

Postcolonial Capitalism and Eco-Related Challenges: Insights from Nigeria's Sacred Groves

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Abstract

Postcolonial capitalism in Nigeria has driven the exploitation of sacred groves, eroding cultural heritage and causing serious environmental abuse, raising urgent concerns about the loss of both ecological balance and indigenous identity. There is a research gap in understanding how capitalism shaped by colonialism contributes to the cultural displacement of sacred groves, resulting to environmental, economic, political, biodiversity loss and security consequences in Nigeria. This research therefore investigates the ways in which the capitalization of Nigerian's sacred groves causes cultural displacement, and has widespread effects. It seeks to reveal the underlying relationship between post-independence capitalism and its effects in Nigeria by exploring these interactions. The study uses David Harvey's Capitalist Accumulation and Dispossession Theory to examine the socio-political, economic, cultural, and ecological landscape of Nigeria as a result of colonial-inspired capitalism and the environmental effects of cultural loss. The study utilizes the ethnographic method of data collection through observation and key informant interviews. The method provides deep insights into the cultural significance of the groves, the impacts of displacement, the ecological and other consequences of neocolonialism in Nigeria. This approach is relevant as it captures the life experiences and cultural contexts essential for understanding the interplay between persistent colonial capitalism and its implications in Nigeria. The paper illustrates how the combination of capitalist exploitation and cultural erosion has led to significant environmental and social challenges. The monetization of natural resources undermines traditional ecological ethics, intensifying climate vulnerability and community disenfranchisement. With a focus on the need for sustainable and culturally inclusive answers to the continuing global discussion on climate change, this study provides vital insights into the wider consequences of cultural displacement within postcolonial settings.

Keywords: Postcolonial, Capitalism, Environmental consequences, Cultural displacement, Climate Change

Introduction

Nigeria has seen substantial economic changes brought about by capitalist growth, much like many other postcolonial countries. After gaining independence, Nigeria followed the colonial methods and implemented policies that gave priority to resource extraction, fast industrialization, and foreign investment as means of achieving economic expansion. But these capitalist methods Nigerian followed which have been exploitative, putting financial gain ahead of environmental sustainability. Akram (2024) observed this and write that the environmental conditions of the colonized areas was influenced by Western colonization in a number of ways. The introduction of alien plants and animals within the colonial boundaries resulted in a forced change of the ecosystems of the colonized people. And DeLoughrey and Handley (2011) contended that ecological degradation is sustained by colonial and neocolonial development, which prioritizes economic expansion above environmental sustainability motivated by Western concepts. The capitalist logic of profit maximization at the cost of ecological and human well-being is reflected in this unrestricted exploitation. Adeyanju, Bulkan, Onyekwelu, St-Laurent, Kozak, Sunderland, & Stimm (2022) stated that illegal resource exploitation in sacred groves for private financial gain occurs globally and in Nigeria. The end effect is an ecosystem characterized by extensive ecological problems, ranging from urban pollution and oil spills to deforestation and degradation. The intricate relationship between postcolonial capitalism and ecological deterioration in Nigeria is brought to light by these environmental problems.

Nigeria's dependence on extracting natural resources, especially crude oil, is at the core of its postcolonial capitalism system. The Niger Delta, which has enormous petroleum reserves, has seen both environmental disaster and economic growth. For many years, multinational firms have worked with the Nigerian government to produce oil, often with little consideration for regulations regarding the environment. Water poisoning, gas flaring, and oil spills have displaced indigenous peoples and destroyed local ecosystems. Crook, Short, & South (2018) note this fact and opined that one aspect of colonialism's lasting impact is the ongoing injustices and rejection of indigenous peoples' rights. It is possible to identify parallel processes of injustice and exploitation with regard to non-human animals and/or elements of the natural environment.

Beyond oil extraction, Nigeria has one of the highest rates of deforestation in the world, which has resulted in biodiversity loss, soil erosion, and disruptions in local climate patterns. Basti (2007), as acknowledged by Akram (2024) establishes the lingering effects of colonial mismanagement as local villagers struggle with a changing climate and degraded environment left in the wake of extractive colonial occupation. Akram observed that foreign invaders forced their supposedly better technologies such as electricity,

combustion engines, and asphalt passages on the areas they controlled. These environmental changes highlight the unsustainable nature of capitalist-driven development. Forests are cleared to make room for expanding cities, and agricultural lands are depleted due to commercial farming practices that prioritize cash crops over food security. The demand for timber, driven by both domestic and international markets, further accelerates deforestation.

In a similar vein, mining operations across have increased environmental degradation. Gold, coal, and other minerals are extracted by industrial and informal mining activities in states like Zamfara and Kogi with no governmental monitoring. Water supplies are contaminated by the usage of hazardous chemicals like cyanide and mercury, putting human and animal life in danger. Marginalized populations are disproportionately affected by the cycle of environmental degradation that is sustained by the capitalist drive for resource extraction, which is often managed by a combination of governmental actors, private investors, and international corporations.

Lawrence, Cheshire & Richards (2004) remarked that degradation of the environment is a global problem. It is shown in a variety of ways, including the removal of trees, contaminated streams, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, chemical pollution, and many other issues. Much of this damage has been attributed to modern agricultural methods. Discussing the impact of capitalism, Heffernan (1998) write that where neoliberal policies encourage farmers to be exposed to free market conditions, need them to use a variety of tactics in order to “survive” and expand their farms which led to the encroachment of the sacred areas. Due to their focus on the market, they often specialize in production, investing their resources and expertise in one or more commodities.

Postcolonial capitalism’s ecological disturbances are made worse by climate change. Increased deserts, changing rainfall patterns, and rising temperatures pose a danger to water supply and agricultural output. Many people are migrating southward in search of fertile land as a result of the worsening droughts in northern Nigeria. Conflicts over resources, especially between farmers and herders, have been heightened by these climate-related migrations. These difficulties are made worse by the country’s failure to enact sustainable environmental policies, which exposes the weakness of Nigeria’s capitalist-driven growth paradigm.

Understanding the larger historical and global scope of this problem is essential when analyzing the relationship between postcolonial capitalism and ecological problems in Nigeria. Colonial-era capitalism systems still influence Nigeria’s economic choices, often giving priority to immediate financial gain above long-term environmental sustainability. A paradigm change that strikes a balance between ecological responsibility and economic

development is necessary to address these environmental issues. It was on this backdrop that Nixon (2011) proposed the concept of “slow violence,” which holds that the unrelenting exploitation of colonized ecosystems under the nexus of global capitalism and colonialism/neocolonialism causes the slow ecological devastation. Environmental deterioration resulted with the introduction of automobiles and the building of coal-tar roads in colonial areas. Nigeria runs the danger of worsening its environmental problems and sustaining resource-exploitation-related social injustices if such a change is not made.

Theoretical Framework

British Marxist geographer David Harvey developed the concept of accumulation by dispossession as a development of Karl Marx's primitive accumulation theory. This concept was first presented and expanded upon in his 2003 book, ‘The New Imperialism.’ David Harvey's theory of capitalist accumulation by dispossession offers a compelling lens for studying post-colonial capitalism and its eco-related difficulties. His theory builds on Marx's theory of primitive accumulation by highlighting the ways in which capitalism keeps growing through environmental destruction, privatization, and the appropriation of public resources. Neoliberal economic policies, land commercialization, and corporate exploitation are posing a growing danger to sacred groves in Nigeria, which were formerly safeguarded as ecological and spiritual sanctuaries. Through the application of Harvey's theory, an essay on this subject can examine how these groves, which have traditionally been protected by indigenous cosmologies, are now being destroyed ecologically and culturally as a result of post-colonial capitalism. This approach aids in highlighting the ways that postcolonial period failure to conserve these sacred groves, instead they facilitated their incorporation into market-driven agenda.

Harvey's theory also makes it possible to analyze the contradictions of postcolonial capitalism, where the quest of profit compromises environmental sustainability. In Nigeria, sacred groves are invaded by state-sponsored infrastructure projects, extractive industries, and urban growth, uprooting indigenous guardians and undermining established ecological knowledge systems. In addition to reducing biodiversity, this kind of accumulation through dispossession weakens the indigenous governance systems that regulated sustainable relationships with the surrounding environment. Using Harvey's approach, this article critically analyzes how this post-colonial capitalism upholds social injustices, marginalizing local populations while benefiting global companies and political leaders. Finally, by exposing the intricate connections between capitalism, ecological deterioration, and cultural survival, the theory sheds light on how the effects of colonial economic systems still influence environmental conflicts in postcolonial Nigeria.

The Sacred Groves of Nigeria: Religious, Cultural and Ecological Significance

Khan, Khumbongmayum & Tripathi (2008) assert that natural resource conservation has been a fundamental aspect of many cultures in various forms from the beginning of time. Traditional religious rituals demonstrate the mutually beneficial relationship between humans and the natural world. Around the world, indigenous people coexisted peacefully with the environment and preserved its sacred groves. Sacred groves are forested areas preserved due to their deep spiritual and cultural significance in various Nigerian communities. These groves often associated with deities, ancestors, and traditional religious practices, have served as centers of worship, cultural heritage, and conservation for generations. Wild & McNeely (2011) write that "Sacred natural sites" are areas of land or bodies of water that have particular spiritual value for communities and individuals. Daniel, Udeagha, & Jacob (2016) observe that sacred groves in Nigeria are the locations of festivals, ceremonies, initiations, and other events, such as the coronation and installation of royal families. Ceperley, Montagnini, & Natta (2010) reaffirmed this view and write that groves are widespread across tropical Africa and are historically related with god worship, initiation rites, and sacrifices. From the authors it shows that sacred groves are found all around Nigeria and other parts of Africa, and they symbolize a special meeting point of spirituality and nature.

Sacred Groves are important in maintaining Nigeria's rich cultural traditions, even outside of their religious significance. Rutte (2011) notes that sacred groves provide locals with many advantages in addition to serving as a place for them to practice their religions and preserve traditions. Bulkan (2017) underlines that sacred groves which are deeply significant to the local community on a cultural and religious level and are widely acknowledged as a traditional kind of community-based conservation. They act as archives for traditional knowledge, folklore, and artistic creations, such as shrines devoted to various deities and sculptures and carvings. These groves are the site of rituals, celebrations, and ceremonies that enhance ties between the past and present by reaffirming communal identity and continuity. These natural areas serve as initiation sites in many communities, where younger generations receive teachings about history, moral behavior, and indigenous spirituality.

Sacred groves are important ecological protection areas that save unique and endangered plant and animal species. For Ossai (2024), these groves provide many ecological services that are essential to environmental conservation, and they are protected from damage by taboos and religious beliefs. First, they are stores of biological diversity, housing a variety of plant and animal species, some of which may be rare or endangered. Because of cultural taboos that forbid exploitation, these groves survived the effects of population and forest clearing in the pre-colonial period. They offer a sanctuary for biodiversity,

protecting ecosystems that have been destroyed by human activity elsewhere. Sacred groves serve as natural sanctuaries that preserve ecological balance, promote the conservation of medicinal plants, and guarantee sustainable cohabitation between humans and the environment in areas where industrialization and agriculture have caused significant deforestation.

Moreover, sacred groves help to conserve water and regulate the climate. Because of their extensive tree cover, these groves assist in capturing carbon, which lessens the effects of climate change by absorbing greenhouse gasses. In order to control water flow, stop erosion, and preserve soil fertility, many of these forests are found next to rivers or act as watersheds. Thus, the existence of sacred trees ensures the supply of pure water and stops land degradation, which benefits agriculture and local livelihoods.

Despite their significance, Nigerian sacred groves are becoming more and more threatened by land encroachment, population increase, and modernity. Since traditional beliefs that formerly safeguarded these forests are eroding due to urbanization, illicit logging operations, agricultural expansion, and real estate development are taking place. Dudley, Bhagwat, Higgins-Zogib, Lassen, Verschuuren, & Wild (2012) regretted that sacred groves have sometimes undergone significant alteration, degradation, and deforestation, rendering them environmentally unsustainable. These groves are in danger of being destroyed because younger generations in some communities are less likely to follow the taboos and regulations that have traditionally protected them. These holy woodlands can disappear if proactive measures are not taken to combine conventional conservation methods with contemporary environmental regulations.

Nigeria's ancient traditions for protecting holy groves were disrupted by the postcolonial capitalism, which resulted in a progressive deterioration in the areas of ecological conservation, cultural heritage, water preservation, and resistance to urbanization. Indigenous conservation methods that protected these groves were undermined by colonial economic policies that placed a higher priority on cash crops, large-scale agriculture, and resource extraction. Rapid urbanization, illegal logging, agricultural growth, and real estate development hastened the loss of these sacred forests as capitalism solidified after independence. Deforestation, water depletion, and biodiversity loss resulted from many areas abandoning spiritual taboos that traditionally safeguarded these areas as land became more and more commercialized. The groves' capacity to act as ecological buffers and cultural sanctuaries was further undermined by the neglect of blending indigenous ecological knowledge into contemporary conservation initiatives, making them vulnerable to capitalist exploitation.

Capitalism, Environment, and Sacred Grove Exploitation

Nigeria's economic and natural landscape has been significantly shaped by capitalist growth since the country's independence in 1960. Nigeria's postcolonial economy remained heavily dependent on the exploitation of natural resources, particularly minerals, oil, and timber, sourced from areas considered sacred by indigenous communities. This was established under colonial rule when British authorities prioritized resource extraction for economic gain, disregarding local spiritual and ecological concerns. In the post-independence era, successive governments continued this pattern, intensifying deforestation, mining, and oil drilling in lands that held cultural and religious significance. This exploitation not only disrupted traditional belief systems but also contributed to environmental degradation and socio-economic inequalities, reflecting the enduring legacy of colonial economic policies.

Subsequent governments anxious to include Nigeria into the global capitalist system, sometimes putting profit ahead of environmental sustainability, increased this reliance. According to Eweje (2006), the environmental effects of multinational corporations' operations in developing countries have received a lot more attention recently, which has sparked a contentious public policy discussion. In particular, there has been interest in the environmental degradation of host communities and nations resulting from the operations of multinational oil companies in developing countries. Gallarotti (1995) however noted that companies in developed countries pay more for their environmental damage through fines, taxes, and legal action, while also benefiting more from green practices through marketable pollution permits, subsidies, and fewer difficulties from government administrative processes.

Impact of Oil Companies in the Niger Delta Region

The most obvious illustration of environmental deterioration caused by capitalism is the oil sector, especially in the Niger Delta. Despite the extraction of crude oil worth billions of dollars by multinational businesses such as Shell and Chevron, the region suffers by massive pollution, oil spills, and gas explosions. Communities that depend on farming and fishing have been destroyed by the loss of local ecosystems, which has resulted in social unrest and a loss of livelihoods. Despite laws, companies have been able to maintain unsustainable activities due to inadequate enforcement and corruption, which has worsened poverty and environmental degradation. Kadafa (2012) write that Niger Delta is the largest wetland in Africa and one of the ten most significant wetland and marine ecosystems worldwide. However, because of oil pollution, the region is now characterized by contaminated streams and rivers, forest destruction, and biodiversity loss, making it an ecological wasteland.

The Niger Delta is made up of a variety of ecosystems, including mangrove swamps, freshwater swamps, and rain forests. Otukunefor and Biukwu (2005) have demonstrated that uncontrolled wastewater discharges and unsustainable petroleum extraction practices are responsible for the region's aquatic ecosystem pollution levels. It was on this view that Emoyan (2008) lamented that petroleum resource production generates enormous profits at the expense of the Niger Delta's air, water, land, and forest resources degrading. However, Ijaola (2016) lamented that the neglect of the gods resulted in the environmental problems in Niger Delta and stated that the colonialists saw no need to be concerned about exploiting the holy forest areas overseen by gods like Aziza or the spirituality associated with the Niger Delta Rivers, which were cared for by water goddesses like Olokun or Onoku. Instead, the goddesses were only seen to be beings with unnecessary, exaggerated eco-spiritual names. As a result, colonialists promoted the debunking of the gods and their restrictions on the exploitation of natural resources in the Niger Delta. And Anoliefo, Isikhuemhen & Ochiye (2003) remarked that the damage caused by the abandoning of traditional cultural activities extends beyond their disappearance and poses a significant risk to natural environmental systems.

Effect of Urbanization to the Environment

Discussing the impact of urbanization in India, Uttara, Bhuvandas, & Aggarwal (2012) remark that the rapid environmental degradation brought on by India's unchecked urbanization has resulted in a number of issues, including housing shortages, declining water quality, excessive air pollution, noise, dust, and heat, as well as difficulties disposing of solid and hazardous waste. They also noted that the process of urbanization is the expansion of cities as a result of economic growth and industrialization, which also causes changes in human behavior, labor division, and specialization that are unique to urban areas. Kalhor & Mahdisoltani (2015) write that in developed countries, the formation and growth of cities often follow a consistent, moderate pattern that is based on industrial development. However, the growing trend of urbanization in developing nations has resulted in a number of environmental, economic, and social issues that are at odds with these country's sustainable industrial and social growth. Rajesh, Ballullaya, Surendran & Sinu (2017) observed the traces of primary and pristine forests in sacred groves that are not part of the state-owned protected area system. Given their modest size and proximity to cities, towns, and human settlements, they are probably going to be impacted by urbanization.

The loss of sacred groves in Nigeria was also greatly affected by industrialization, which has been driven by postcolonial capitalist policies. Some protected land for spiritual reasons has been acquired by large-scale enterprises such as manufacturing, mining, and

urban expansion. Governments provide permits for resource exploitation that destroys these once protected areas because they want economic expansion more than environmental and cultural preservation. The surviving groves are degraded by industrial pollution, making them unfriendly for wildlife, plants, and indigenous people who depend on them for medicinal and spiritual reasons.

As growing towns encroach on natural areas, urbanization serves to worsen the loss of sacred groves. Sacred groves have been turned into homes and businesses in many postcolonial nations due to the fast population increase and the need for infrastructure and accommodation. Many times, traditional societies who used to care for these groves as centers of culture and spirituality are uprooted or under pressure to stop using their traditional methods of conservation. Since many religious rites and oral traditions associated with these groves disappear along with their demise, the loss of these holy areas not only affects the natural balance but also weakens cultural legacy.

Nigeria's rapid urbanization and industrialization have resulted in deforestation, land degradation, and water pollution in addition to oil extraction. The demand for timber, farmland, and infrastructural development has led to massive deforestation in many sacred areas in Nigeria. This led to industrial activities in cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt which contribute to air and water pollution, with toxic waste from factories which are dumped indiscriminately. Although capitalist expansion has created jobs, the religious and environmental effects endanger public health, long-term economic stability and religious belief of the people.

Indigenous Knowledge and Environmental Conservation

According to Guto (2020), the idea of indigenous environmental knowledge is founded on the holistic character of indigenous knowledge systems, which see the socio-ecological system as a single, cohesive whole rather than as separate components. As a result, they see people as a part of the whole cosmos. The recognition of the IKS as a comparative and alternative knowledge system is necessary since any imbalance resulting from a component of the socio-ecological systems tends to produce disequilibrium in the socio-ecological system. Gadgil, Berkes & Folke (1993) note that indigenous peoples who have historically used resources consistently tend to have a deep understanding of how complex ecological systems behave in their own communities. Many observations passed down from one generation to the next have contributed to the accumulation of this knowledge. According to Donovan & Puri (2004), earlier theoretical, conceptual, and empirical research, indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK) has a major influence on the environment and may be used effectively in resource management and conservation activities. First, over numerous millennia, indigenous people have been able to control

natural plants with far better outcomes because of IEK. Barnhardt (2014) opined that because IEK is derived from experience, education, and generational transmission and survival in a complex environment, it also increases the resilience of socio-ecological systems.

According to Gbadegesin & Gbadamosi (2024), indigenous peoples in Nigeria used this indigenous knowledge to guide their activities and promote peaceful coexistence with their surroundings prior to the establishment of formal legal systems. Indigenous knowledge covered a wide range of areas, including technologies, skills, practices, beliefs, and the need to preserve biodiversity. In Nigeria, indigenous knowledge has been essential to environmental conservation because it provides methods for maintaining ecological balance, biodiversity, and sustainable land use. Indigenous people in Nigeria used their profound knowledge of nature to manage resources sustainably before the arrival of colonial capitalism. These communities established conservation traditions that guaranteed the continuous availability of natural resources through taboos, collective land ownership, and sacred groves. But post-colonial capitalism has ignored these ancient structures in favor of quick industrialization and profit-driven exploitation, which has seriously harmed the environment.

Jeeva, Mishra, Venugopal & Laloo (2006) write that mythological narratives and indigenous knowledge related to the groves have been the primary factors in maintaining the sacred groves in their immaculate state. Sacred groves are the dwelling places of deities, and religious belief is one of the main factors for the conservation of plant resources in such groves. Using holy forests and groves was one of the most successful indigenous conservation strategies. Many Nigerian ethnic groups, like the Yoruba and Igbo, prohibited hunting and deforestation inside designated holy land geographic areas. Rare plant and animal species were preserved by these groves, which acted as storehouse of biodiversity. In the same way, taboos often controlled rivers and lakes, limiting fishing during the mating season and enabling fish populations to recover. By avoiding overexploitation, such ecological knowledge guaranteed the long-term preservation of natural resources.

Indigenous agriculture methods supported environmental sustainability in addition to spiritual locations. Agroforestry, mixed cropping, and shifting cultivation are examples of traditional agricultural methods that have reduced erosion and preserved soil fertility. The Tiv ethnic group of central Nigeria, for example, used a cyclical agricultural technique that let the ground recover before being used again. This strategy was in contrast to the large-scale monoculture agricultural model, which is pushed by capitalism and often results in biodiversity loss, deforestation, and soil depletion. Environmental problems have been made worse by post-colonial agricultural policies that disregard traditional

farming practices. According to Sharma, Kanta, Dwivedi & Rani (2020), indigenous farming methods used by the people are mostly based on traditional knowledge, which is typical in agricultural systems to protect biodiversity and ecosystems and is helpful in ensuring sustainable food and human health. Kolawole & Laogun (2005) specifically listed the different indigenous knowledge system (IKS) techniques used to preserve soil fertility in Ekiti State of Nigeria, explained why they were employed, assessed the advantages of using IKS to preserve soil fertility, and examined the ecological and socioeconomic factors that affected IKS use. Farmers use a variety of renewable farm resources as agricultural practices, reducing reliance on external inputs. They also hold a rich pool of indigenous expertise in livestock management. By addressing rural development and nature conservation, these approaches help to protect the local ecology, which in turn promotes the sustainable use of biodiversity conservation.

Indigenous conservation was also based on communal land ownership. Land was viewed as a collective inheritance rather than a commodity in many pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Valdivia (2005) note that "traditional knowledge" and indigenous agroforestry have been favored as models for environmental conservation in global environmental discourse. According to Del Rio (1992), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, [12]), indigenous knowledge is the comprehensive traditional scientific understanding of a people's lands, natural resources, and environment that has been developed over many generations as a result of their interactions with the environment and how these relate to the indigenous people's cultural, social, economic, and physical well-being. By promoting shared accountability for resource management, the communal system stopped careless exploitation. But private land ownership was brought about by post-colonial capitalist practices, which made it easier for people to steal land, clear forests, and destroy communal forests for profit. Increased land disputes, environmental damage, and community displacement have all been increased by this change.

The importance of indigenous wisdom in current environmental conservation initiatives is becoming gradually acknowledged, despite the difficulties presented by post-colonial capitalism. Nigerian policymakers and environmentalists are starting to incorporate traditional knowledge into contemporary conservation plans, encouraging sustainable agriculture, community-based forest management, and the preservation of holy places. Nigeria can develop more successful strategies for environmental sustainability by reexamining and reviving these traditional customs, guaranteeing that the knowledge gained from the past contributes to a future that is more environmentally balanced. Obiora & Emeka (2015) request that people must comprehend African worldviews, cultural history, values, and ecological structures in order to appreciate the significance of African

indigenous or traditional knowledge systems in promoting ecological sustainability. Additionally, we must comprehend African myths that describe the many cultural customs of the African people.

Policy Gaps and Nigeria's Sacred Groves

The continued existence of sacred groves is under danger due to serious policy brought about by Nigeria's post-colonial economic system. Early colonial policies, according to Jackson (1994), were designed to protect natural resources for European interests. To this purpose, several environmental laws were developed to control the use of natural resources for the betterment of the European. Mgaya (2023) recalled that laws restricting local people access to forests and usage of forest products were passed by the colonial government. The policy shows how the number of reserves increased over time, resulting in a series of community conflicts. And Arowolo (2010) notes that Western civilization has displaced African ideas and culture, and the latter are now seen as inferior to the former due to the widespread and widespread tendency of cultural westernization of Africa. Due to economic policies that prioritize resource extraction, urbanization, and industrialization, these groves which have historically been safeguarded by indigenous religious beliefs and customary laws have seen an increase in encroachment. Western legal frameworks that mostly disregarded traditional conservation techniques were adopted by colonial administrators and later post-independence governments, who replaced them with regulations that overlooked the ecological and spiritual value of holy groves. These locations are now vulnerable to infrastructure development, land grabs, and deforestation as a result of this regulatory vacuum.

These issues of post-colonial capitalism were not limited to Nigeria, but also occurred in other countries under British colonial rule. For instance, in discussing the impact of colonialism on sacred groves in India, Agrawal (2005) and Nagendra and Gokhale (2008) noted that under the British, groves that were community owned were taken over and controlled by the state, and utilized for state resource needs, such as building railways. The Forest Act of 1865 also stated that; "large tracts of forest were taken over and controlled by the state under the revenue department." For Gadgil and Guha (1992), the colonial land policy had a revenue emphasis. The economic exploitation of the groves was a result of this forest strategy. According to Kandari, Bisht, Bhardwaj & Thakur (2014), there are a lot of causes for this decline of sacred groves in both area and population, but the major one is lack of documentation, which makes conservation and maintenance challenging. Legislative protection has not yet been put into effect. The lack of explicit legislative protection for holy groves in Nigeria's environmental regulations is one of the main problems. Although there are national laws governing forests and biodiversity, they

often prioritize the management of commercial resources above the protection of cultural heritage. Because of this, a large number of holy groves are not protected, making them vulnerable to destruction. This is made worse by the enforcement of current environmental regulations, which favor business endeavors like logging, farming, and real estate development above the preservation of native cultures.

Policy changes must close the gap between cultural heritage preservation and environmental protection if Nigeria's sacred groves are to survive. Like national parks and animal reserves, the government needs to enact laws that specifically acknowledge sacred groves as protected locations. Amendments to the constitution or certain laws that incorporate indigenous governance systems into land management strategies might accomplish this. Additionally, financial incentives like tourism programs could aid in proving the worth of protecting these areas.

The absence of interaction between contemporary conservation initiatives and indigenous governance institutions is another significant policy gap. Priests, chiefs, and local elders were among the traditional guardians of sacred groves in pre-colonial Nigeria. These old institutions have been undermined by post-colonial capitalism, however, and have been replaced with bureaucratic structures that disregard indigenous knowledge. Local communities' participation in preserving holy groves has been undermined by their absence from policy-making, which has resulted in a decrease in collective responsibility for conservation. It was on this backdrop that Appiah-Opoku, (2007) write that throughout human history, using indigenous knowledge has been crucial to survival. Using indigenous wisdom to protect the environment is not a new idea among Africans. The previous generation was aware of the necessity for conservation and preservation as well as the damage of the environment. However, Groombridge (1992) noted that developing nations tend to adopt a less traditional approach, which leaves opportunity for instability in the global safeguarding of biodiversity. Sambe, Yager, Ver & Ikape (2021) lament that even though traditional African belief systems are crucial to the protection and management of natural resources, the institution is still disregarded. Nigeria is in grave danger because environmental protection measures disregard indigenous knowledge and traditional priests. Through cultural and spiritual traditions that support ecological balance, traditional priests have been instrumental in protecting rivers, sacred groves, and wildlife for generations. Modern policies, ignore these tried-and-true conservation techniques, which results in environmental deterioration, deforestation, and the loss of medicinal plants. Nigeria runs the risk of more natural catastrophes, soil erosion, and climatic crises that might endanger food security and rural livelihoods if traditional knowledge is not included into environmental governance. To protect the country's

natural future, traditional ecological knowledge must be acknowledged and taken into consideration.

Discussing about the impact of Western culture on sacred areas in Nigeria, Ischei (1995) write that the Niger Delta people were certainly exploited "culturally and socially, making an island of them economically and deforested of energetic man-power, while the missionaries created a vacuum in their religiosity, leaving them in an unbridgeable void between the earth and the sky." In the same way, Ijaola (2016), writes that the ecological crisis in Nigeria's Niger Delta region is linked to a number of reasons, including pollution and deterioration brought on by commerce with Europe and the eventual commercialization of the region by western nations. However, if it weren't for western Christianity demythologizing the old ecological beliefs, none of these would have happened.

Sacred groves have also declined as a result of changes in religion and culture. The indigenous religious traditions that formerly guarded sacred groves have been undermined by the advent of Christianity and Islam as well as economic development resulting from post-colonial capitalism. Rather of being essential elements of cultural legacy, many younger Nigerians see sacred groves as artifacts from the past. Sacred groves are seen as worthless in the face of capitalist growth unless significant policy changes are made that combine traditional ecological knowledge with contemporary conservation techniques.

Sacred grove protection policy must be created with community input. To ensure that their spiritual and cultural knowledge affects policy choices, indigenous custodians need to have a formal role in conservation planning. Traditional leaders, environmentalists, and legislators working together might contribute to the development of hybrid governance models that respect both contemporary legal frameworks and indigenous customs. Campaigns for education that highlight the ecological and cultural importance of holy groves can also influence public opinion and create a feeling of shared responsibility for sacred grove protection.

It is ultimately necessary to change Nigeria's perspective on development and conservation in order to fill the policy gaps brought up by post-colonial capitalism. The government must strike a balance between ecological and cultural sustainability and economic development, seeing holy groves as priceless national resources rather than obstacles to advancement. Without decisive action, these sacred groves will keep vanishing, wiping out centuries' worth of indigenous knowledge and upsetting the natural equilibrium they support.

The Future of Sacred Groves in Nigeria

Sacred Groves: Community Tourism - Mohapatra, Dash, Shekha, Palei, and Debata (2017) noted that the great potential of sacred groves highlights the need for their development, it can draw tourists and also to protect biodiversity and encourage innovation in scientific studies of nature. According to Ejikeme & Okonkwo (2022), in a discussion on holy groves as a way to generate tourism money in Inyi, Enugu state, Nigeria, sacred groves can significantly boost the local economy. Additionally, the cultural resources and values of the holy groves will be preserved and restored with the aid of tourism. It makes sense to use them as tourist attractions. Tiimub, Kuffour, Tiimob, Kuuyeni, Tiimob & Tiimob (2020) suggested that sacred groves, which are protected locations, can certainly be turned into parks or natural gardens and eco-tourist destinations. This might help maintain the biodiversity of the region, provide a recreational opportunity, and generate revenue for the local community.

Sacred groves have long been valued in Nigeria as custodians of the country's natural biodiversity, spirituality, and cultural legacy. These locations are increasingly seen as both ecological riches and thriving cultural centers that convey the tale of indigenous peoples and their engagement with the natural world as tourism develops. Sacred groves are positioned to become hubs for community-led tourism that puts cultural integrity and environmental care ahead of mass commercialization in a post-capitalist world where economic structures are changing toward more inclusive and sustainable models. Discussing the tourism benefits of sacred groves Enemuo & Oduntan (2012) assert that Osun Oshogbo Sacred Grove's tourism attractions include both natural and cultural features that may draw big crowds of visitors and have an effect on the local populations. Changes in the quality of living and social life of host communities are among the social and cultural transformations that tourism may bring about. This attraction in Oshogbo Sacred is applicable to other sacred groves in Nigeria.

Nigerian post-capitalists anticipate a time where local communities are crucial to the management of natural and cultural resources and where wealth and resources are distributed. By encouraging collaborative and less profit-driven methods, this change has the potential to fundamentally transform the travel and tourism sector. Sacred grove tourism can develop into eco-cultural tourism, which honors the places' ecological balance and spiritual value, as an alternative to the traditional economic model. Within this developing framework, tourist projects might be led by local custodians, guaranteeing equitable distribution of profits and the preservation of these sacred groves.

Sacred groves in tourism business have the potential to become more sustainable and community-focused under post-capitalist principles. Nigeria ought to develop tourist policies that improve local lives and preserve these priceless natural sanctuaries by combining traditional knowledge with contemporary conservation techniques. Sacred groves can establish Nigeria as a world leader in responsible tourism. In the end, repurposing holy groves as ethical tourism destinations can have wider social advantages by strengthening links between tourists and Nigeria's rich legacy.

Sacred Groves as Means of Cultural Identity - According to Chakraborty (2019), the Santal people of Foringdanga village, which is located in the Paschim Medinipur district of West Bengal, India, used their sacred grove for a variety of socio-cultural and religious gatherings. These included (i) worshipping their traditional religious festival, (ii) educating the younger generation about cultural festivals, (iii) holding wedding ceremonies to bestow happiness, and (v) also serving as a community gathering place. Malhotra, Gokhale, Chatterjee, & Srivastava (2001) write that Sacred Grove is a rich cultural legacy that has played a vital part in the local tribal population's religious and socio-cultural lives. Nigerian sacred groves are living representations of the country's cultural identity and legacy, and they have long served as more than simply ecological protections. These woods have long been regarded as sacred locations that have been used for ceremonies, storytelling, and social gatherings, tying together the strands of regional traditions and ancestors' knowledge. Following this understanding Acharya & Ormsby (2017) write Sacred Grove is used for a variety of cultural celebrations, such as marriage, funeral rites, social gatherings, and other significant social events. The significance of holy groves is being reexamined in the context of post-capitalism, as value systems are being reoriented from profit-centric to community and sustainability-focused, emphasizing their potential as strongholds of collective memory and cultural preservation.

A vision of decentralizing authority and reestablishing local authority is beginning to emerge in post-capitalist Nigeria. As a result of this change, indigenous people are able to take back responsibility for holy groves and make sure that they are managed to respect traditional customs rather than give in to economic exploitation. Sacred groves may encourage traditions that are ingrained in the Nigeria's cultural substance, revitalize forgotten stories, and create intergenerational conversation when local custodians are in charge of preservation efforts. In addition to strengthening ties within the community, this approach offers an alternative perspective to the homogenizing effects of global capitalism. Troisi (1978) noted this and write that among the Santal culture sacred grove has the crucial purpose to establish village membership and geographical borders.

Sacred groves may develop into exciting centers of cultural revival in the future, bridging tradition with modern goals. On this view that Lavand&Khebudkar (2022) identifies tangible, intangible elements associated with groves and the various aspects of continuation of cultural traditions. Discussing sacred grove as cultural storehouse, Mansberger (1991) identified sacred groves of Kathmandu Valley as ‘symbolic resources’ and ‘religio-cultural reservoirs’ for the people of the Kathmandu. Kathmandu is located in Nepal, a landlocked nation situated in South Asia, bordered to the north by China (Tibet) and to the south, east, and west by India. The valley is known for its rich cultural heritage, ancient temples, and historical sites, many of which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It has been a significant center of Nepalese civilization, trade, and religion for centuries.

Scared grove in Nigeria can provide a model for a sustainable cultural identity in which the unrelenting drive for economic expansion is replaced with the principles of reverence for the environment and communal well-being. Sacred Groves can be positioned to spur a more comprehensive social change, one in which Nigeria’s rich legacy can be honored, conserved, and modified to prosper in a post-capitalist future by integrating cultural education, community involvement, and environment.

Sacred Grove as a means of Climate Change Mitigation - Change (2014) recognized that the traditional protected areas have recently been recognized as resilient to combat the effects of climate change and stop desertification by increasing carbon stocks, species variety, and aboveground biomass. Dar, Subashree, Raha, Kumar, Khare& Khan (2019) reported that sacred groves and other holy locations are rich in improving carbon (C) storage and are crucial in controlling the local microclimate in the context of climate change, biodiversity preservation, and ecology. According to Maru, Gebrekirstos & Haile (2023) the traditional beliefs (taboos) and cultural love for nature make sacred forest patches a perfect place to assist climate change adaption mechanisms and forest ecosystem preservation. In Nigeria, sacred groves have traditionally functioned as living sanctuaries where wildlife and cultural history coexist. These groves naturally trap carbon and preserve essential ecological balance, and indigenous peoples have long maintained them for their spiritual and therapeutic significance. Sacred Groves stand out as alternatives to extractive practices at a time when post-colonial capitalism has reshaped resource management and land use, providing an ecologically viable and community-driven conservation approach.

Rapid industrialization and urbanization combined with the stresses of contemporary economic growth often result in biodiversity loss and environmental damage. However, since they serve as organic carbon sinks and protects a variety of species; holy groves still play a critical role in reducing the effects of climate change. In the face of capitalist exploitation, their tenacity highlights the need of traditional land management techniques

that put long-term ecological health ahead of immediate financial gain and the capacity of indigenous knowledge to provide viable answers. In line with this view, Bora, Nath & Das (2013) suggested a thorough approach to climate mitigation must include evaluations of holy forests' capacity to store carbon, especially those managed by indigenous populations in developing nations.

Bhagwat & Rutte (2006) and Tamalene, Al Muhdhar, Suarsini & Rochman (2014) write that historically protected woods have cultural value, but they are also crucial for preserving species that benefit the local population, mitigating the effects of climate change, and containing endangered species in other areas. Sacred forests and other culturally protected areas are excellent examples of measures to mitigate the negative consequences of climate change, and they have been the most effective ways to increase species variety by limiting unauthorized intrusion using taboo restrictions.

Considering all the views mentioned, policymakers may close the gap between contemporary climate research and conventional conservation techniques by acknowledging these regions as essential parts of the nation's environmental infrastructure. In addition to bolstering attempts to mitigate climate change, this fusion gives local populations the ability to protect their natural and cultural heritage, establishing a standard for sustainable development that goes against the accepted ideas of post-colonial capitalism.

Research and Education Opportunities - Despite the pressures of post-colonial capitalism, which prioritizes rapid economic growth over sustainable practices, sacred groves in Nigeria are evidence to alternative, community-based land management systems that integrate cultural heritage with environmental stewardship. These natural reserves are repositories of indigenous knowledge and biodiversity, preserved through centuries of community stewardship, and they provide rich opportunities for research and education that go far beyond traditional classroom settings. According to Ossai (2024), in the Ezimo community, the Ekwu Arikpo holy grove serves as a living pharmacy where generations of people have acquired knowledge about medicinal plants, protecting the community's biodiversity and cultural legacy. In addition, the Sacred Grove provides a natural laboratory for the research and preservation of *Bridelia Ferruginea* and other therapeutic plants. And Nnamani, Akah, Okoli, Ezike, and Kenne (2020) remarked that *Bridelia Ferruginea* is used in traditional African medicine to treat rheumatic pains, oedema, burns, bruises, boils, dislocation, fever, headaches, and stiffness.

Sacred groves serve as centers for multidisciplinary research, offering scholars and educators a unique setting in which to investigate intricate ecological, anthropological, and sociological processes. Researchers may examine the conventional conservation

methods found in these groves and compare them to contemporary scientific methods for managing ecosystems and promoting sustainability. By showing how localized, culturally sensitive conservation strategies may provide more resilient and sustainable solutions, this not only advances our knowledge of indigenous traditions but also challenges the prevailing capitalist concepts.

Nigerian educational methods might be revolutionized by including holy groves into research projects and academic curriculum. By working together with local communities, academic institutions and research centers may record, examine, and revive traditional ecological knowledge, establishing forums for practical learning and community involvement. In spite of post-colonial capitalist pressures, this integration of indigenous knowledge with contemporary research techniques not only enhances scholarly investigation but also gives local guardians greater authority, promoting a more inclusive approach to environmental education and sustainable development.

Conclusion

In the face of capitalist pressures, the effort to restore sacred groves highlights the ongoing tension between cultural preservation and economic growth. Religious and spiritual places are being invaded by urbanization and commercial interests, forcing communities to protect their value from forces that put profit before history; the commodification, repurposing, or even destruction of holy landscapes to make way for economic expansion is a worldwide issue in recent times. However, religious and indigenous groups' resilience in defending their sacred spaces shows a strong dedication to preserving spiritual and cultural identity in the face of financial pressures.

Preserving sacred groves in Nigeria is just one aspect of reclaiming holy places; another is reiterating the meanings and values that are ingrained in them. The preservation of these areas is essential for the benefit of current and future generations as they are hubs for social cohesiveness, spiritual sustenance, and cultural continuity. Finding a way to balance economic expansion with the moral need to preserve and honor holy places is the difficult part. In order to prevent economic advancement from coming at the expense of spiritual and cultural degradation, policies that acknowledge the inherent worth of these areas must be given top priority as communities struggle with this problem. Reclaiming traditional sacred spaces is ultimately a call to respect the deep ties that exist between community, religion, and environment as well as an expression of identity and a rejection of uncontrolled materialism.

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