the greatest damage to the earth is excessive rainfall and flood. Excessive rainfall causes flood. A flood is any relatively high flow that over-tops the artificial or natural banks of any stream within reach. It is also regarded as, "an over flow of or inundation that comes from a river or other body of water and causes or threatens damage," or simply a "deluge or inundation" (Ologunorisa, 2006 p.32).

Africans, particularly West Africans believe that, "it is God who regulates this balance and they look to God as being behind the 'balance of nature" (Mbiti, p.67). Generally, Africans have many myths that "conceive God as the Rain Giver" (Mbiti, p.59). Some of these myths hold that, the overflowing of rivers, seas, and flood are generally linked to God. They also contend that, "When God speaks, it is reported that a nearby well overflows" (p.147). The Akan of Ghana for example, speak of God as the "Giver of Rain" who causes rain to fall piously and makes water to overflow without ceasing. The Ila of Zimbabwe have a myth which refers to God as, "The flooder", no doubt in connection with the annual flooding of the Zambezi River whose northern bank they inhabit. Other African myths that refer to God as the great deluge and the flooder or his agents are those of, "The Ashanti, Chagga, Dorobo, Herero, Nandi, Yoruba and other peoples, especially in the region of the Congo Basin and the Niger Delta" (Mbiti, p.146) of Ghana and Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. This myth is corroborated by the Christian and Islamic beliefs that the Creator sends such occurrences to check people's excesses. Both religious thoughts affirm that when Noah called His people to the path, and they remained obstinate, the flood was sent (Qur'an 71:25 and Genesis 7:13-17).

The African myths that revere flooding also hold that flood water leads to reduced stream pollution and provide opportunities for fishing, recreation and agricultural expansion since farming holds back the excess flood-water after the flood has receded. Others contend that floodplain soils are normally more fertile and easier to till than those of the flat land and the uplands and that floodplains are less costly to build on. The implications of such mythological dispositions, Africans have always had greater emotional affinity for riversides and floodplains suited for farming. Practical evidence of the Africans' attachment to flood plains is their early settlements along the valleys and floodplains of the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates, Indus and Hwang Ho and other floodplains which gave rise to the emergence of Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires. At present, the Ganges Delta and the Hwang Ho floodplains are some of the most densely populated parts of the world. The Nok culture in Nigeria also developed on the floodplains of the Niger. Research have also revealed that some farmers along the lower zone of floodplains have adapted their crop patterns to annual overflows so much so that they would be disappointed if flooding were to fail. As though not enough, some traditional Nigerian peoples engage in ritual acts to God/divinities and the ancestors for rain making. These acts of rain making, when excessive, lead to environmental degradation by the occasioned floods, and the washing away of the earth's surface. With such myths and practices, "floods

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are not only beneficial to the Africans but also desirably necessary for the sustenance of life" (Ologunorisa, 2006 p.36). These which have given rise to such popular sayings as, 'Egypt is the Nile and the Nile is Egypt' 'No Nile, No Egypt;' and "Nile gives life to the Egyptian desert'.

As a result of the belief in these African myths on flood and the settlement on African peoples on floodplains, valuable forest resources continue to be harvested on the Amazon floodplains by the inhabitants of such settlement areas. Little wonder, also that, nothing is done by traditional Africans to create good drainages to channel water so as to avoid erosions like the indiscriminate dumping of refuse. Another worrisome practice that exacerbates flooding is. Indeed, according to Bamidele, "It is on record that people are the habit of disposing refuse in the river channels while the shallowness of these channels coupled with the unplanned layout of streets and building are not helping matters" (p.4). Yet, Africans are never foresighted enough to know that, their activities encourage flooding which in turn causes untold hardship for them. For example, floods pollute the fresh waters of the rivers, giving a reddish colour to the water during the dry season. Some farmlands and sometimes even settlements along main banks suffer partial or total submergence and/or are washed away during floods in some cases. In Nigeria, for example, the Ogunpa floodings experienced in Ibadan as far back as August 30, 1980 and 1981 are pointers. For example, in 1981:

> August 31st, the Ogunpa River flowing through the city of Ibadan over flooded its banks and all features encroaching on its floodplains. Over 200 persons perished in that flood (*Oyo State Year Book* 2). The series of floods which hit the city of Kano between August 6 and 14, 1986 culminating in the collapse of the Baguda dam is estimated to have claimed a total of over 100 lives. (Ologunorisa, 2006, p.38)

In August, 2011, a flood disaster in Ibadan, the Oyo State capital, claimed over 100 lives and ruined property worth billions of naira. A similar scenario replayed itself in Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Edo, Lagos, Kebbi, Oyo and Ogun States and other parts of the country in year 2012, when the ravaging effect of flood was even worse and more pathetic. In Ibadan,Oyo state, for example, several locations and bridges were flooded including Apete, Odo-Ona, Oloni, Oluqule, Ayegun, Ode-ona Elewe, New Garage and other places. "It was a pitiable sight-seeing people of varied categories getting drowned" (Dele, p.4). In the Lagos State metropolis, areas of the city badly affected, according to Haruna, A. and Ezeobi, C. (2012), included:

> Murtala Muhaammed International Airport Road, Apapa-Oshodi Expressway, Yaba, Surulere, Gbagada, Oworonshoki, Mafoluku Oshodi, Iyana-Ejigbo, Isheri-Osun, Berger/Alagbole Road, Ajegunle Ikorodu Road, Ogijo, and Odogunyan. On the Lagos Island, many roads in Ikyoi, Victoria Island and Lekki were also flooded. (p. 8A)

Other worse hit areas were the mainland areas covering Ogba, Ikeja, Orile-Agege, Alagabado, Iyana-Ipaja, Ipaja, Ayobo, Moshalashi, AIT road, Killington, Oke -Ode and Ahamadiya where a portion of the expressway collapsed. Also affected were Arowojobe and Akinwunnmi estates in Maryland as well as parts of Ikeja GRA, Dophin Estate, Ikoyi, highbrow Victoria Island, VGC and Ibeju-Lekki, the Lagos-Abeokuta Expressway into Ijaiye bus stop near Abule-Egba particularly in Ajegunle covering the JMJ quarters, Apiri, Emodi, Ashafa, Alyenero, parts of Ogbewankwo and Olayinka streets located within Ajeromi Ifelodun Local Government Area of the metropolis and the Ijora Baida area.

i) Myths on the Sun

While the world is lamenting on the increased temperature which results in denation in the earth's orbit, and which has led to changes in the seasonal distribution of sunlight reaching the earth's surface, Africans continue to engage in activities such as tree felling which exacerbate the situation. Many Africans, particularly, West Africans believe that sunshine and the "moving" of the sun across the earth symbolises the presence of God. To them, the sun produces light, warmth, and a change of seasons, causing crops to grow and ripen. For this reason, they rarely reflect on the negative impact of the sun on the ecosystem. This orientation has informed the wanton felling of trees by Africans. Indeed, many Africans are yet to know that trees and/or thick forests are buffer zones for various atmospheric occurrences and balance of vital gases such as oxygen and carbon-dioxide, essential for the survival of living things. According to Umoren (2012):

> Apart from the life trees give, [they are] known to be very useful in sinking carbon dioxide which is a major contributor to greenhouse gases and replenishing the air with oxygen coupled with the aesthetic value [they] add to the environment ….. Trees also reduce the greenhouse effect by shading houses and office buildings. This reduces the need for air conditioning by up to 30 per cent, which in turn reduces the amount of fossil fuels burned to produce electricity. (p.39)

The combined roles of carbon-dioxide removal from the atmosphere, carbon storage in wood and the cooling effect make trees extremely efficient tools in fighting the greenhouse effect. Also, trees have been identified as a useful means to help curb respiratory diseases like asthma. These activities of Africans which enhance the negative effect of the sun on their

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environment are gradually leading to global warming which is increase of the average temperature of the atmosphere, ocean, and land masses of the earth (*Microsoft Encarta*, 2007).

III. Recommendations

To mitigate the disastrous effects of climate change and environmental degradation occasioned by the mythical dispositions of Africans, the following are recommended:

- African Governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) should endeavour to sensitize people particularly those in rural areas, on the causes and effects of desertification and droughts. They should also teach the people land conservation techniques.
- African Governments should set up a task force against settlement on Flood plains and throwing refuse into drainages". This will go a long way to prevent blockages that lead to flooding and the destruction of lives and property.
- African Governments should build more drainages in the affected areas and dredge already existing ones to prevent cases of overflow. This will spur fishing, irrigation and other economic activities.
- Professional stakeholders should relentlessly harness weather prediction and analysis, embarking on state tours to educate the African rural and urban dwellers in the local dialects on the challenging weather conditions and the need to adhere to weather alerts and warnings.
- African Governments through their Ministries of Environment should embark on vigorous annual tree planting. To achieve this, Ministries of Environment and Natural Resources could raise 4-20 million seedlings of various tress and commence planting as soon as the rains set in. Two models of tree planting can be adopted; the community and private woodlots and school programmes, among others.
- African Governments, especially the government of Nigeria, should reconstruct the many bad roads in the country.
- Any measures taken to address desertification will be in futility unless the people of Africa, are provided with alternative sources of affordable cooking fuel.

IV. Conclusion

African myths play a significant role in the mysterious force that keeps the universe going. Whether these roles are positive or negative, especially as they relate to climate change, is of little or no concern to people. Thus, even when they see the negative effects of the myths on the environment, they continue to hold unto those religious beliefs that encourage harmful environmental practices. The people believe that these practices can ensure abundance of crops and long life. Unless such practices are discontinued, all efforts towards environmental preservation will be futile, in Africa and in the whole world.

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