

Environmental Concerns in African Oral Literature: The Maieutic of the Quarrel between Heaven and Earth

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Abstract:

This paper examines the pedagogical approach of African verbal art in the construction of environmental awareness and sensitivity. While the wind of modernity, foreign religiosity, and Western imperialism have eroded most of the African traditional philosophy of nature¹, we claim the reevaluation of ancient paradigms and systems of knowledge in education and research, where the African cosmogony has long been presented in a socio-cultural and religious vision, through what Wole Soyinka terms cosmic totality². Based on Yoruba Oral literature, this study evaluates the conditions of existence in the interplay between humans and the environment where is sealed life and cosmic harmony, under the protection of the sacred laws of creation. Yoruba religious expressions in the quarrel between heaven and earth consecrate, from a literary perspective, those sacred laws made to dismantle the anthropocentric vision of the environment which “forms instrumental reason that view nature and the animal...as external to human needs, and thus effectively dispensable, or as being in permanent service to them, and thus an endlessly replenishable resource³”.

Keywords: Environment, Oral literature, Yorùbá, Pedagogy, Revival.

¹The unplanned Industrialization and urbanization process is expressive of a corrupted vision of what modernity should be in Africa, on the basis of the neocolonialist discourse and imperialism, for the profit of foreign powers and corrupt elites. The concept of man as master of nature has been a paradigm of deforestation.

²Wole SOYINKA, *Myth Literature and the African World*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

³Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin *Postcolonial Eco-criticism Literature, Animals, Environment*, 2nd Edition Routledge, 2015 306 Pages, <https://www.routledge.com/Postcolonial-Ecocriticism-Literature-Animals-Environment/Huggan-Tiffin/p/book/9781138784192>

Introduction:

The infringement of the laws of creation leads to an apocalypse materialized through the war between Heaven and Earth with a cosmic tragedy that portrays the political downturn caused by rising despot regimes in West Africa. The pedagogy of verbal art through the plotting of the antinomy of forces committed in a drama of disrespect in the sanctuary of cosmic harmony is expressive of the negro-African ontology and philosophy of responsibility in the protection of life. Addressing Yoruba education, Claude ASSABA makes a striking analysis of the traditional approach of integration in the cosmic totality, resumed in this study from an angle of eco-criticism, which is, unfortunately, not always at the core of man's activity on the environment, mainly in the exploitation of natural resources. In a time when most African countries are embarking on development programs with the rhetoric of unplanned and accelerated deforestation, mining, and industrial agriculture, the metaphors of cosmic harmony of African oral literature must have their place in the fostering and articulation of environmental philosophy. As such, this analysis seeks to pave ways toward a dynamic revival of oral literature in a modern perspective, to contribute to the building of ecological integrity amidst global warming and climate change context, and to complement the different undertaken initiatives.

A) The Cosmic interplay:

The narrative of "The Quarrel between Heaven and Earth" is part of the *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa*⁴ corpus, which is at the core of Yoruba literary traditions. The beginning of the narrative paints different spheres of existence correlated by strong ties of friendship, kinship, and diplomatic convenience. The setting showcases the imagery of beautiful landscapes and enthusiastic interplay, between the kingdom of heaven ruled by Ajalorun and the kingdom of earth ruled by Ajalaye. The free movement of people in the story of those different kingdoms is an expression of internal harmony for the inner being and the external world as well. It offers both a contemplative and active connection with nature, distinctive of the negro-African vision of life enclosed in the theory of cosmic totality, which postulates the vital nexus between the different worlds of creation. In the genesis as described in the story, people from heaven and earth entertain good relationships with solid ties materialized in different manners as stated below:

"They were closer than in-laws and would have been sworn to be true blood relatives. They ate together, hunted together, slept together and nothing seemed to be able to disturb the sky of their beautiful friendship that no cloud had ever darkened⁵".

⁴WandéAbimbola, *Sixteen Great Poems of Ifa*, UNESCO, 1975.

⁵ Our translation of la querelle du ciel et de la terre, CfLouis CAMARA, *Le tambour d'Orunmila*, Dakar, NEAS, 2003.

This deep connection magnifies the matrix of life and the power of *Ase*⁶ the creating force and asset of existence that must be in any performance of the human activity. This relates to the benefits of verbal art⁷ in society and to the diverse functions of storytelling as entertainment, but also as production and transmission of knowledge for the safeguards of cosmic strongholds. The physical and metaphysical worlds are, in this context, a network of cosmic components consecrated by the vital force. That is why education and culture are understood as a digest sum of practices, norms, and values set as guidelines for appropriate human conduct. At this point, the Bantu understanding of cosmic harmony⁸ brings heaven and earth together and celebrates the crosscutting spheres of existence:

The guarantee to this totality is a function of human responsibility, in that man, as a component of beings and major actors is expected to abide by the spirit of creation. Accordingly, without targeting the restriction of freedom, ethos is viewed as a clear manifestation of ethics corresponding to a social project. Religion, politics, and law must be anchored upon the understanding of the cosmos as the continual strife for harmony. It is such an anchorage that gives authenticity and legitimacy⁹ to its content. The Yoruba environmental vision makes no place for disruption between man and the environment. Though there is a critical point raised in the fact that the destiny of both Kingdoms is encapsulated in absolutism and centrality of power, communality confers authority to the sovereign whose status is grounded in sacredness. However, recalling the concept of the choice of an Ori¹⁰ in Yorùbátradition, this does not exclude responsibility in the African perspective as mentioned below:

The village model in Africa is a model of free discourse for the purpose of making good judgments and for doing justice for individuals and the community. These narrative situations force dialogue and give rise to human reflection, and they are far from uncritical. Each dialogical situation has earmarks of the Socratic enterprise; each is formative of the value

⁶ASE (or àṣẹ or aṣe) is an African philosophical concept through which the Yoruba of Nigeria conceive the power to make things happen and produce change. It is given by Olodumare to everything - gods, ancestors, spirits, humans, animals, plants, rocks, rivers, and voiced words such as songs, prayers, praises, curses, or even everyday conversation. Existence, according to Yoruba thought, is dependent upon it.²

In addition to its sacred characteristics, ase also has important social ramifications, reflected in its translation as "power, authority, command." A person who, through training, experience, and initiation, learns how to use the essential life force of things to willfully effect change is called an alaase.

Rituals to invoke divine forces reflect this same concern for the autonomous ase of particular entities. The recognition of the uniqueness and autonomy of the ase of persons and gods is what structures society and its relationship with the other-world.<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z24Jgm-t1vE>

⁷EviChamalah, AgusNuryatin, Suminto A. Sayuti, Ida Zulaeha, "Functions of Character in Indonesian Folklore Princess of the Runaway Valley: A Study of Vladimir Propp Narrative Structure Theory", *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies* Volume 1, Issue 3, 2019 C/<http://ijlls.org/index.php/ijlls>, consulté le 27/02/2021.

⁸P H. COetze, A.P.J Roux, *The African Philosophy Reader*, London, Routledge, 1998, p.300.

⁹Idem

¹⁰Louis Camara, *The Choice of an Ori*, Xamal, Michigan, 2001.

characteristic of that community; each reflects the essential texture of human life; each dialectically serves to move a community from injustice to justice, from wrong to right, from brokenness to wholeness, from ignorance to truth¹¹

This role played by verbal art in what can be termed as traditional eco-criticism has long contributed to the preservation of nature. Postcolonial eco-criticism documented environment as a way of thinking that seeks to understand how top-level, elite-driven processes including (neo) colonialism, capitalism, international development, interstate alliances, or the centralization or devolution of power are connected to the spaces in which people live and act, while at the same time recognizing that the reclamation of space, land, and resources is a key part of the process of people's liberation¹².

The time and space traditional eco-criticism is centered in religious canons of traditionalism that create a metaphysical connection in the theory of cosmic totality. However, this does not mean absolutism and absence of criticism. The re-evaluation of the ancestral agency and sacredness can be viewed as a form of a critic found in the postmodern notion of a crisis of authority as the narrative of the Quarrel between Heaven and Earth does not include criticism through characterization. But in both cases, pre and postcolonial eco-criticism performs an advocacy function¹³ in an Afro-centric assessment and positioning of African values at the heart of any single African program. It is specifically where the idea of indigenous knowledge of Africa and the African Diaspora is a way of countering Western hegemonic thinking and arrogance about their self-perceived monopoly of Knowledge¹⁴.

B) From harmony to discordance

The pleasant era of cooperation between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of earth unexpectedly ended under the responsibility of their kings. A linear reading of the story would show some anachronism in the friendship ties between the two kings, regarding the power and authority they hold. The communal responsibility they endorse does not appear in the fantasy of the hunting episode, which is expressive of selfishness, self-pride and a violation of nature. This corresponds to what Vladimir Prop calls the villain sphere of criminal action¹⁵. However, one may understand the plotting technic as a stimulus of the duality between the

¹¹Samuel. OluochImbo, *An introduction to African philosophy*, Rowman and littlefield publishers, Inc, US, p, 104, 1998.

¹²Nelson, Jake Robert, "For a Postcolonial Eco-critical Approach to International Relations." *In Transatlantic Perspectives on Diplomacy and Diversity*, edited by Anthony Chase, 139-150. New York: Humanity in Action Press, 2015.

¹³Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Eco-criticism, Literature, Animals, Environment*, Second edition, New York, Routledge, 2015, p.13.

¹⁴TanureOjaide, "Indigenous Knowledge and its expression in the folklore of Africa and The African Diaspora", KarimTraore, MobolanleSotunsaandAkinloyeOjo, *Expressions of Indigenous and local Knowledge in Africa and its diaspora*, London, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, p.12.

¹⁵Op, Chamalah, AgusNuryatin, Suminto A. Sayuti, Ida Zulaeha, Op,cit, p.03

devotion to collective welfare and the burden of selfishness. The figure of Elesin Oba, *InDeath and the Kings'horseman*, on whose sacrifice lays the harmonious continuity of cosmic order corresponds to the characters of the Kings who do not anticipate the consequences of their actions. Then, this maieutic of storytelling goes beyond the linearity of events and offers a wide range of interpretations.

The end of the companionship between Ajalorun and Ajalaye, and of the connectedness of their kingdoms highlights the blindness and tyranny of instinct in the face of accountability. The two kings encounter conflicting interests during a joint hunting activity presented both as leisure and a demonstration of power which ends with separation and environmental chaos:

One day, on their return from an unsuccessful hunt during which they had brought nothing, nothing, not the thinnest civet, not the smallest hare, not even the smallest turtledove... Ajalorun and Ajalaye arrived on the edge of a vast forest which seemed very gamey. After a quick consultation, our two kings decided to set fire to it in order to chase away the animals that lived there and turn it into an easy carnage.

Without further delay, they carried out their project and, when the flames of the fire began to set the forest ablaze, they went around it and stood at its exit with their eyes on the alert, their fingers on the rope stretched with their bows. Soon the whole forest was nothing more than a huge, smoking, crackling blaze.

Looking from an eco-criticism perspective, the strategy and tactic of the two kings correlate with the concept of man as master and possessor of nature that has largely contributed to the development of industrialization along with the bad consequences of anthropogenic activities on nature. It is quite difficult to calculate the damages caused by the devastation of a forest when due attention is given to the role of plants and all living species on the one hand, and to the deterioration caused by hazardous agents on the other. With this lack of environmental ethics, the narrative pictures the destruction of the environment as a major cause of global warming. From that insightful metaphor we remember that, though man learns from experience to improve his conditions, permissiveness has long contributed to his continuous self-destruction.

To foster eco-criticism and raise consciousness among people, environmental concerns have been at the core of traditional systems of knowledge and values conveyed by storytelling, myths, and legends. The task of regulating human activity on earth for a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs¹⁶ is not something new in Africa. However, the task has never been easy. A hermeneutic interpretation of storytelling sets a link between verbal art paradigms of knowledge and the continuous impact of fossil fuels on the environment. The increasing CO₂

¹⁶Collin BAIRD Michael Cann, *Environmental Chemistry*, fourth edition, W.H Freeman and Company, 2008,p.

emissions could result in a significant increase in global temperature, with its resultant modifications of climate¹⁷.

The story shows the exaggerated attitude of the Kings which is an infringement of the laws of nature but also to cosmic totality. One could hardly imagine that an unsuccessful hunt of kings could finish with an environmental tragedy. The melancholic language of disaster, expressed through the imagery of flames and smoke wreaking havoc on the forest is a cry of disintegration, which transmits a kind of idea-in-sound....to add emotion or vividness¹⁸ ...to narrated sequences.

While the two leaders are in an attempt to validate their heroism, the blinded challenge of power, honor, and dexterity leads to a shameful and abusive result. The counter-values of egocentrism, self-pride, and foolishness describe the dark side of humanity, through the two protagonists who are both accountable for the protection and destruction of their environment. They do not hold authority as a duty of creating the best living conditions for a peaceful and harmonious life, but rather as a privilege of domination. Most oral traditions In Africa paint nature and environment as the dwelling place of spirits with reverence and devotion in all life cycles as stated below:

The dynamic between humans and nature is embedded in oral pearls of wisdom, and as a result, one may say that interaction is one of the subjects in the indigenous artistic expression of this culture. Oral poetry/songs can generate and convey many more meanings than those intended for the gracing of the occasion for which they are performed if they are deconstructed¹⁹

However, looking closely at this typical event of the story, one can easily notice the uncommon lack of environmental consciousness in African oral literature, compared to the narrative of *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (Daniel Olorun Femi Fagunwa's, 1939) portrays. The figures of the two kings burning the forests down for game offer satiric interpretations uttered in verbal art through words, facial expressions, or whispers in the context of oral performance, as "laughter of many sorts accompanies the unrolling plot: laughter suggesting amusement at particular words or phrases; laughter of indignation, protest, or outrage..."²⁰ As a matter of fact, painting the meanness of humanity helps to present the required materials of analysis with regard to the environment.

¹⁷ Idem, p.304

¹⁸ FINNEGAN, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012
<<http://books.openedition.org/obp/1154>>. ISBN: 9781906924720., p.113

¹⁹ Geremew Chala Teresa, and Hunduma Dagim Raga, "Oromo Oral Literature for Environmental Conservation: A Study of Selected Folksongs in East and West Hararghe Zones", *Mdpi Journal of Humanities* 28 September 2018, p.14

²⁰ Karin Barber, *The Generation of Plays: Yoruba Popular Life In Theater*, Indiana University Press, p207.

Therefore, the plot of the quarrel between heaven and earth evaluates the significance of harmony from its contrary, moving the audience into dialectic thought. The total severance between the two kings occurs in a furthermore striking failure of convenience, despite the glorious past of harmony and peace they enjoyed and offered to their kingdoms, as the story goes:

Weary and discouraged, our two kings turned back with their heads down, pensive and thinking that it was better not to take any game. At least that day...

But just as they were about to emerge from the forest they had reduced to ashes, Ajalayé shouted a cry of surprise mixed with joy.

"O-o-o-o-o!...Ajalarun!.... look !... over there !... a palm rat !...

Indeed, just at the edge of the forest lay a very small, tiny red-coated palm rat, with a long tapering tail, of the species commonly known as "Emo".

It was dead... probably suffocated by the smoke of the fire, as its carcass was intact and showed no signs of burning.

Raising his head, Ajalarun in turn saw the palm rat and suddenly, forgetting the dignity that befitted their lordship, the two kings began to run at full speed towards the remains of the small animal... Faster, Ajalarun arrived first and, grabbing the tail of the palm rat, lifted it up triumphantly.

"Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!... It will not be said that Ajalarun one day came back empty-handed from hunting!... ", he said jubilantly.

No sooner had he finished talking than Ajalayé, out of breath, arrived in his turn and, taking the palm rat by the snout, pulled it with force from his side...» Hey there, my friend... gently ..." he said gasping, "... It's my rat! »

At first surprised, Ajalarun had dropped the tail of the palm rat and was looking at his friend with amazement... But his amazement was brief and, with a quick movement, he grabbed the rat's tail again...

"You're lying! ",Ajalarun became furious and pulled the rat's tail more and more violently.

Liar yourself!... "repliedAjalayé, clinging with all his strength to the animal's muzzle.

Oh really?!... ", roared Ajalarun, whose wrath was at its height, " ... well keep the rat ... but you will bitterly regret it, believe me!...

Shortly after the dispute between the King of Heaven and the King of Earth... the traditional ties that had long united the inhabitants of the Earth with those of Heaven were irremediably broken.

The consequences of this separation will undoubtedly lead to cosmic upheaval and climate change as Ajalorun, the King of Heaven and unique master of rain holds a determinant power and authority that he will exert against the Kingdom of Earth. To avenge what he considers an outrage to his lordship and rank among kings, he will wean the whole kingdom of earth from rain. The complexity of the story is that nothing reasonable could justify such a decision. Ajolorun who claims his supremacy before Ajalaye should have been compromising. But the protection of the environment and life on earth is the responsibility of Ajalaye the King. The consultation prior to the decision to burn the forest down should have been enough for him to make a better analysis of the stakes of being committed with a partner who is totally different, as the events take place in his own kingdom.

An overall analysis of this level of the story could lead to the idea of man being in perpetual introspection in religious, rational, and superstitious attitudes that affect his existential condition. The lack of leadership and charisma are undeniably the root causes of his disintegration and of the deterioration of his environment, while a simple consultation of the spirit of wisdom, IfaOrunmila in Yoruba tradition would have shown him the right conduct. However, a long apocalyptic drought viewed as punishment will fall on earth causing the deterioration of the environment, hunger, and death.

C) The hermeneutics of cosmic fragmentation:

The violation of the laws of nature could not but lead to environmental chaos. The harmony of life broken by the two kings as shown in the narrative could be compared to the current challenges related to climate change. Deforestation has reached unprecedented levels around the world, while people continue the same scenario of Ajalaye and Ajalorun, cutting trees polluting, and discharging hazardous products into their environment. In Nigeria, the Royal Dutch Shell Company has been involved in an environmental disaster with the complicity of political leaders. The exploitation of natural resources in industrialized economies as in poor countries has led to a series of damages on air, water and soil and livestock with several diseases diagnosed as a direct consequence of human activity on nature.

The geographical context of the narrative of the Quarrel between Heaven and Earth is located in Yoruba land. Therefore, recalling the historical figure of Nigeria's writer, Ken SaroWiwa, the protagonist of environmental activism for the *Ogoni* people of the Niger Delta is a duty of memory. Speculating on his death, he said: "I know that I am a mortuary candidate. But I intend to head for the mortuary with my pipe smoking." Unfortunately, his sense of responsibility for the protection of life led him to martyrdom because "In the end, it was the

other pipes that got him, the Shell and Chevron pipes that poured poison into the land, streams, and bodies of Saro-Wiwa's Ogoni people, provoking him to take up the life of protest that was to be his triumph and his undoing."²¹ The testimony on the sufferings caused by a mentality of rapacious capitalists, for whom money is the only value, expresses a sorrowful cry of smothered people, materialized through the narrative of Ajalaye and Ajalorun.

The link between fiction and reality in fictional literary genres is undeniable in literary criticism. But it is difficult to search for a similar situation in reality and difficult to witness the imprudence of Kings as narrated in the story. However, in the same perspective, the corrupt attitude of political and corporate leaders in our modern world of civilization and progress is far more vicious, as mentioned below:

an ocean of crude oil moving swiftly like a great river in flood, successfully swallowing up anything that comes its way. Cassava farms, yams, palms, streams, and animals for miles on end. There is no pipe-borne water and yet the streams, the only source of drinking water are coated with oil. You cannot collect a bucket of rainwater for the roofs; trees and grass are all covered with oil. . . . Men and women forced by hunger have to dive deep in oil to uproot already rotten yams and cassava²².

The postcolonial eco-criticism embodied by the writer and activist Ken Saro Wiwa has a lot to do with the attitude of Ajalaye and Ajalorun. The Shell Oil company activity was a disaster made possible by the acolytes and political elites who continue to sacrifice their populations just as the criminal act of burning the forest down with all its drawbacks is the result of the criminal complicity of Ajalaye. Finding balance in cooperation with a focus on vital and strategic assets is one of the key aspects of business, economic, and corporate diplomacy that leaders and the narrative's characters have missed dreadfully. As mentioned in the fragment of the Quarrel below:

The consequences of this serious decision were quickly evident, for soon not a single drop of water fell from the sky and a terrible drought hit the whole earth...

The water in the rivers began to dry up and the water levels dropped rapidly. Springs, brooks, waterfalls, and all streams were weakening at a glance. As for the ponds, lakes, pools, and other calm water points where people and animals come to drink and get their supplies, they began to stagnate lamentably, before drying up incredibly quickly while their surface was covered with beds of dead leaves.

²¹Bertolt Brecht, "PipedreamsKenSaro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice, and Micro-minority Rights", Nigerian government memo, December 5, 1994, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/currentstudents/postgraduate/masters/modules/resourcefictions/oil09/nixon_saro.pdf

²² Idem.

The branches of the trees lost all their leaves and twisted desperately with thirst. The flowers also lost their petals one after the other and then pitifully dried out before dying withered away.

The water from the wells evaporated, leaving them dry, and the sap from the plants dried out, making them sadly stunted and flaccid. Burned by the relentless sun, the tall grasses of the savannah became yellowish, dry, and brittle...

Soon the antelopes, gazelles, deer, giraffes, and other herbivorous species that populate the savannah found nothing to eat or drink and, having lost the strength to run, became easy prey for the carnivores that made dreadful carnage. But little by little, the game became increasingly scarce, both for the lion, the Lord of the forest and for the other carnivorous animals, condemned to starve to death, because these noble animals never eat corpses.

The only beneficiaries of this unprecedented disaster were of course the hyenas, jackals, wild dogs and other low-level predators, which were now feeding without restraint and infesting the forests and savannahs that they had taken over from their masters.

We even saw animals of the same species eating each other and lions, driven by hunger, attacking people and their livestock.

The animal kingdom was in madness, the whole of nature was in mourning and the destructive spirits were having a field day.

Naturally, mankind was not spared from the terrible calamity that had befallen the earth. Their drought-ravaged fields were no longer producing anything and the most fertile land now looked like barren.

Yam and other food plants were left with slender stems, unable to grow. Maize produced only small, stunted cobs that did not reach maturity. As for beans, their flowers opened well, but their seeds could not hatch for lack of sap...

For all this, the women could no longer prepare maize porridge, cassava flour puree, yam flour paste, and bean sauce with peanut oil, fried yam fritters with palm oil, or any of these substantial and body-friendly foods.

Without substance, men lost their vitality and could no longer procreate and women could no longer bear children. Diseases quickly turned into disabilities and killed ten times faster than normal...

This situation directly addresses the environmental threats of the 21st century, not only in Africa but worldwide. In different parts of the world, forests are being destroyed, and oil spills affect global health with permanent destruction of the Ozone layer. Africa is not left

apart from the several consequences of modern civilization that did not come along with the core values of life wrapped in the metaphors of the oral genres. It is difficult to develop appropriate environmental ethics without an interest in the literary traditions that have long contributed to the creation of What Assaba calls the pedagogy of the sacred. In this era of information technologies, the past audience of oral performance has been drawn away from its circle to the screen, with programs mostly developed by foreign lobbies and industries at a moment while our *common home* is being destroyed as never before, considering what follows:

Global environmental problems, such as habitat destruction and fragmentation, biodiversity loss by population and species extinctions emerging and reemerging diseases, and more recently climate disruption, were practically unknown or little recognized in the 1950s, but now are the cause, trade of endangered species, invasive species, toxification and pollution, of grave concern²³.

To contain these attacks on the planet, several initiatives have been taken to stop the ozone layer depletion and its effects on the environment and health. The Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer of 1985 ratified in 2009 is an example of commitment to the promotion of a better world. But there again the concrete application of the decisions is often hindered by the discretionary power of States to be bound or not by conventions. The construction of an environmental conscience is therefore not an easy task, because the obligational characteristic is most often considered as a sanction, contrarily to the maieutic approach of the verbal art performance.

The power of emotion is determinant in the secret germination of an ethos of responsibility, communion, and sustainability in a variety of fields, hence the advantage of a trans-disciplinary approach in the common mission of protecting nature and life on earth. Revisiting creation myths, epic narratives, storytelling, and legends from the perspective of sacredness to collect the fragmented cosmic spheres and better appreciate the harmony of creation is therefore essential to our education systems. The cross-sector commitment to mitigating environmental threats is made visible in the narrative of the quarrel through, the whole community and the genius of the different messengers sent as ambassadors of peace and cosmic reconciliation.

D) Cosmic reconciliation:

The unbearable harsh conditions of drought, disease, and death plaguing the kingdom of Ajalaye cannot but lead to repentance. The solution to the carnage builds on the joint

²³ Gerardo Ceballos, "Four commentaries on the Pope's message on Climate Change and Income Inequality: Pope Francis' Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si*, Global environmental risks and the Future of Humanity", *The Quarterly Review of Biology*, The University of Chicago Press, September 2016, Vol. 91, 2016, p250.

participation of all forces, but most importantly on the role played by Esuoro and Orunmilathe spirit of wisdom and master architect, the spiritual evidence of knowledge who came from the heavens to the earth²⁴. This episode connects the audience to the realm of supernatural intervention through the divination of Ifa priests. It is somehow weird, after burning the forest willingly, to seek the causes of the drought at the altar of Orunmila. This deceptive contradiction is a revelation of the nature of the human spirit in continuous flux and reflux between right and wrong, good and evil which is a way of escaping liability. But the superstitious recourse to divination is remedied by an introspective allusion to the responsibility of humans in the carnage that must be repaired by sacrifice. This is an illustration of power separation as the presence of gods is not a sign of fatalism but a sound manifestation of their participation in the protection of creation:

After three days and three nights of secret talks, Ifa gave them the key to the problem and, in turn, the soothsayers revealed it to the elders who had come to consult them. The solution seemed very simple on the surface: two swift rats, two fish with graceful fins, two fat chickens and two full geese, and two beautifully horned Einlà cows, had to be sacrificed as an offering to the King of Heaven. But, most importantly, it was also necessary to find someone to bring the little palm rat to the King of Heaven, the cause of the fateful quarrel between the two sovereigns.

The reconciliation of man with the environment is conceived in terms of cosmic justice to create the conditions of harmony. The act of reparation and satisfaction to the hurt totality is marked by global solidarity and epic songs in a ritualistic tone. In the story, the special challenge is to bring the palm rat to the King of Heaven. Several attempts by volunteer heroes are counted with a broken curb of hope as narrated below:

Then, with their hearts full of hope, the huge crowd gathered in the courtyard of the Ajalaye palace began to sing in chorus, clapping their hands:

The kite took flight

The quick, intrepid kite

Who carries with him our hope...

Eya Kite! Eya!

Take heart! ...Go up to the heaven!

²⁴ Adeyinka Olaiya, Orunmila Ifa ... The incredible highlights of the master architect according to AdeyinkaOlaiya

Save the earth from peril!...

The kite rose very high indeed. It even did everything it could to reach the sky. But after a while, having reached the limit of its strength, it came down at full speed and let the palm rat fall to the ground.

This scenario is reproduced several times with the praise songs magnifying the abilities and heroism of the volunteer messengers of the earth to carry the palm rat to the palace of Ajalorun. The chant in this expedition is not only an energizing and motivational art but a form of catharsis of the gathered assembly exorcising its miseries:

The cheerful song of encouragement, which is heard from all the breasts with a hitherto unrivaled fervor, resounds once again with thunderous applause...

The Vulture has taken flight,

The calm, the leisurely vulture

Who carries with him our hope...

Eya vulture! Eya!

Take heart! Go up to Heaven

Save the earth from peril!...

This repetition in a form of Oriki²⁵ gives this section of the narrative the solemnity of the much expected cosmic reconciliation. Humans, animals and birds are all mourning and lamenting for salvation. The successful end of the ritual marked by the commitment of the Vulture after the failures of all his predecessors is a celebration of victory through the comeback of the rain, opening a new era of well-being and prosperity.

The birth of a new environmental conscience through reconciliation is an outcome of the different cosmic spheres and the role played by the gods. The end of the story provides a vivid understanding of the traditional approach to the environment with emotion and reverence for the forces that govern the universe. Though there might be a religious connotation in the interplay of man with nature and the universe as a whole, it is important to remember the educational functionality of the narrative in the constant task of building an environment-fit ethos and conscience. The development and constant stimulation of a collective memory

²⁵In the Yorùbá language of southwestern Nigeria, oríkì can refer to a single praise name (Abraham 1962:481) or an entire string of “attributive epithets” (Barber and Waterman 1995:241). Because of the variety of vocal modes, styles, and instrumental accompaniments associated with it, oríkì defies classification, cf Aaron Carter-Ényì, “Lùlùfúnwọ̀n”: Oríkì in Contemporary Culture, *Ethnomusicology, Morehouse College Vol. 62*, 2018.p.2

immersed in the values of creation is inherent to traditional systems of knowledge, ethics, and philosophy that storytelling myths and legends convey differently.

Conclusion:

The narrative of the quarrel between heaven and earth should be understood as a description of cosmic components and scrutiny of their vital connectivity. The plot follows the narrative structure of the African model of storytelling, corresponding to the work of Vladimir Propp's narrative structure theory. The characters of Ajalayé and Ajalorun the main protagonists offer the image of the tenants of power and authority and therefore rulers of creation by whom the breaking of the sacred cosmic laws happened. The exaggerated exercise of kingship in the narrative is a critique of the meanness and tyranny of human activity on nature, illustrating the current environmental threats in an industrialized world with anthropogenic pollution extinguishing the planet. The transition between tradition and modernity failed to include the development of environmental conscience, despite the important educational resources that must be incorporated in the curricula from primary to graduate school. Meeting the environmental challenges of the United Nations sustainable development goals 11 and 13 calls for a reconciliation of all nations, sciences and technologies around the vital cosmic connectivity which can only happen through a maieutic of environmental conscience and ethos. Another world is only possible with a new-born cosmic personality in lieu and place of fragmented being.

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