

## ***African Urban Wildernesses as Cultural Entities: Bio-culturalism between the Global North and South***

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There is an ethno-linguistic nation of people occupying the south-west part of Nigeria called the Yorubas. They are not only the largest ethnic group in Nigeria, but also showcase the peculiar biocultural relationship of African indigenous urban populations with urban wildernesses normally referred to as ‘sacred groves’ in the morphology of the cities. This is clearly distinct from biocultural relationships of the Global North. This biocultural relationship is essentially spiritual, non-material, and unique to the Global South, and transcends the material biophilic approach of the Global North. At the advent of modernism and westernism, heralded by colonialism in the whole of the British West Africa (between c. 1851 and 1960 in Nigeria), this biocultural identity was not only threatened but almost driven into extinction. During these colonial eras, there was the substitution of the ‘sacred groves’ with English types of parks and gardens which are associated with non-African notions of nature. The forces of urbanisation leading to greater pressure on land use in the urban centers have also led to incursion, diminishing, or total elimination of the few remaining ‘sacred’ natural spaces hitherto preserved through a mythological system of taboos. The situation in the developing world suggests that approaches that are peculiarly culturally-based can help to remake nature in African urban settings. A good starting point will be to identify, revisit, and illuminate (in order to reconnect) with the cultural value-systems of African urban wildernesses. This project therefore aims at determining the culturally-driven strategies to ‘remaking’ African urban wildernesses, drawing upon deepened case studies from Nigeria. Through in-depth literature and ethnographic field survey praxis, the outcome of the project promises to contribute modestly to the knowledge base on indices for nature conservation, contribute to urban nature conservation policies in African context, add an African voice to the global debate on environmentalism, and offer suggestions for further literary engagements with nature in cities in the face of global urbanisation.