

## SENDING THE GODS TO EXILE: THE EFFECTS OF DEFORESTATION ON SHRINES IN AFRICA

**Gideon Y. Tambiyi, PhD**

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Jos, Nigeria

[tambiyig@unijos.edu.ng](mailto:tambiyig@unijos.edu.ng)

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**Nenman Danjuma Wapwera**

Department of Religion and Philosophy

University of Jos, Nigeria

[wapweran@unijos.edu.ng](mailto:wapweran@unijos.edu.ng)

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### **Abstract**

*The rate of deforestation in Africa is always growing in an alarming rate. Despite all the awareness and campaigns on the effects of deforestation, the problem kept on continuing on daily basis. This study aims at assessing the effects on the deforestation on the habitation of the gods in some parts of central Plateau state and southern Kaduna. The researchers in this study argued that deforestation in African soil is an intentional activity initiated by the colonialists to weaken the activities of African traditional worshippers who have high regards for the forests habitations. This the researchers claimed was for them (colonialists) to have easy access to introduce their foreign God thereby relegating the assumed powers of the African gods to the background. This research employs a historical, descriptive and analytical approach to some African existing and already destroyed shrines and how it affects the religious activities of the people of some parts of Ngas land of Plateau State and the Bajju people of southern Kaduna.*

**Keywords:** Ngas, gods, Bajju, Southern Kaduna, Kajju, Africa, deforestation, and shrines

### **Introduction**

Many observers have criticised the global political response to environmental change, which largely seeks to institutionalise scientific solutions to contemporary environmental problems. Some of these authors, according to Shehu and Molyneux-Hodgson, argue that scientific approaches tend to undermine the role of cultural and social forces that shape perception and adaptation to environmental change within societies and can alienate peoples who are most vulnerable to climatic and environmental change. In an effort to

relate environmental change with religion, they also stated that, in many societies across the world, religion provides an important lens for understanding human worldviews, attitudes and behaviour regarding major issues such as social and environmental change.<sup>61</sup>

Apart from Shehu and S. Molyneux-Hodgson, there are other scholars who have researched the role of religious beliefs in environmental conservation. These studies were based on surveys conducted in Western countries, where Christianity is the dominant religion, although differences between Christian denominations were evidenced; particularly among those having a more literal interpretation of the Bible (some Evangelical churches), which were found to have less environmental concern than Catholics or Orthodox communities. However, previously distinguished research does not assess whether Christianity is more or less environmentally friendly than other major religions, such as Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism.<sup>62</sup> It is evident that such environmental changes have had great influence on the religious life of the African people particularly in the aspect of deforestation and the gods in traditional African societies.

This work examines the effects of deforestation on the African traditional religion and its roles in decongesting the abode of some of the African gods thereby sending them on exile. It considers the concept of a forest and how it is viewed within an African context. It also looks at the idea of deforestation in African countries and studies the influence of deforestation on religious activities particularly on the gods and their shrines in Traditional African Societies, sampling the Ngas land of Plateau State and Kajju land of Southern Kaduna. The work equally discusses some socio-economic and religious effects of deforestation on the African societies and it also makes some recommendations on curbing the issues of deforestation and to save the African gods from being exiled.

### **The Brief Concept of a Forest**

Forest in African thoughts, as viewed by Omorovie Ikeke, is held and revered to be a sacred entity and in most cases the habitation of supra-human forces, and as such preserved and protected from endangerment. Ikeke adds that

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<sup>61</sup> M. Shehu, and S. Molyneux-Hodgson, "Faith communities and environmental degradation in Northeast Nigeria." *International Journal of Environmental Sustainability*. Vol. 10, No. 1 (2014): 27-40.

<sup>62</sup> Emilio Chuvieco, Mario Burgui and Isabel Gallego-Álvarez, "Impacts of Religious Beliefs on Environmental Indicators: *Is Christianity More Aggressive Than Other Religions?*" *Worldviews* 20 (2016): 253.

forests hold great value in every local community and global world as they are not only important to human lives but also important for the survival of other non-human lives and species that depend on forests environments for survival and flourishing.<sup>63</sup> The implication of this submission is that the make-ups of forests includes both trees and other lives inhabiting the forests.

As a result, Forest, according to *Webster's Dictionary of English Language*, refers to "a large area of land covered with trees and bush growing thickly".<sup>64</sup> Forest involves land, trees and bushes. Africa has been considered to contain so much undeveloped land and has so many trees and bushes growing around the societies. Of the many problems in Africa, environmental problems constitute and integral part in many African societies. Amongst the concerns raised is the issue deforestation.

Deforestation and land use is being a problem to the coming of the colonialists into Africa. They argued that before the coming of the colonialists, Africans were environmentally friendly, as they are good in the preservation of the nature.<sup>65</sup> Ikuenobe submits that traditional African thought sees nature as holistic and as an interconnected continuum of humans and all natural objects which exist in harmony. According to him, People's actions and ways of life reflected the efforts to exist in harmony with nature. These efforts led to the preservation of nature. Many of these traditional African values, ways of life, and the moral attitudes of conservation were destroyed by the exploitative ethos of European colonialism and modernity.<sup>66</sup> Science Daily records that "the first study to link pre-colonial African leadership and current levels of deforestation has shown a strong correlation between areas with historic leadership structures more susceptible to corruption and higher rates of forest loss today".<sup>67</sup> Their report also submits that, areas with 'social standing' leaderships in pre-colonial times have approximately 50% more deforestation than the average rate of forest loss for Africa over this period. This is indication supports the assumption of the intentional deforestation of Africa by the colonialists, using African machineries to achieve their aim of frustrating the African gods, thereby sending them packing in their motherland.

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<sup>63</sup> Mark Omorovie Ikeke. "The Forest in African Traditional Thought and Practice: An Ecophilosophical Discourse". *Open Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2013): 345.

<sup>64</sup> Merriam-Webster, *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (Bendon, 2014), 358.

<sup>65</sup> P. A. Ikuenobe, "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy". *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 2:4 (2014), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Ikuenobe, "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy", 1.

<sup>67</sup> University of Cambridge. "Traditional Authority' Linked to Rates of Deforestation in Africa". *Science Daily*, Nov. 24, 2015.

There are different types of forests in Africa and all these forests did not actually carry out the same function and also some forests may be perceived differently in different areas with different imaginations. Some forests are restricted to some people and one may even discover some parts of the forests that is still being feared by many, such as the cases of evil forests. Africans believed that plants, animals and other living things that lives in the forests possess some spirits but the spirits are not the same and some may be possessed by good spirits while others with evil spirits.<sup>68</sup> This briefly presents an idea of what constitutes a forest within the African continent.

### **Deforestation in Africa**

According to Chakravarty, Ghosh, Suresh, and Shukla, “deforestation is the conversion of forest to an alternative permanent non-forested land use such as agriculture, grazing or urban development.”<sup>69</sup> They see “deforestation to primarily become a concern for the developing countries of the tropics as it is shrinking areas of the tropical forests causing loss of biodiversity and enhancing the greenhouse effect.”<sup>70</sup> Deforestation could also be defined as the depletion and exploitation of forest resources, as well as the conversion of forested land into alternative land uses.<sup>71</sup> There have been a lot of deforestation activities in Africa. Many of them started during the colonial period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, commenting on when deforestation began in Kenya, Flannery Bethel wrote:

The path toward deforestation began when Kenya became a part of the British Empire in 1895 and ownership of public forestland was transferred from ethnic communities to state control. With this western presence came western approaches to forestry, conservation, and land tenure decisions. In the 1930s, large portions of the Mau forest were cleared in order to establish plantations of primarily exotic tree species for logging purposes and tea plantations. The colonial government did not recognize the Okiek people’s claim to the land, and chose to move forward by displacing them into designated reserves in other forests across Kenya. These land use changes escalated over time, and over the

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<sup>68</sup> Ikeke, 347.

<sup>69</sup> Sumit Chakravarty, S. K. Ghosh, C. P. Suresh, A. N. Dey and Gopal Shukla, “Deforestation: Causes, Effects and Control Strategies” in Clement Akais Okia ed., *Global Perspectives on Sustainable Forest Management*. Croatia: InTech, 2012, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Chakravarty, Ghosh, Suresh, Dey and Shukla, 1.

<sup>71</sup> Flannery Bethel, “Deforestation threatening Practical and Cultural Livelihoods: Lessons Learned from Participation in Tree Planting by Rural Women in Kenya and Ghana. June, 2016. <<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d537/caa9eefd265e9a41b026c4f2b26b3a13238c.pdf>>, 8

last two decades, over 107,000 ha of forest, accounting for over 25 percent of the Mau complex, has been destroyed.<sup>72</sup>

Citing the work of Klopp and Sang, Bethel notes that the forests of Kenya had never suffered such extensive devastation rather than before the destruction of this large closed canopy forest beginning in the 1930s. He notes that in 1963, ten percent of Kenya's land was covered by forest (5.81 million ha), but as of 2011 that figure was close to dropping below 6 percent, leaving total area in forest loss comparable to the size of Puerto Rico.<sup>73</sup> Bethel further cites the growth of the community as a major cause of deforestation. According to him, 80% of the people rely on fuel and space for agriculture, hence resorted to cutting down of trees.<sup>74</sup>

Bethel identifies logging and harvesting, fire and conversion of forests into lands for agriculture and human settlements, and the increase in climate change, intensified droughts and floods which forced poverty driven people and those in the rural areas to rely on forest resources in order to maintain their livelihoods as causes of deforestation in Kenya.<sup>75</sup>

According to Daniel Asante Boamah, deforestation is a major problem in Ghana. He notes that according to a report, an estimation of 33.7% of the forest cover of Ghana was lost between 1990 and 2010. Together, deforestation and land/soil loss have led to loss of significant biodiversity.<sup>76</sup> These environmental issues have created a lot of problem in Ghana and many parts of Africa.

In a study in Ghana on deforestation, Abubakari Sadik Mohammed states that "deforestation has affected crop production in the areas of delayed commencement of planting seasons, pest and diseases infestation, level and quality of crop yields and reduction in the income levels of farmers. The study recommended among other things, the continuous education and sensitization of farmers, strengthening of the public institution stakeholders and promotion

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<sup>72</sup> Bethel, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Bethel, 20.

<sup>74</sup> Bethel, 20.

<sup>75</sup> Bethel, 22-23.

<sup>76</sup> Daniel Asante Boamah, "Akan Indigenous Religio-Cultural Beliefs and Environmental Preservation: The Role of Taboos." Master's Essay submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree Master of Arts in the School of Religion at Queen's University August, 2015. <<https://www.queensu.ca/religion/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca.rlgwww/files/files/rels/grad/Daniel%20Asante%20Boamah%20MRP.pdf>> p.3.

of active research that will ensure a decline in deforestation.”<sup>77</sup> Apart from these issues, there are also religious challenges which deforestation has caused to the gods and shrines in Africa, which this work will survey among the Ngas people of Plateau State and the Bajju people of Southern Kaduna.

### **Exiling the Gods and their Shrines in Traditional African Societies**

Shrines in African religious thought are sacred places where rituals are performed and they are predominantly located in the forests or sometimes at homes. It is believed that all the objects of worship are domiciled in the shrines, so also some of the gods. Setting aside a sacred place where certain rituals are performed is one of the core features of traditional religions in Africa. In African traditional thought, the gods inhabit the shrines in search for safer abode. Shrines and sacred lands are common in Ngas land. These areas, as noted by Gontul et al, are “strictly prohibited from all forms of human exploitations except for acceptable and prescribed uses.”<sup>78</sup> Any attempt to carry out any activity or duty that is not prescribed or accepted within the sacred place or shrine is strongly frowned at and usually attracts punishment.

African traditional religion plays a vital role in environmental conservation and this may not be unconnected with the fact that Africans believe in the powers or spirits that reside in the conserved environment. The advent of Christianity in African soil has seriously affected the views of the Africans on the preservation of the shrines and the sacred places. This decision is informed by the fact that many of the Africans have accepted the new faith and therefore are seeing nothing good emancipating from the existing traditional religion. The new religion has disapproved all the religious practices of the Africans with its sacred places and shrines. This notion has resulted in exposing the hitherto conserved shrines to all forms of exploitation such as grazing, hunting and wood extraction.<sup>79</sup>

Polycarp Ikuenobe argues that prior to colonialism, the activities that have raised environmental concerns in Africa did not exist. In his argument, he insists that Africans had conservationist values, practices and ways of life. He notes also that the people’s ways of life reflected the efforts to exist in harmony

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<sup>77</sup> Abubakari Sadik Mohammed, “Deforestation and its Effects on Livelihood Patterns of Forest Fringe Communities in the Asunafor North Municipality.” <<http://ir.knust.edu.gh/bitstream/123456789/7539/1/ABUBAKARI%20SADIK%20MOHAMMED.pdf> Accessed 16th April, 2020, p. v.

<sup>78</sup> T. K. Gontul et al. “Conflicting Religious Practices and Environmental Resource Conservation in the Ngas Community of Plateau State, Nigeria”, *Journal of Research in Tourism*. Vol 4. (2013): 60.

<sup>79</sup> Gontul, 61.

with nature. To him, these actions led to the preservation of nature. A nature friendly people cannot in any way partake in anything that can lead to the destruction of that same nature.<sup>80</sup>

The Europeans do not have the same view as the Africans as far as nature in Africa is concerned. Ikuenobe summarizes the view of the Europeans on Africa's nature thus:

For the Europeans, Africa's rain forests and jungles can be destroyed, lumber can be harvested for homes, furniture, and as export to Europe. The land and forests are to be converted into industrial and real estate complexes or into farms and plantations to produce cash crops and export for industrial Europe. The mountains are to be mined indiscriminately for minerals, the rivers dammed for electricity, and the swamps drilled for oil.<sup>81</sup>

The Europeans actually dealt mercilessly with the natural habitat of the Africans and thereafter posed to claim that the Africans are not nature friendly. These activities of the Europeans affected the relationship that the Africans had with the nature to the extent of the Africans themselves seem to forget the relationship that existed between them and the nature prior to the time of the Europeans. Colonialism destroyed and supplanted African ways of life and beliefs to create colonial structures which were eventually left behind in Africa.<sup>82</sup> It is no doubt that the friendly relationship that the Africans had with nature was strongly based on their religious beliefs. Many activities of the colonial masters, which range from mining, cutting down trees for building and commercial purposes, had succeeded in rendering most of the African gods, whose abode is either the forests, rivers, and caves into exile as they no longer have a place to live comfortably. To buttress this point, this work samples two lands and culture in the middle belt of Nigeria.

### **1. Shrines among the Ngas Land of Plateau State**

Ngas is one of the ethnic groups on the Plateau. History has it that the Ngas people originated from Yemen, and migrated through Borno and from there continued the journey until they arrived their present location- *Yil Ngas*, which is in the present day Pankshin and Kanke Local Government Areas of Plateau State. On the history of the Ngas people, Goyol and Dimka state thus:

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<sup>80</sup> Ikuenobe 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ikuenobe, 12.

<sup>82</sup> Ikuenobe, 13.

The Ngas are said to have originated from Yemen and belonged to the Sudanic Kash group of People who were originally a cognate to the 'Kash' of the contract of the Nile, the Ancient Nebatse-Nubians. The Ngas language belongs to the group of very ancient languages interrelated to some common stock with the Ancient Egyptian language from which some stock has grown into the Hausa language. The Ngas migrated to Nigeria through Borno and moved to Bauchi at about AD 1100. They later moved to settle at 'Yam' in Kanam LGA where they split into two groups. One group is called the *Ngurna* came to the present day Ngas land through Gyangyang to what is today called the plain Ngas areas such as: Kabwir, Amper and part of Ampang East districts. The second group called the *Kangchan* moved up hill to settle at what is today called the Hill Ngas areas like Wokkos, Pankshin, Garram and part of Ampang east districts.<sup>83</sup>

The traditional world-view of the Ngas people is populated with the myriads of spirit forces that interacts with man who is at the centre of the hierarchy. The spiritual forces which cannot be seen physically, can be experienced by the people. The man interacts with these spirit forces through constant worship which constitute prayers, offerings, sacrifices etc. The hierarchy of the spiritual beings in the Ngas cosmology has *Nen* (The Supreme Being) at the helm. Wambutda notes that the word *Nen* does not have etymology. *Nen* in Ngas language means spider, as such, the nature of the Supreme Being cannot be understood superficially.<sup>84</sup> *Nen*, basically describes the attribute of the Supreme Being rather than the name. The ability of the spider to create its webs from within itself out of nothing, explains that *Nen* (Supreme Being) is a powerful creative being.

The second in the hierarchy is the *Zigwol*. They are said to be referred to as the sons of *Nen*. The Ngas according to Wambutda, conceives of a counterpart world to his own with all the counterpart institutions as he sees them in this world. The *Zigwol* are said to be part of the counterpart world from whence they perform their activities. They are only seen by very special breeds of people, the *goputurmwa* 'the people with the chest' and the *jepritmwa* 'the good boys' (men of second sight). It assumed in Ngas land that children up to the age of twelve or so years might have been in contact with the *Zigwol*, but as they grow older the ability disappears. They are usually black or red. Their consent

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<sup>83</sup> A. Goyol, and E. Dimka, *Pusdung: Ngas Festival of Art and Culture* (Jos, 1999), 5.

<sup>84</sup> Daniel Nimcir Wambutda, *A Study of Conversion among the Ngas of Plateau State of Nigeria with Emphasis on Christianity* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 97.

is always sought before one erects a house or compound so as not to build in their meeting place. The *Zigwols* may be associated with a particular place.<sup>85</sup>

The ancestors (*wongmwa*) are the third in the hierarchy of beings. In the realm of religion, what occupies the mind of the Ngas people most is the ancestors. The Ngas man swears by his deceased father, or grandfather if his father is still alive. Libations of beer are first poured on the ground before it is drunk in honour of the ancestors. They are also referred to as *d'demwa* (the lords). Their abode is in the sacred grove, usually on a hill. The grove usually belongs to the compound which is nearest to it. A thatched hut is always built in the groove. Ridges of stones usually surrounds the hut representing various names of the ancestors. Not everyone can become an ancestor. Only those who die of natural causes, and who are not younger than middle age within the patrilineage.<sup>86</sup> One can become an ancestor if he dies young only if he holds a responsibility of either a chief or the overseer of a compound (*gopobong*).

The importance attached to the ancestors in *Yil Ngas* (Ngas Land), led to the preservation of the place of abode of the ancestors in form of groves, which had been the practice for time immemorial. Most of the communities in the Ngas land used to have number of groves (shrines) dedicated for the worship of the ancestors. This practice is gradually fading with the coming of Christianity and modernization that is gradually taking over the activities of the people. Most of the people accepted Christianity and the shrines are no longer relevant and the trees that make up the shrines are cut down for other usages. The effects of these activities have endangered the bio system as groves or shrines serves as abode for even some animals.

In a study carried out in some villages in Pankshin District of Pankshin LGA, it was discovered that most of the shrines are in good shape, akin to the fact that most of the villages visited still have good number of the practitioners of the traditional religion. Most of the festivals that requires the appearances of the ancestors like the *moswong*, *morgi*, *chenshwe*, *chikshwe* are annually celebrated with each of the ancestors having their specific shrines. A visit to *Ner* (The headquarter of the District), three major shrines; *lit morgi*, *lit moswong*, and *lit burtuk* were discovered which two are in good shape (*lit morgi* and *lit moswong*) and the *lit burtuk* which was used by women had since been abandoned and the shrine not in use. Despite the fact that the area is still reserved, and the trees have been affected by bush burning and encroachment.

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<sup>85</sup> Wambutda, 101.

<sup>86</sup> Wambutda, 101-102.

Dilla is one of the villages in the District, which holds the traditional activities in high regards as such, you hardly find a compound that does not have an active traditionalist who still maintains the family heritage. This made it easier to preserve the shrines in the village. Only few shrines have been tempered with but most of them are in good shape. In an interview with the Nde Joseph, the *Galadiman Dilla*, he revealed that the village community always ensures that the heritage of the forefathers is held in high regards because the land can only succeed if it has the blessings of the ancestors.

In a study carried out by Gontul et al on the topic “Conflicting Religious Practices and Environmental Resource Conservation in the Ngas Community of Plateau State, Nigeria”, the authors selected 15 villages in Kabwir District of Kanke Local Government Area had at least on Shrine and one Sacred place, making a total number of 30 for the 15 villages. Also during this research, they discovered that seven of the sampled villages were still actively practicing African Traditional Religion, the other 8 (eight) according to them, had abandoned the traditional religion in favour of Christianity.<sup>87</sup>

The implication, therefore, is that those villages that are still practicing the traditional religion should have their shrines and sacred places intact. The villages that had since abandoned their traditional religion had for a long time abandoned their shrines and sacred lands, which they put them into other uses. For the villages that still maintain the traditional religion, they still maintain their shrines with two of the village still maintaining their sacred lands. It is then glaring that even amongst the villages that still practices the traditional religion, not all the sacred places are standing.

In their study of the 30 (thirty) shrines and sacred areas, they discovered that more than 21 (twenty-one) of the over thirty (30) protected areas (shrines and sacred lands) or more than two third of them had been abandoned and converted to other uses. Two possible reasons for the abandonment were suggested by them, which include; the disapproval by Christianity and the escalating population increase.<sup>88</sup>

The aforementioned study revealed that if strict measures are not put in place to curtail further abandonment of the protect areas, soon the impact of the ancestors will not be felt and they may have no option than go on exile, which

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<sup>87</sup> Gontul, 62-63.

<sup>88</sup> Gontul, 63.

in turn, leading the traditional religion to extinction. This makes this study of importance among societies in order to understand the influential link between deforestation and shrines among the Ngas people.

## 2. Shrines in Kajju Land of Kaduna State

Historically, the Bajju people are known to have migrated from Zamfara to Bauchi, then Jos. They moved and settled in Dibiyi/Kurmin Bi, in the Zonkwa chiefdom of what is present Zangon Kataf Local Government of Kaduna state. Now they can be found in other LGAs in Kaduna state such as Jemaa and Kachia. They speak Jju language and the land occupied by the Bajju is called Kajju. With an estimated 600, 000 native speakers, the Bajju, commonly referred to as Kaje (a pejorative term), constitute one of the largest ethnic groups in Southern Kaduna. The Bajju are particularly found in Zangon-Kataf, Jemaa and Kachia Local Government Areas of Kaduna State.<sup>89</sup>

Among the Bajju people, there have been a high belief in witchcraft and juju practices. The Bajju, who live in southern Kaduna State, Nigeria, West Africa, believe that individuals are born with an inherent inherited capacity to use spiritual power through psychic emanations to harm others in the spiritual realm which results in evil, misfortune, illness, or death in the physical realm. Bajju people assert that some people are born without this power, but later acquire it. Use of spiritual power is a psychic act; it involves no rites, spells, sorcery, or medicine.<sup>90</sup>

In many Bajju societies, there are separate words for sorcery; the use of magic for evil purposes, and for witchcraft. In other societies, these two concepts blend together with a single word encompassing both concepts. Among the Bajju if sorcery or miracles occur, the phrase *nkyang mamaki* is used, which literally translates as “things of wonder.” Bajju distinguish two types of *nkut*: good *nkut* (*atsatsak nkut*) and evil *nkut* (*əbibyyi nkut* or *əkatur nkut*). Good *nkut* is protective discernment.<sup>91</sup>

The Bajju believed in gods and witchcraft or *nkut*. *Nkut* is the power to exert spiritual influence over another person. People who use *nkut* are referred to as *Akut*, and are believed to have a second set of eyes. The first set allows one to

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<sup>89</sup> “Jju” <http://dice.missouri.edu/docs/niger-congo/Jju.pdf> Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Carol Virginia McKinney, “The Bajju of Central Nigeria: A Case Study of Religious and Social Change” (PhD thesis: Southern Methodist University, 1985), 17.

<sup>91</sup> McKinney, 18.

see the physical, while the other is used to see into the spiritual realm.<sup>92</sup> This was reflected in the concept of the *Gajimale*. A *gajimale* is a water spirit that comes out to seduce its victims by coming in the form of a good-looking opposite sex partner. The Bajju believe that the *gajimale* gave riches in exchange for the lives of children and that epilepsy, *rong ncen* or 'fire of the river' was caused by the water spirits. There is also the *abvoi* belief.

The Bajju worship the god, *Abvoi*. *Godo Abvoi* or *Dodo* is the leader of the shrine while the *Magajin Abvoi* is the one who relays the messages of the god to the people. Kings men, traditional council and elders guided by the *Gado* of the *Abvoi* and the tradition were respected and valued making it compulsory for anyone who wants to embark on anything like: farming, hunting, marriages, festivals, and gathering and worship rites to consult him. The *Abvoi* was seen as God. The *Abvoi* has a *Gado*, who is also regarded as the highest leader in the community.<sup>93</sup> There is the idea of the *akurusak*: They are masquerades, which represent the *Abvoi* spirits during the celebrations. All these people and practices are done in the shrines. The idea of the shrine became a common thing among the Bajju people and they have served them till the coming of Christianity.<sup>94</sup>

It is historically stated that *Christianity* first entered the *Bajju* area in the late 1920s, and the first *Bajju Christian conversions* occurred in 1929. Other denominations and missions to establish a presence include; the United Native African Church, Church Missionary Society (Anglican), Baptists, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, and Methodists. Today there are almost 200 churches on their land, and as many as 90% of the people identify as Christian. Church now plays an important role in society, being a place of gathering and where problems are addressed in the community.<sup>95</sup>

Introduction of Christianity caused a strong decrease in the occurrence of polygamous marriage patterns, traditional religious beliefs, and many other

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<sup>92</sup> McKinney, Carol V. "Witchcraft or Spiritual Power among Bajju Christians" *On Knowing Humanity Journal* 2:2 (2018): pp. 17-24.

<sup>93</sup> Isuwa, Sunday. "The values, Taboos in Bajju Kingdom" [https://www.academia.edu/8523332/The\\_values\\_Taboos\\_in\\_Bajju\\_Kingdom\\_From\\_Sunday\\_Isuwa](https://www.academia.edu/8523332/The_values_Taboos_in_Bajju_Kingdom_From_Sunday_Isuwa) Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January, 2020, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> Onyeakagbu, Adaobi. "Popular taboos, beliefs and superstitions of the Bajju people of Kaduna" <https://www.pulse.ng/lifestyle/food-travel/popular-taboos-beliefs-and-superstitions-of-the-bajju-people-of-kaduna/pyjljdk> Accessed 21st January, 2020.

<sup>95</sup> "Jju" <http://dice.missouri.edu/docs/niger-congo/Jju.pdf> Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.

traditions and rituals.<sup>96</sup> In the Bajju area of Southern Zaria alone, the ECWA churches have grown from a very small beginning, with the first Bajju convert in 1929, to a denomination with twenty-nine churches and an average attendance of about 3346 by 1985.<sup>97</sup>

With the coming of Christianity in Kajju land, it has become difficult to find a shrine in any of the villages. A survey of many villages reveal that there is no shrine apart from Sakwak, which has a symbol-like or remains of the shrine, which has even been demolished. Such demolishing attitude shows how concentrated Christianity has grown in these areas. Although some inhabitants within the Kajju land still find witchcraft and traditional practices interesting and appalling considering the amount of insecurity challenges and diseases, which are befalling their people. Although Christianity penetrated the land and has changed the beliefs of the people concerning the gods, traces can be found in the land, where people still see witchcraft activities or traditional religions as meeting their socio-economic and religious demands in the societies. Such traces are considered devilish and barbaric by people who consider themselves Christians.

It is no doubt that the the gods are exiled in Kajju land, a similar scenario with what J. J. Van Der Leeuw called, *Gods in Exile*.<sup>98</sup> Some of those shrines have been demolished without even their remains. The elderly ones in the societies are dying and are being buried with the histories behind the shrines. It is hard today to find children who know a bit about the shrines and their activities in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. The society has become digital and the gods and the chief priests find technology uncomfortable and antagonistic to their activities. There is need to revisit the histories and practices of the gods to promote the culture of the people.

### **Socio-economic and Religious Effects of Deforestation**

According to Asante, Ababio and Boadu, forests are important for the socioeconomic development of societies, as they help in ameliorating global warming, providing income and also serve as homes to most of the world's plants and animals. Accordingly, they submitted that people believed that forests were sacred resources associated with spiritual relatives and inter

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<sup>96</sup> "Jju" <http://dice.missouri.edu/docs/niger-congo/Jju.pdf> Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2020.

<sup>97</sup> Ikeanyi M. Enwerem, *A Dangerous Awakening: The Politicization of Religion in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA-Nigeria, 1995. Web. <<http://books.openedition.org/ifra/400>>.; McKinney, "The Bajju of central Nigeria" 264-268.

<sup>98</sup> J.J. Van Der Leeuw, *Gods in Exile* (Chicago: The American Theosophical Society, 1926).

connected with humans, nature and the universe.<sup>99</sup> Their views on the forests are virtually the views of many African societies on forests.

Forests, as noted above, are mostly revered in Africa because they are sometimes referred to as the homes or the abode of the gods and ancestors; thus, activities around the forests are in most times monitored to ensure that the activities are not detested by the gods and do not also disturb their activities so as not to incur the wraths of the deities.

Traditional Africans see mountains, trees rivers, and different animals as representations of the deities and as such, they are divine, sacred and are highly revered.<sup>100</sup> This view of the traditional Africans cannot permit them to partake in any activity that can lead to the destruction or anything that can affect the nature as any attempt to do that can affect not only the natural object but the people at large.

Deforestation has serious effects on the bio-diversity of the Africans, the religion of the people, and the entirety of the people. Many of the adherents of even the newly found religions even complain about the disappearance of the forests and the sacred areas. For the adherents of the traditional African religions, it seems that the distance created between them and their gods makes it difficult to access the favours and the blessings of these gods who now live away from them.

These disappeared bio-diversity could have served as places for tourist attraction even if they are not used for religious purposes. It has become obvious that these trees have been cleared and the essential purpose for which they were planted has lost its place. Africans need to understand that there are virtues associated to the trees and religious places.

Tropical deforestation increases uncertainty and risks for food production due to direct physical changes that alter temperature and rainfall, both near and far from where forests are cleared. Deforestation in the tropics is also therefore beneficial at both local and global scales.<sup>101</sup> However, its influence on human and animal societies could be seen to have dominated the benefits.

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<sup>99</sup> Asante, Eric Appau, Stephen Ababio and Kwadwo Boakye Boadu. "The Use of Indigenous Cultural Practices by the Ashantis for the Conservation of Forests in Ghana." SAGE Open January-March 2017. Doi 10.1177/2158244016687611. Journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo p. 1.

<sup>100</sup> Ikuenobe, "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy", 5.

<sup>101</sup> Effects of Tropical Deforestation on Climate and Agriculture." In *Nature Climate Change*. <http://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/wp->

Also, forest conservation should also occur inside private land. Private forest-reserves and permeable agroforestry systems may be the key components of the landscape to maintain the connectivity among large public natural reserves, if they act as biological corridors, stepping stones or even as permeable matrix for some forest species.<sup>102</sup>

Deforestation has reduced the amount of rainfall in Jos and Kaduna. Some years ago in the eighties, the weather and climate in Jos and Kaduna was dense. However, recently, Jos and Kaduna particularly Southern part, has become extremely hot. The amount of rainfall has reduced drastically.

There is need to reinstate the planting of trees and enforce their religious significance in Africa, particularly in Jos and Kaduna. Because of development, these trees have been deforested and most exposed the ground to heat. Even if the religious significances are not advocated, it is good for the society as the trees preserve sheds to the earth, making the amount of heat to reduce on the face of the earth.

### **Conclusion**

This work argues the effects of deforestation on religious beliefs within the people of Ngas people in Plateau State and Kajju land in Southern Kaduna State. The attitude of cutting down trees in the society has succeeded in exiling the gods, which our traditional fathers' worshipped and such idea of worshipping the gods has contributed in protecting them from their enemies. But today Christians in the villages are killed despite the belief in God as the ultimate. Such an orientation needs to be instated among Africans which will help redefine our beliefs in God and Jesus or the gods in order to avoid being slaughtered in our own homelands. There is need to engage in afforestation in our societies to safeguard the presence of the gods and God in our lands. This collaborative effort would make our societies experience a touch of ancestral demarcation from the God that is being worshipped by Christians today.

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[content/uploads/2016/02/Effects\\_of\\_Tropical\\_Deforestation\\_Policymaker\\_Summary.pdf](content/uploads/2016/02/Effects_of_Tropical_Deforestation_Policymaker_Summary.pdf) Accessed March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Jean Paul Metzger, "Effects of deforestation pattern and private nature reserves on the forest conservation in settlement areas of the Brazilian Amazon" <http://www.scielo.br/pdf/bn/v1n1-2/a03v1n1-2.pdf> Accessed 24th April, 2020.

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