

Ancestral Voices, Future Earth: African Oral Traditions as Knowledge Hubs for Climate Solutions in a Globalized World

African rituals and oral traditions highlight dialogic connections between humans, animals and the natural environment. From the Agikuyu sacred mugumo tree to the Igbo mystic silk-cotton tree narratives; to songs, proverbs and riddles and puns on the natural environment and man's place in the ecosystems, African indigenous epistemologies reveal significant knowledge hubs. This paper attempts to show that these can bridge traditional and contemporary knowledges in understanding the natural environment and its sustenance of life. It adopts Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's definitions of ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Analysis of the texts is done within the tenets of Ethnophilosophy, borrowing from Alaxis Kagame's view of African oral traditions as sources of indigenous knowledge and philosophy and myths, proverbs, and folktales as key to understanding African thought. Further, the Oral Narrative Performance theory by Pius Nkashama helps explain how folklore uses language creatively to bring out deep philosophical insights. Through close reading and content analysis within ecological contexts, the paper shows how interconnected and symbiotic human, animal and plant worlds are, and that destroying one segment leads to the destruction of all three. It places oral cultures at the center of communicating the needed mind shifts in environmental conservation given that orality is central to mind transformation as it promotes ethically driven actions with immediacy. The study exploits underlying African traditional wisdom that man is an integral part of the ecosystem and that its conservation demands his brains and humility rather than force and arrogance, pitting traditional African approaches against modern supremacist exploitation and degradation of the same environment. The study shows how African folklore carry practical sustainable ecological practices that are at the risk of dying with the mental archives of orality.

Key Words: Ecocriticism, Conservation, Nature, Folklore, Indigenous epistemologies

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Track Classification: Cross-cutting areas: The effect of culture and religion in climate change adaptation and mitigation