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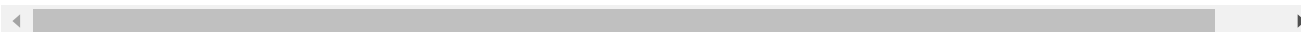
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With Regards

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BAOBAB (ADANSONIA DIGITATA), BAND CULTURAL TREE: REMEDYING THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND HEALTH PROBLEM (DEPARTMENT OF DONGA, BENIN, WEST AFRICA)

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ABSTRACT

In Benin, particularly in the locality of Bantè, the baobab tree is considered to be a divinity whose consideration is that of its maintenance.

The objective of this research aims at identifying the cultural, medical and environmental values of the Baobab tree in the commune of Bantè. The technique of sampling is made with a view to the point of view of young people. The whole, thirty (30) people were questioned.

The results of this research show that the baobab tree is for the population of Bantè, a tree having several virtues, with the result that it intervenes in the cure of certain diseases and its cut without a ritual would cause several evil against the populations of this locality. Also, the baobab tree is a tree that contributes to the ecological balance of a medium

Keywords: Crowned tree, cultural values, ecological balance, municipality of Bantè.

1. INTRODUCTION

In tropical countries, the interest in the plant is large in size depending on the species. In West Africa, about 350 species have been identified and provide essential commodities including medical substances, timber, fuelwood, oil, nuts, resins, fiber, fodder, vegetables and of course fruits.

Moreover, from the cultural point of view, some are considered sacred. Under the guise of the sacred, of religion, the local population forges an alliance with the biodiversity in particular that vegetable in general and the baobab in particular ... The latter is charged with deep symbolism (Ela, 1992). The African baobab is one of the species most appreciated by the Sahelo-Sudanese populations and the multiplicity of its uses makes it one of the most useful species in the Sahel. In Benin, particularly in the locality of Bantè, he is considered a divinity offering several donations both environmentally and health. Its consideration in this locality implies its preservation and maintenance because it is endangered nowadays. The present research is an analysis of the different uses and values granted to the Baobab in the commune of Bantè.

2. PRESENTATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**2.1 Geographical and demographic situation**

The commune of Bantè, located at the extreme north-west of the department of the Collines between 8 ° 05' and 8 ° 40 'of northern latitude and 1 ° 40' and 2 ° 00 'of east longitude, is limited by the communes of Savalou in the South, Bassila in the North, Ouèssè and Glazoué (by the Agbado River) in the East and the Republic of Togo in the West (Fig1). With an area of 2695km², it occupies about 19.44% of the territory of the Department of the Hills and 2.49% of the national territory. It comes in second place after the commune of Ouèssè (3200 km) from the point of view of the importance of its area at the level of the department.

The capital of the commune of Bantè is located 296 km from Cotonou, economic capital of Benin. The commune of Bantè has an estimated population of 82129 inhabitants of which 41994 women is 51.13% and 40135 men is 48.86% (RGPH 2002).

1.2 Vegetation, Fauna, Relief and nature of soils

Yesterday, zone of dense and humid forests, the commune of Bantè is today a savannah area with trees such as caïlcédra, néré, shea, samba, cheese, etc. There are also some savannahs and dense forests subjected to abusive exploitation. The most important of these forests is the Agoua classified forest which covers about 75 000 ha in which are installed the plantation of 482.5 ha of cashew trees, on the one hand and a forest defended by the population of Sako an area of about 12 ha, on the other hand. The commune of Bantè has a relief made up of 70% plateau, 20% hills of varying altitudes between 200 and 400m (the highest are KOUBETE and OLADJE) and 10% of lowlands. The types of soils encountered are: Clay-sandy soils suitable for growing cotton, yams and fruit trees; Ferruginous-tropical soils suitable for a variety of food crops such as maize, cowpeas, peanuts, etc. ; Hydromorphic soils of lowlands suitable for growing rice and market gardening. (PDC2 Bantè)

1.3 Population, Social organization and main socio-cultural groups

The settlement of the Commune of Bantè dates from a long time with the installation of Ifè and Isha. These Ifè and Isha peoples were formed by three successive waves of migration. The first, the oldest, is from Ilé Itcha and the two most recent ones are from Oyo and Ile-Ifè under the respective leadership of the hunters Obinti and Ogbéa.

The first villages founded are those of Banon, Bobè, Adjantè, Djédia, Kubètè, Koko, Lougba, Akpassi and Djagballo. This was the first nucleus that gave birth to the current Isha people in Central and North Bantè.

The social organization within socio-cultural groups is characterized by the patrilineal structure where the traditional chiefdom coexists with the administrative authority. The present king of Bantè is his majesty ADE-FU-ILU-TU. There are also traditional chiefs in all villages. Traditional power, despite modernity, still retains its sacredness and allows for the settlement of possible differences between socio-cultural groups.

At the family level, the man is the head of the household and is mainly concerned with field work, he is the guarantor of discipline in the home. The wife takes care of the household and the trade or the rustic works. The arduous work of the household is reserved for men.

The majority Yoruba (90%) are composed of Itcha met in the central and northern districts (Agoua, Bantè, Koko, Akpassi, Bobè, Lougba and Pira) and Ifè living in the southern districts (Gouka and Atokolibé). To this linguistic homogeneity are added the immigrant groups Idaasha, Mahi, Fon, Djerma, Ibo, Adja, Holly, Peulh, Ditamari, Lokpa, etc., in quest. fertile land or attracted by logging and other lucrative activities (Ibo, Djerma for example).

At the associative level, there is a certain dynamic that favors groupings with cultural characters (development associations), economic (groups of women, men or mixed producers, POs, MFIs, groups of artisans, a committee of territory and Village Animators of Development, ...) and social (SIS, APE, COGECS). The presence of women is remarkable in all these organizations and associations of an economic nature. On the other hand, they are a minority in other types of associations and decision-making bodies.

Several religions coexist in the Commune of Bantè, the most important of which are: Christianity, Islam and traditional (endogenous) religions. The traditional religion (endogenous) is very varied and very animated in the Commune. In the realm of belief, totems and taboos, social, food and clan prohibitions also exist; but they are less and less respected because of the predominance of revealed religions and the multiplication of Protestant, Baptist and other religious groups. Thus, once sacred places, forests and waterways fetish become more and more desacralized.

One of the most respected practices is the belief in "pacts of land" which is an alliance established between villages to serve as nonaggression or mutual assistance agreements. (PDC2 Bantè).

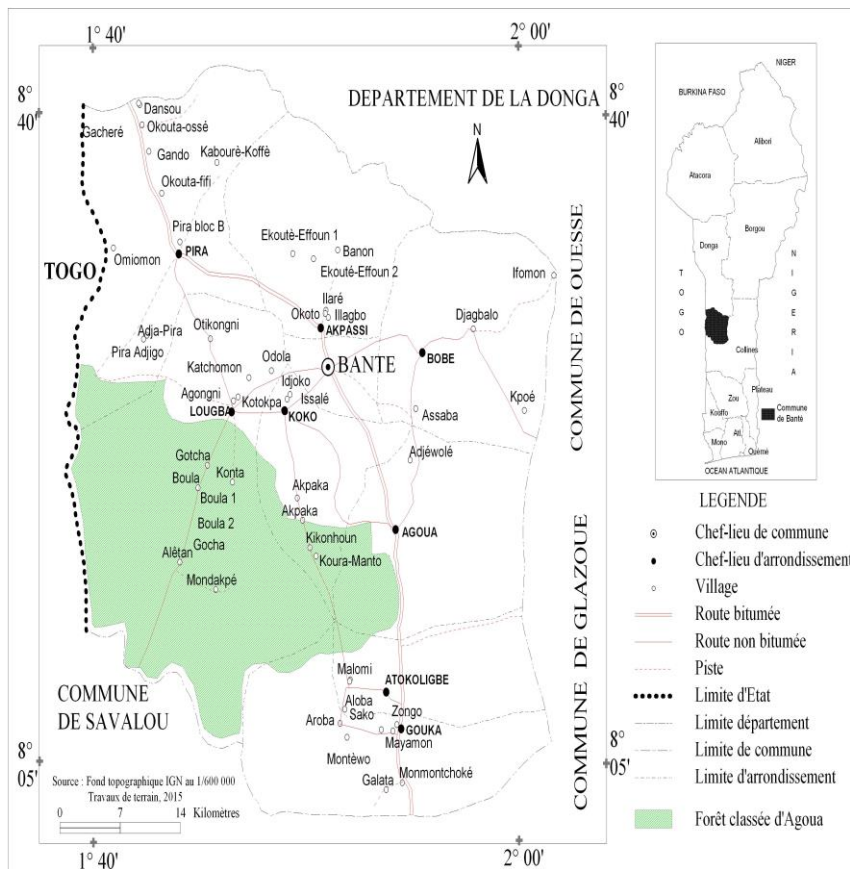


Figure 1. Location of the municipality of Bantè

3. PROBLEMATIC

3.1 Statement / Problem

In West Africa, many peoples carried out their daily activities according to a diversity of beliefs in divinities; which allowed them to be in harmony with their environment. Thus, in Benin and particularly in the commune of Bantè, several divinities are encountered according to the ethnic groups and are most often represented by an element of nature. Among these are deities such as OGOU (represented by iron) and which prevents accidents, maintains health, fight against adultery etc. ...; the TCHANKPONNON (represented by the granite), preserves against the evil spirits, EGUI OTCHE (represented by the baobab tree) which grants happiness, wealth, fertility etc. Regarding the latter which is a fetish tree highly respected in ancient times, it does not grow

anywhere and can not be grown like most plants. Its presence increases the number of flora and fauna. The baobab is a tree with health virtues. Its leaves are used in the preparation of the sauce; its fruit and bark are used in the preparation of herbal teas against certain diseases.

However, nowadays, the value and importance of the baobab are increasingly lost in the face of revealed religions and the proliferation of religious groups of Protestant, Baptist or other cultural backgrounds and the major concerns of men of the century. present (urbanization, new technologies, etc.). This fact can lead to destruction and thus, a gradual disappearance of baobab which will not be without influence on the environment and health. How do Bantè populations perceive this tree and what use (s) do they make?

3.2 Assumptions

- The Baobab is a tree that serves as a deity for the people of the commune of Bantè;
- Baobab is a tree that contributes to the ecological balance of an environment;
- The baobab is a tree that has virtues, remedies against diseases.

3.3 GOALS

3.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of this study is to know the cultural, health and environmental values of Baobab in the commune of Bantè.

3.3.2 Specific objectives

Specifically it is:

- to apprehend the cultural place occupied by the Baobab in the commune of Bantè;
- explain the contribution of Baobab in solving environmental problems;
- show the usefulness of baobab in the restoration and maintenance of health.

4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

4.1 Sample

In carrying out this research, the following sampling techniques are used:

- the snowball that made it possible to go from one respondent to reach the others since an exhaustive list of all the units in the sample is not known.
- the reasoned choice, simply because the targeted people are supposed to hold as much information as possible regarding the baobab in Bantè environment.

4.2 Target group

Religious leaders: they are depositories of myths, beliefs and therapeutic recipes related to baobab.

Women: They are better placed to give their appreciation to the fruits and leaves of baobab.

Young people: they can help to take stock of the social reading they make on the scope of the baobab and the place they reserve for him during the execution of their rural activities

A total of thirty (30) people were interviewed.

4.3 Method of study

This research is of a more qualitative than quantitative nature because it makes it possible to study, to understand, to treat the phenomena related to the exploitation of Baobab. The qualitative method is based on exploratory research.

4.4 Techniques and tools

The data collection techniques thus retained here for this work are the non-directive interview where the respondent has the opportunity to express his opinion on the question put to him, the observation which consists in doing the immersion in order to collect data and group discussion. To collect information in the field, a maintenance guide and observation grid are used as tools. The interview guide is used for the purpose of addressing the major axes that circumscribe the subject of research.

4.5 Method of data processing

The data collected is essentially processed manually. Initially, the tools and information received during the field work were developed according to the expression of Raymond QUIVY et al (2006). Then, the tools used are read and corrected to adapt to the realities of the field. In a second step, it was a question of proceeding to the categorization, the triangulation and the classification of the data obtained. The latter have been classified according to the different topics discussed by different actors. This ranking made it possible to assess the nature of the information received.

Finally, the triangulation allowed to highlight the specificities in order to be able to cross them. The analysis and processing of these data are done during the triangulation.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Results

5.1.1 The Baobab: tree serving as deity for the populations of the municipality of Bantè

In the commune of Bantè, the Baobab is not privileged like other species (cashew nut for example) but nevertheless it occupies a very important cultural place. It serves as a deity for

certain communities that give it importance according to its social proximity. He is considered a human because killing him becomes a homicide. He who cuts him finds misery as long as the sap flows from the tree. To cut it without referring to the corresponding ceremonies is to provoke the anger of the deities.

Before cutting the bark, a consultation must be carried out indicating the part to be cut. This cut of bark is not random; or it is taken from North, South, East or West depending on the circumstances so that satisfaction is effective. Otherwise, the risks are the disease, the lack of harvest or the scarcity of rainfall.

Representing a deity for the population, he gives to it in return for an offering, the fertility of the land for a good culture, healing etc. Before cutting a baobab it takes several rituals to move the spirit that lives to another tree (baobab) not far from the middle.

Failure to do so will result in punishment that may be a repetition of unexplained deaths in the community.

Also, it is formally forbidden for women in menstruation to touch in any way at the risk of having their periods continue indefinitely.

Given the importance given to the baobab in the locality of Bantè, it is not cut but maintained. This is the example of the one located in the illélakoun district of Bantè center where the cup was defended by the wise people of the district for cultural and environmental reasons. Thus, its presence in an urban environment can preserve the homes of high winds and in a forest, it makes it sacred. This being the case, the anarchic exploitation of the wood in this forest is limited and even sometimes not allowed. In view of all the above, it can be said that the Baobab is a tree that serves as a deity for the people of the commune of Bantè.

5.1.2- Baobab: a tree that contributes to the ecological balance of an environment

Depending on the environment in which it grows, it allows the abundance of greenery, because it makes the soil fertile and is a way to fight against erosion through its roots. Its branches are an ideal place to shelter the nests of birds, which allows the growth of the bird population.

Like any tree, the baobab uses the phenomenon of photosynthesis, of which only plants are capable. This phenomenon uses light energy to convert water and carbon dioxide into basic food for itself (sugars) and oxygen that purifies the air, making the environment healthier.

The baobab is a tree whose existence in large numbers promotes the proliferation of several animal species including mammals (the monkey) who particularly appreciate its fruits, hence the name "monkey bread".

The presence of a baobab in a medium is a protection against the heat of the sun by the cooling of the ambient air because of the shade that spread around him. Its trunk (hollow and spongy) constitutes in certain environments, a reservoir of water to which many animal species drink (men, monkeys, cattle, birds, reptiles, etc.).

Baobab is a tree that really contributes to the ecological balance of an environment.

5.1.3 The baobab tree has virtues and remedies for diseases

In terms of health, the baobab is a medicinal plant whose name differs according to socio-cultural groups (Table 1).

Table 1: Some local names of baobab in Benin

Sociocultural groups	<i>FON</i>	Nago	Bariba	Dendi	Ditamari	Lokpa
Traditional names	Kpassatin	Osché	Sônbu	Kôô	Sônbu, Moutomu	Télou

Source: Field Investigations, October 2017

From the scientific name *Adansonia digitata* and the common names baobab, African baobab, palaver tree, bottle tree, pharmacist tree, Africans call him the pharmacist's tree because it plays a very important role in traditional medicine and almost all parts of the tree (fruit, pulp, leaves, etc.) have a therapeutic function. It is at the same time a febrifuge, an analgesic, an anti diarrheal. It is even used to treat people with smallpox and measles.

Its leaves prepared in the form of sauce give protein and prevent against malaria. Also, its bark prepared in the form of herbal tea cures among other things fatigue, diarrhea, fever, also allows ease of delivery and gives the newborn a healthy health. This is why its bark sometimes enters into the preparation of certain decoctions called "AGBÔ".

In Bantè, to make a baby grow in underweight, it is bathed in a tea made from the bark of the baobab, taking care not to wash his head with this tea because it could make it grow more than normal. The Bantè community therefore gives the baobab a special place for its multifunctionality. This natural essence is at the base of the agrifood industry of local actors. Boiled, monkey bread mixed with sorghum is both a medicine that scars wounds that occur during the delivery of a pregnant woman and a fortifier for her etc.

5.1.4 Religion and baobab

Due to population growth, men, to settle, are sometimes forced to cut this tree. As a result, baobabs are becoming more and more rare nowadays. According to the populations " this tree is very sacred and contributes enormously to the balance of the environment and to the good health of the population ". The finding is that population growth, the erosion of local values due to the effects of religion etc. are all indicators that hinder the survival of baobab in Bantè.

6. DISCUSSION

The study of baobab in the locality of Bantè makes it possible to understand the importance which the population grants to it mainly on the cultural level. This echoes the view of Cherruau

(2005) who believes that " people worship baobabs and are afraid to cut them; they bleed and attract misfortune to those who harm them. "

This same baobab offers the populations its health healing qualities and allows soil fertility; thus the abundance of trees and some animal species help to preserve the ecosystem. To this end, Maillet and Depommier (1997) " think that trees and shrubs were seen as a way to offer many ecological, productive and economic services to Sahelian populations. Indeed, trees favor, for example, the protection and the maintenance of soil fertility, they are a source of food and condiments ... "

From the sanitary and economic point of view, Garnaud Sebastien, thinks that " the baobab by the fruit pulp, cures several diseases and its bark contains a fibrous material used for the manufacture of cordage by fiber braiding. Also, having the capacity to absorb a lot of water during dry seasons, elephants pierce a hole in them to drink. " Some of the cultural knowledge and practices are endangered. Traditional religions are abandoned in favor of news whose adepts no longer accord sacred value to the elements of nature. A revaluation is necessary. This confirms the idea of Dupre (1991) that "the argument most often advanced for praising the merits of peasant societies' knowledge unreservedly is that they result from long experience in the field and represent perfect adaptation to the environment ".

7. CONCLUSION

In the light of this analysis, it is important to stress that the municipality of Bantè is losing some of its natural species that should enable it to cope with certain natural disasters.

For this reason, the rational management and the safeguarding of this natural heritage challenge each and every one of us without distinction of sex, age, social rank. This means that not only do older people need to be aware of the need for better protection of the fauna and flora, but also the children are concerned and it is important to preserve their future environment now. Human-scale actions can now be undertaken to reduce the adverse effects of human activities on the environment on the one hand and on humans on the other. To gain access to cultural, social, environmental and economic well-being, it would be obvious that local authorities set up an education, information and awareness-raising mechanism for local populations both in schools and in extra - school. The environmental issue therefore requires the participation of stakeholders and the dissemination of information for all. The baobab is, for the population of Bantè, a sacred tree containing several virtues, which makes it intervenes in the cure of certain diseases and its cut without certain rituals would be source of several evils against the populations of this locality.

So, it is vital to preserve, maintain and respect the prohibitions related to this tree to lead a peaceful life because human existence requires first spiritual, physical health and then a healthy environment.

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