

Socio-Spiritual Dynamics of *Ori-Oke* among Indigenous Churches: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

*Spiritual objects are items that the people of a society attached sacred value to, and as a result, are given special and sacred attentions. More so, the items to be revered are always the consequences of socio-cultural practices and beliefs of the people. This study is an attempt to examine the socio-spiritual dynamics of **Ori-Oke** as conceived by indigenous church members specific set of Christian Visitors to **Ori-Oke** as the object of empirical analysis. To achieve this objective, the study adopted survey method. Data for the study were generated through the use of questionnaire and Key in-depth Interview to collect quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. A total of 76 respondents were selected as samples for the study. The sample was chosen through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The social action and diffusionism theories were used as explanatory models for the study. Frequency distribution and percentage were used to analyse the quantitative data, while content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data generated for the study. Findings from the study revealed that members of indigenous African churches conceived of **Ori-Oke** as a sacred entity, and as such should be understood as such by all and sundry, in order to avoid conflicts among people of different faiths, who did not see the mountain top in the same light. This is necessary in order to improve on the spiritual functions performed by the entity to this set of people, and to avoid inter and intra religious conflicts that occur as a result of the differences in people's conception of the entity.*

Introduction

Man by nature is a spiritual being (Shankar, 2006), the spiritual nature of human being is bore out of his curiosity to provide answers to

certain metaphysical questions of life. The fact that spirituality is fundamental to human social existence, could be reflected from the fact that religion, which is external manifestation of spirituality, is described as one of the basic institutions in the society (Olatunji, 2010). Religion is conceived as a basic social institution because it performs a very important socio-psychological functions of providing answers to many meta-physical questions of living. Essentially, what makes religion unique from other social institutions is its ability to differentiate between the sacred and profane (Durkheim, 1968). In other words, while the profane are regarded as the worldly things, the sacred represents the spiritual realm. These elements represent the foundation of every belief system.

Thus, in every religious practice, certain physical and social elements are regarded as sacred, while some others are seen as profane. Many at times, the items usually referred to as sacred are those elements that human intellect cannot provide a formidable explanation for the secret behind its existence (Schneider, Francis & Smith, (2013). Specifically, one physical element that has been given sacred attention almost since the beginning of religious practices is the mountain hill. This assertion could be buttressed from the point that in many world known belief systems, mountain hill have been conceived as a special realm, a sacred entity that has enormous spiritual values. For an example, *Ori-Oke* (mountain or hill) is conceived as a deity among the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria. This position is corroborated by the Internet Sacred Text Archive in African Religion. Similarly, some of the most-respected Hindu and Buddhists' temples were built on top of hills (Vardia, 2008). The Biblical/Quranic Stories of Moses and some other notable religious figures show some connection between their religious message and a hilly place (Exodus 3: 20).

Furthermore, one of the cardinal worship points of Muslim pilgrims is to visit the mountain *Arafat*. With special reference to Nigeria, it is common among some Christian denominations, to locate their place of worship on, or, around a hill top. Specifically, some sets of African Indigenous Churches always attach the word 'Oke' (Mountain) to give a special identification tag for their

churches. In other words, what could be deduced from the foregoing is that the reality of *Ori-Oke* has a significant spiritual value in many religious beliefs. However, despite the essential value and the significant effects given to the phenomenon of the mountain hills in many of the known religions of the world, many known researchers have not examine the dynamics of this physical entity among many religious adherents. Specifically, going by the value given to this entity by African indigenous Churches, there is the need to beam academic searchlight on the phenomenon. It is in line with this background that this study empirically examined the socio-spiritual dynamics of *Ori-Oke* among Christians of African Indigenous Churches.

An exercise such as this is necessary from the point of the fact that religion and religious objects serve important functions in human life generally, and more so, because any academic exercise relating to religion is an exercise targeted at improving the quality of human life generally. It is important to consider the socio- spiritual dynamics of *Ori-Oke* in this manner in order to improve on the academic attention given to the reality of spiritual objects. All of these efforts would contribute to knowledge in religious studies generally, and Sociology of religion specifically. Finally, an exercise such as this would serve as the bedrock on which further related studies could be laid upon.

Review of Relevant Literature

In order to achieve a better understanding of the topic, relevant literatures relating to the topic of discussion re essential for a review.

What is Spirituality?

The term spirituality is conceived differently by different people according to the context in which it is being used. However, despite the diverse conception, one key element of spirituality is its connection with meta-physical reality; it is often related with beliefs and religiosity and because of its relationship with religiosity, what constitutes spirituality is generally subjective (Diener et al., 2011; Bond, Lun, & Li, 2012). As such, what connote spirituality to

someone is not spiritual to another (Diener et al., 2011). In essence, the elements that constitute spirituality vary across religious belief systems (Eichhorn, 2012). According to Krentzman (2016), spirituality includes a sense of connection to something larger than us, and it typically involves a search for larger meaning in life. It may be described as sacred or transcendent experience or simply a deep sense of aliveness and interconnectedness (Hill 2000). Due to the nature of human being, he could be described as spiritual being and as such spirituality is a universal phenomenon.

The idea of spirituality is not new to religious and theological studies, although some forms of vagueness has crept into the use of the word today. The term spirituality has, therefore, been used in a variety of ways, but in its simplicity, the term attaches itself to matters that are related to sacred; the sacred in this sense that most times, cannot be seen, but perceivable, and can be contrasted with the physical or the earthly. Okoli's (2008: 3) insight on the concept of the spirituality is very profound. According to him, spirituality assumes the following meaning and applications:

- i It connotes a sense of connection to something 'greater' than oneself, which normally includes an emotional experience of religious awe;
- ii Matters of sanity and of psychological health;
- iii An aspect of religion, which focuses of personal experience and devotion;
- iv Perceiving or wishing to perceive life as more important (higher) more complex or more integrated with one's world view, as contrasted with the merely sensual;
- v Practice or tradition of perceiving and internalizing one's 'true' nature and relationship to the rest of existence (i.e. God, creation, the universe, or life), and becoming free of the lesser egoic self (or ego) in favour of being more fully one's 'true self'

From the foregoing, it is apparent that spirituality is essentially the improvement of the human mind and soul by improving ones will power, an intimate relationship with the Supreme Being and the

world at large. In the light of this spirituality will cover the meaning of life, better comprehension of situation and places which also influence purposes for existence. Spirituality assists awareness of a connection with God, gods, nature or any other forms of the spirit as the psyche might imagine it. In this sense, nature will include natural phenomena such as mountains, hills, lakes, rivers, wilderness, or anywhere the sacred is experienced (Eneji et al, 2010). According to Gumo, Gisege, Raballah & Ouma (2012), African spirituality is expressed using symbols derived from the immediate African environment. They appreciated the fact that due to the indices of secularization and modernization, African religion has continued to influence the lives of both Christians and Muslims. Thus, spirituality could be seen as any reality (real or fictitious) that an individual attached sacred or special attention to. This normally manifests itself in various means such as religious traditions and practices, ethics, perceptions and beliefs that are anchored on the worldviews of the believer (Mbiti, 1969).

The concept of *Ori-Oke* in Yoruba and Biblical Epistemology

Ori-Oke is the Yoruba name for mountains or hill tops. It is a compound word embracing two key words that are joined together. The first word which is *Ori* among the Yoruba comes with several connotative implications. In the first instance, the word speaks of the literal head of a person. Secondly, it connotes the idea of the inner man which is referred to as *Ori innu*. This is the personality head symbolized by the physical head. Ademuleya (2007) posits that *Ori* in Yoruba belief occupies the centre of sacredness; and how it is conceived is embedded in the Yoruba myth concerning the creation of man and the role played by his creator. This is connected to the Yoruba conception of the destiny, anchoring on the myth of a man choosing his destiny and his destiny being affixed to him (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979). Closely to the two accounts given above is a third connotation of the word, meaning a deity. *Ori* refers to a divinity that inhabits high places; this is against the backdrop of deification of

natural phenomena. Several Yoruba songs are sang in veneration of this *Ori*. One of them is:

<i>Ori lo da mi</i>	The Deity is my Creator
<i>Eniyan ko o</i>	It is not man
<i>Olorun ni</i>	It is God
<i>Ori lo da mi</i>	The Deity is my Creator

A fourth perception of *Ori* is premised on the fact that it speaks of a top, an apex, a place higher than the ordinary space and above man himself. In this sense, *Ori* is seen as an adverb speaking of a spot on a place or the top of a particular thing. In the context of this paper *Ori* is an adverbial clause depicting a higher spot of a place. From the foregoing, *Ori* in the Yoruba cosmology symbolizes the personality soul of man; it speaks of a divinity, and it is also used to mean a place. The second word *Oke*, means a height, a hill or a mountain. The combination of the two words to describe mountain hill among the Yoruba connotes the level of spiritual value given to *Ori-Oke* among the Yoruba.

In Christianity, the word mountain hill is mentioned in various places in the Bible for various reasons, ranging from spiritual to social. For instance, Moses received the Decalogue on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20; Jesus taught his disciples on the mount. (Matthew 5-8); he also went to pray on the mountain before choosing the twelve apostles (Mark 6: 46). In addition to this, Jesus, towards the end of his earthly ministry, also went to the garden of Gethsemane to pray for strength to bear and be able to complete the assignment before him. A look at some of these verses would reveal that the mountain top is seen as sanctified entity, a place that is treated with awe and reverence, a place where several social socio-spiritual problems confronting human being could be solved etc. However, it is important to note that despite the understanding of the Bible, regarding the mountain hills, the orthodox churches rarely visit or use the mountain hill for such socio-spiritual purpose. Thus, the argument of these authors is that the use of the mountain hill for prayers and worship by indigenous Christians is not as result of

diffusing the practice of mountain use in indigenous religion with Christianity, but because several biblical sayings also support it.

Overview of African Indigenous Churches

African indigenous churches are the churches that were founded by Africans, for the Africans in Africa (Ayegboyin, 1997). These churches appeared in the second part of the Twentieth century, and the churches have over time expanded to various parts of the globe. They have been considered under various names such as Spiritual Churches, Charismatic Churches, *Aladura* Churches, African Independent Churches and African Indigenous Churches (Osun, 1999). According to Ray (2000), these indigenous churches have registered themselves in the religious map of Christianity in Africa. By 1930, they have become so popular that they have become objects of study either as a whole or individually as Churches that emerged out of Africa. Scholars like Peel (1968), Omoyajowo (1982), Ayegboyin (1997) and Gaiya (2002) have devoted time and space to study these churches. The foundations of many of these Churches were the efforts of Yoruba people of South-Western Nigeria. Some of the churches under this category are shown in table 1

Table 1: Names of some Indigenous Churches in Nigeria, Names of the Founder and the Year of foundations

S.No.	Name of Church	Name of the Founder	Year of Foundation
1	Cheribum and Seraphim	Moses Orimolade and Abiodun Emmanuel	1925
2	Christ Apostolic Church	Ayo Babalola	1930
3	Celestial Church of Christ	S.B.J. Oshoffa	1947
4	Church of the Lord <i>Aladura</i>	Ayo Oshiteju	1930

Source: Olatunji and Ogunbiyi (2016)

The Cherubim and Seraphim Church was founded by the duo of Moses Orimolade Tunolase, an indigene of Ikare and a young lady living in Lagos in 1925, and by 1930, the Church has spread to many Yoruba cities and today, it has spread throughout Nigeria and the diaspora. The establishment of the Christ Apostolic Church was a disagreement between the Apostolic Church of London and its affiliated body in Nigeria. The Apostolic Church has the same foundation with the Christ Apostolic Church. However, the major difference between the Orthodox Churches and apostolic churches stems from a couple of factors, predominant among which include Pentecostal emphasis and issues related to contextualization of Christianity in Africa. (Johnson, 2011). The origin of the Church can be traced to four personalities. They are Pastors J. B. Sadare, I. B. Akinyele, D. O. Odubanjo and Joseph Ayo Babalola.

Christ Apostolic Church was founded by Ayo Babalola, a person who received a divine instruction to leave his work to preach the gospel, with the message that "prayer and omi-iye (the water of life) will cure all sicknesses." The Church then expanded from Lagos to other places. The secession was led by Ayo Babalola, who ignited the revival of the 1920s as a result of the resuscitation of a dead person, and they became Christ Apostolic Church. Celestial Church of Christ was founded by Pa S. B. J. Oschoffa, a carpenter who was a Methodist by faith before receiving his revelation. He started the Church in Dahomey in 1947. By 1952, the Celestial Church of Christ had expanded into Nigeria with Lagos as its headquarters (Isichei, 1995).

From Lagos, it has expanded into almost every part of the country, and has spread beyond the shores of Nigeria. These African Independent Churches were expressions of attempts at contextualizing Christianity in Africa. The Christianity introduced by the Whites was embedded in heavy western culture such that it was alien to the Africans (Johnson, 2011). One of the salient characteristics of these Independent Churches was to interpret Christianity and make it understandable to the Africans. Falaye (2015) concurs with this opinion when he said that the African Independent Churches were, "Africans' way of domesticating the

Christian teachings.” Commenting on the characteristics of African Independent Churches, Kalu (2007: 8) came up with six “advocacies”. These include: shared pneumatic emphasis; new religiosity; linked roots in the historical discourse of origins, kindred atmosphere of worldview, shared racial ideology and the re-interactive response to social predicament

By and large, African indigenous churches were mainly established to block the loop holes of some traditional religious practices that are in the Bible, but not previously considered in orthodox churches. Essentially, these churches borrowed some practices from African traditional socio-cultural system in order to adapt them to Christian religious beliefs. In other words, the African indigenous churches were established with the effort of Africanizing Christianity (Johnson, 2011).

Theoretical Exploration

In a further attempt to explain the socio-spiritual conception of indigenous churches of the mountain top, the argument should be situated in a theoretical framework. This is done in order to further justify the fact that *Ori-Oke* has socio-spiritual connotations among the indigenous Churches and also to bring out the reason why *Ori-Oke* is so venerated among them. According to Haralambos & Holborn (2000), a theory is a set of assumption that offers explanations about the nature, the cause or the dynamics of a phenomenon. Essentially, one of the functions of a theory in academic research is to juxtapose the line of reasoning of the researcher and to situate the claim of the researcher in the context of assumptions that have been made by previous scholars (Bichi, 2004). In this study, the theoretical positions that would be used to explain the dynamics and the conceptions of *Ori-Oke* among African Indigenous Church members are Social Action theory and Diffusionism theories.

Social Action Theory

The concept of social action is fundamental to Weberian sociological school of thought (Cuff, et.al. 2006). Weber conceived of Sociology as a comprehensive science of social action (Shankar-Rao, 1998). The social action paradigm stands in a place of theoretical perspective, as well as grand method of conducting research in the social sciences as observed by this researcher in 2015. As a theoretical perspective, it tends to focus on the importance of microscopic elements of social behaviour. As a method of conducting research, social action theorists argued against the use of physical science *erklaren* methods in studying social phenomena, they rather advocated for the humanist *Verstehen* method. Their conception is that, the same method used in studying physical phenomena cannot be adequately used in studying social phenomena. They substantiate their argument on the fact that while physical phenomena are without social values, human beings which is the subject of study in the social sciences are filled with subjective orientations and full of social values, hence the same method cannot be used to study the physical and social (Olatunji, 2015).

In other words, if one wants to achieve a good understanding of the causes of human behaviour in a particular social setting, one must project into the actor's subjective situation. According to Weber (1949), one of the goals of sociological research should be the understanding of action in terms of its subjective values. Social action theory was developed from Weber's interpretive analysis, to explain how subjective orientations produced actions, and why actions in turn influenced meanings in the social realm (Labinjoh, 2002 cited in Olatunji, 2015). To Weber (1923), social action is an activity carried out by an individual in which an individual attached personal meaning to, and that meaning is usually the foundation of behaviour.

According to Labinjoh, (2002: 22) "the basis of Weber's Sociology is that the human subject is a free being who project meaning and seeks ends and such ends or goals of social actions are determined by the values of the society while the means to achieve them are prescribed by the norms". One of the conditions that make

social action possible according to this school of thought is the subjective meaning attached to it by the actor.

In relation to our present purpose, African Indigenous Church member's conception of the *Ori-Oke* could only be well understood in the context of the spiritual value given to it. For an example, the subjective meaning given to the mountain top by the Orthodox churches is different from that given by the indigenous churches hence the reason for the differences in their conceptions about the sacred nature of the hill as well as their dispositions towards the utilization of the place for spiritual activities. However, the theory of social action is useful in explaining the subjective factors that conditions the conception of the indigenous churches regarding *Ori-Oke* but this theory have not explain the reason why the Indigenous churches conceived of the *Ori-Oke* as such as sacred entity. In other to cover this shortcoming, an anthropological theory referred to as Diffusionism is examined.

The Theory of Diffusionism

Diffusionism is an anthropologically-oriented theory that is used to explain the reality of culture in human society. The concept is specifically used to explain how the cultural process through cultural beliefs and practices integrate into one another. Some of the proponents of this theory are British scholars such as G. Elliot Smith, William J Perry and W.H.R Rivers. These scholars held the view that cultural elements, (tangible or intangible) beliefs and cultural practices originated only in one part of the world from which such an element is transported into other societies of the world. For instance, they held that Egypt was the culture centre of the world and the cradle of civilization, and it is from this point that civilization spreads to other parts of the globe.

In other words, diffusionism refers to the process of transmission of cultural characteristics or traits from a specific point to all other societies (Harris, 1995). They believed that most inventions happened just once, and because human being is capable of imitation, such inventions were then integrated or inculcated by people in other societies (Cuff, et al, 2005). Thus, they specifically look for diffusion

and variations that gradually occurred, as people of different cultural backgrounds interact with one another. In relation to our present purpose, diffusionism could be used to explain the genesis, or one of the fundamental reasons why African indigenous churches make use of the *Ori-Oke* as a spiritual haven. A causal connection that could be made in this regard, is the fact that because the indigenous churches were established by Africans in a bid to draw more Africans into the fold of Christianity, some of the earlier African conceptions of spirituality diffused into Christian religious practices. As revealed earlier in this study, African's conception of *Ori-Oke* before the coming of Christianity is a major factor that made founders of the indigenous churches to cultivate the habit of using the mountain top as a special sacred realm that could be used for spiritual purpose.

According to Ojo (1993), the spirituality attached to the mountain is as the result of the perception of natural phenomena in African cosmology. Mbiti (1981) observed that, though foreign religions have influenced African religiosity, each of these religions has equally adapted, and is shaped by the religious heritage of the Africans. Since African spirituality is intricately connected with African worldview, values, practices and belief systems that are connected to natural resources, places or habitat, such a world-view have found its way into imported religious beliefs in Africa. Visiting the *Ori-Oke* for prayer worship could be cited as a good example in this regard.

Methodology

The core objective of this research is to examine the socio-spiritual conception of *Ori-Oke* among Christians, attending African Indigenous Churches. To achieve this objective, survey method is adopted to carry out the research because this method has been found useful in conducting a research of this nature. The choice of indigenous Christian churches as the research respondents is as a result of the fact that this set of Christians utilized the mountain top more than their counterparts in orthodox churches. More so, it is obvious that indigenous churches use the mountain top with some

sociological undertones, that is, this is precipitated by some socio-cultural factors. Primary data used for the study were obtained through self-administered questionnaire, and Key In-depth Interview (KII). The Questionnaire was used to obtain certain socio-demographic data, as well as and certain socio-spiritual dynamics inherent in the respondents. KII was used to retrieve qualitative data, relating to the respondents' socio-spiritual conception of *Ori-Oke*.

The population of the study consists of 76 persons who the researchers meet on a popular *Ori-Oke* often visited by Christians for spiritual purpose in Ilorin. This mountain top is chosen because several members of the indigenous churches around the area claimed to have visited the mountain at one point or the other. It is also clear that the *Ori-Oke* is not owned by a specific church. The researchers realized that this mountain is not controlled by any specific church. It is a free space where Christians come from far and near to perform different spiritual activities, especially praying and worshipping. The sampling technique was purposive and snowball. Purposive sampling was used to specifically select only those that are seen as Christians and those who have visited the mountain for spiritual purpose. Snowball was used to get different groups of worshippers who visit the mountain top, at every point in time, including overnight periods. All the 76 questionnaire distributed were retrieved because it is self-administered. Descriptive statistics was employed for analysis of the data collected for the study. Frequency distribution and percentage table were used for descriptive analysis of data collected while the qualitative data were analysed by describing the contents of the data.

Data Presentation and analysis of Findings

This section of the research is used to present and quantitatively analyse the socio-demographic features of the study respondents

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of the Respondents

1	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
	Male	21	27.6
	Female	55	72.4
	Total	76	100
2	Age	Frequency	Percentage
	below 20	13	17.1
	21-40	25	32.9
	40 years and above	38	50
	Total	76	100
3	Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
	Single	29	38.2
	Married	17	22.4
	Others	30	39.5
	Total	76	100
4	Ethnic affiliation	Frequency	Percentage
	Yoruba	66	86.8
	Igbo	5	6.6
	Hausa	1	1.3
	Others	4	5.3
	Total	76	100
5	Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
	Unemployed	27	35.5
	Self employed	29	38.2
	Paid work	20	26.3
	Total	76	100

6	Denomination	Frequency	Total
	Orthodox churches	11	14.5
	Indigenous churches	66	86.8
	Total	76	100
7	How often is the visit?	Frequency	Total
	Daily	18	23.7
	Weekly	33	43.4

	Monthly	21	27.6
	Total	76	100
8	Purpose of Visitation	Frequency	Total
	Pure worship	44	57.9
	solve a problem (healing and deliverance)	32	42.1
	Total	76	100
9	time of visit	Frequency	Percentage
	Early in the day	56	73.7
	Late in the day (Overnight)	11	14.5
	Anytime of the day	9	11.8
	Total	76	100
10	mode of worship	Frequency	Percentage
	Individual capacity	17	22.4
	in group	59	77.6
	Total	76	100

Source: Olatunji and Ogunbiyi (2016)

Item 1 of the Table shows that the numbers of male who visit the Ori-Oke is 21 (27.6%), while that of the female is 55 (72.4%), this shows that the numbers of female who visit the *Ori-Oke* are more than the male counterparts. This could be as a result of the fact that women are more flexible than men regarding their ability to cope with unwanted situation and conditions. Item 2 of the Table shows that the number of people below the age of 20 who visit *Ori-Oke* is 13 (17.1%), the number of people between the age of 21 and 40 who visit *Ori-Oke* is 25 (32.9%), while the number of people who are 40 years and above who visit *Ori-Oke* is 38 (50%). This shows that the numbers of people who are 40 years and above who visit *Ori-Oke* are more than other people in the lower age grade. This also shows that people tend to put more interest in religious issues as they grow older. Item 3 of the Table revealed that the number of single people who visit *ori-oke* is 29 (38.2%), the number of married people is 17 (22.4%), while the number of 'others' who visit *Ori-Oke* is 30 (39.5%).

This shows that the numbers of people with other marital statuses apart from married and single who visit *Ori-Oke* are more than single and married people.

It could be seen from the Item 4 of the Table that the number of Yoruba people who visit *Ori-Oke* is 66 (86.8%), the number of Igbo people is 5 (6.6%), the number of Hausa people is 1 (1.3%) and number of other ethnic groups who visit *Ori-Oke* is 4 (5.3%). This shows that the numbers of Yoruba people who visit are more than the numbers of other ethnic groups. This might be as a result of the fact that Ilorin – the city in which the mountain was located is largely dominated by the Yorubas. It could be conceived from Item 5 of the Table that the number of unemployed people who visit *Ori-Oke* is 27 (35.5%), number of self-employed people is 29 (38.2%), while number of people working paid jobs is 20 (26.3%). This shows that the numbers of self-employed people who visit *ori-oke* are more than the numbers of unemployed and paid workers.

Item 6 of the Table revealed that the number of Orthodox Church members who visit the *Ori-Oke* is 11 (14.5%), while the number of indigenous church members is 66 (86.8%). Thus, members of indigenous churches visit *Ori-Oke* more than the orthodox churches. This implies that the religious doctrine of the African Indigenous churches favours visiting the *Ori-Oke*. Item 7 of the table shows that the number of people who visit the *Ori-Oke* on a daily basis is 18 (23.7%), those who visit the place weekly is 33 (43.4%) while those who visit monthly are 21 (27.6%). This implies that people go to *Ori-Oke* more on a weekly basis. Item 8 of the table revealed that people who go to *Ori-Oke* for pure worship are 44 (57.9%), while the number of people who go to *Ori-Oke* to have their problem solved is 32 (42.1%). This shows that people who go to *Ori-Oke* for pure worship are more than those who go to there to find solutions to their problems. Item 9 shows that the number of people who go *Ori-Oke* early in the day is 56 (73.7%), number of people who go late in the day is 11 (14.5%), while the number of people who go there at any time of the day is 9 (11.8%). This shows that many of the *Ori-Oke* goers do visit the place early in the day. Item 10 of the table shows that the number of people who visit *ori-oke* individually

is 17 (22.4%), while the number of people who go in groups is 59 (77.6%). This implies that a large number of people visit the *Ori-Oke* engage in spiritual activities in group. This could be used to juxtapose the fact that human being like performing many social activities in group.

Spiritual Connotations of *Ori-Oke* among African Indigenous Churches: The Empirical Overview

African Indigenous churches were technically separated from the Orthodox churches, because the indigenous churches were established by Africans, while the orthodox churches were established by the Europeans (Johnson, 2011). As a result of the background of the founders of these churches, the churches are characterised by some practices which are not commonly found among the Christians in orthodox churches. The conception of the founders is that incorporating such practices into Christianity would make the Christian belief close to the understanding of Africans (Ogunbiyi, 1985). One of such beliefs and practices is giving some reverence and awe for the *Ori-Oke* (the mountain top). The African Indigenous Churches have been known to have a great respect for *Ori-Oke* as a worship and prayer centre. As African-oriented Churches, these Churches have discovered the joy in meeting God at *Ori-Oke* early at the inception of these Churches (Olayiwola, 1987: 44).

These Christians have been known to be very active in prayer and spiritual lives generally to the extent that some of them are being referred to as *Aladura* (Prayer warriors). Although this set of Christians believed that prayers could be held anywhere, some sites or scenes are more appropriate for making prayers than others (Jegede, 2010: 46-49). This is the reason for their going to pray in places where they feel the presence of the Almighty God. Some of the responses made by the KII participants corroborate this assertion. A 55-year old woman, a member of Christ Apostolic Church states thus:

The mountain is a sacred place and a spiritual entity where one could meet with the Lord. I preferred coming here for prayer because of its unique nature and because of calmness and serenity and I have been going to the mountain for worship since my early age in the Church.

Another participant, Pastor Shodayo, a 37-year old woman, responded thus:

By mere looking at this environment, one would observe several wonders of the Lord. This is a reflection that this place is a unique, sacred and spiritual enclave, where one could meet with the Lord ...

Below is yet the opinion of another respondent, Mrs Aladeniyi, 42-year old, a member of an apostolic church.

What could be deduced from the foregoing responses is that this set of Christians conceived the hilltop as a unique entity with several natural signs; and as a place with high and enormous spiritual value and it is in the light of this that they visit there to fulfil certain religious obligations. Essentially, these places are often regarded to as sacred places where people often believe that prayers are answered automatically. Aysegboyin (2010: 89), in his assessment of the Aladura Churches, has these to say:

Yes Ori-Oke is sacred, a place filled with spiritual value. This is the reason why I have loved to go to the hill top to conduct my prayers. Although My God is not limited to a particular geographical place.

In order to aid spiritual exercises, the *Aladura* developed preference for the use of what they have termed as *ile mimo* or *Ori-Oke* (sacred places) which they use for the purposes of prayer or as a sort of spiritual retreat. It is believed that prayers when offered in these sacred places are always very efficacious.

The responses made by some of the respondents of the Key in-depth interview revealed this further. Mrs Ayorinde, a member of the cherubim and seraphim church has this to say:

Personally, I believed that the Ori-Oke is a sacred entity and I have developed the attitude of visiting Ori-Oke for prayer sessions because I observed that prayers made on this platform is often answered..

Mrs Ileladewa, a member of the Celestial Church of Christ, also expressed her opinion:

To the best of my own understanding, this place (Ori-Oke) is not just a place but it is a sacred place, a place that is specially designed by the Almighty for people to seek his Face. It is a sanctified place.

The above responses show that ori-oke is not only conceived as sacred by this set of Christians but it also seen as a sort of prayer closet. Some of these indigenous African churches have made themselves so familiar with the mountains to the extent that they occasionally make the place a meeting point to perform other socio-spiritual activities such as religious carnivals, festivals and ceremonies of the churches. During such occasions, these churches perform ceremonious activities such as *Gigun Ori Oke* (ascending of sacred hills and mountains) where they spend days ranging from three, seven, twenty one to forty days alone in spiritual exercises. Responses given by some of the interviewee corroborate this further:

Actually, I have come here today at my individual capacity but I must tell you that there are times when we come here in group, there are some situations whereby we (church congregation) go to the Ori-oke to perform group prayers of celebrate out church anniversary on this ori-oke. **A mechanic and member of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church who came to pray for breakthrough.**

In addition to the foregoing, Ori-Oke is conceived by the indigenous churches as an important spiritual place where divine healing could be received.

You see ni Ori-Oke yi (On this mountain hill), it is a place of deliverance, it is a place where the spiritual problems of many have been solved. On this mountain, God is doing wonder and people are receiving blessings every now and then. To God be the Glory.

A respondent gave similar response thus:

Actually, a friend brought me to this mountain when I disclosed some of my problems for her. Although I reluctantly followed her here but since I have been coming here to pray, God has been faithful to me, I have received enormous blessing and Miracles have been happening in my life and that of my family since my coming to this mountain top. **A 38 years Woman who trades in House hold items in Garage Offa area of Ilorin**

This conception could be further understood by the acronym given to different hilly and mountain sites used for this purpose. Such names include: *Agbala Itura* (vine yard or sacred place of mercy); *Agbala Iwosan* (vine yard of healing); *Agbala Iyannu* (vineyard of miracles); *Agbala Idande* (vineyard of deliverance) and so on. Responses given by the study respondents further justified this assertion. A pastor responded thus:

People come to this Ori Oke Agbara for answers to different challenges of life. Some come for the fruit of the womb, others are seeking for forgiveness, while yet a few are seeking protection from curses and generational enemies. The Bible says that God can give solutions to people in problems (Mathew 11: 28). **A 35 years old Christ Apostolic Church Pastor who led congregation to pray on the mountain hill**

Another respondent said:

Ori-oke is divine place, it is a place where problems of people of old time solve several spiritual problems. There exist several portions of the Bible that give evidence of deliverance and solution to the challenges of those who come to God. For instance, the blind see (Matthew 11: 4-5).

In addition to the above, members of these Churches often visit the Ori-Oke for a couple of reasons. These include the fact that they are directed through the Spirit to go and offer prayers on Ori Oke. Usually, these directives may come from Holy Spirit directives that may come through dreams, visions, and trances or tongues interpretations. The instructions given via these media may be collectives involving every member of a Church, family or a particular group in the Church. On the other hand, the instructions may be individualistic touching on the need for the individual to go to the hill top to pray. This is further shown in the responses of the study respondents:

I have received Miracles on this mountain. For instance, let me tell you that I have been barren (Sic) for eighteen years but when I started attending services on this hill top I am now blessed with the fruit of the Womb, am now nursing my second son, in fact, I come to this mountain hill from Abuja on a monthly basis **A 43 year Old civil servant who come to the mountain at least once in a month**

Another respondent responded that God provided job for him after he started visiting the Ori-Oke for prayer and worship

Initially, I do not really believed in the miracle of the Ori-Oke until this my pastor encourage me to come, Although I was reluctant at first but when I start receiving God's blessings through prayers and fasting, I developed the habit of coming down here at least once in a week **A 36 year Old man working with an Accounting firm in Ilorin metropolis**

In addition, members of indigenous churches conceived of Ori-Oke as places used for spiritual retreats with the main intention of developing their spiritual lives. Others mount the Ori-Oke during festival periods of a particular Churches or the annual date of the establishment of the Ori-Oke. Responses made by some of the interviewed respondents corroborate this further:

I came here today at my individual capacity but sometimes I come in the company of other church members especially at the periods when we use to have special Ori-Oke service or some other times when we come for marathon prayer and fasting for a specific period of time. **A choir member of one of the Apostolic Churches around the mountain site.**

At other times, individual members of the indigenous Churches often relate to the Ori- Oke due to divine callings. Those who are called like this, usually live on the Ori-Oke or frequent the place to offer prayers for themselves and those who believe in their ministries. One of the respondents said:

If you observe rightly, you would see that many times you come here, you always meet me, this is because my coming is not my own volition, rather it is a divine command, I was actually called by God to come and domicile myself here to pray, fast and engage in worship and to render divine assistance to those who are in need of deliverance from all sorts of bondages. **AA 41 year Old man by name Pastor Eri who is always available at the ori-oke**

Another interviewee responded with a similar account:

It is unfortunate that lately many people come here to pray for people without divine clearance, as for me, my action of praying for people on this mountain is not by my choice, but rather by the direction of the Holy spirit, if you are not called or chosen to do it and you claimed it, you might end up regretting your action **A 51 year old woman who pray for people on the mountain.**

Bye and large, what could be deduced from the foregoing is that the mountain top *Ori-Oke* is generally venerated by the indigenous Churches as a place with enormous spiritual value, a place where one could attain spiritual connection with the most high, a place where one could develop his/her spiritual level, a place of healing and deliverance from different shackles of life, a place of redemption and an entity where certain socio-spiritual functions could be performed. More so, it is a place managed by people who have received a divine command to do so. Generally, these African Indigenous church members gave high reverence to the mountain hill, and as such have been one of their cardinal places of prayer and worship. In fact, some of these churches like the Apostolic Faith usually attach the tag *Oke* to their other names as a church.

Conclusion

The foregoing has been used to examine the spiritual denotations and connotations of *Ori-Oke* among indigenous Christian Church attendants. It could be deduced therein that the *Ori-Oke* is a highly revered space among the indigenous Christians; it is a place that is reserved for spiritual transcendence and divine connection. The foregoing also show that the conception of the indigenous Christians about the mountain hill could have some scriptural backings, but it is largely as a consequence of some sort of cultural diffusion from the indigenous African belief system. The two theories used in the study have been used to juxtapose these argument. It could thus be deduced from the analysis in this paper, thus far, that *Ori-Oke* is conceived as a sacred entity among the indigenous Christian faithful and, as such, should be understood by all and sundry in order to avoid conflicts among people of different faiths in the country.

Specifically, this paper is of the view that, based on the spiritual value given to the mountain top by the African indigenous churches, there is the need for robust attempt to target the public for awareness of this fact, especially among non-Christian faithful, especially people of other faiths that should be made to see the need for inter-religious tolerance, such that the religious activities of these indigenous

churches on the mountain hill would not be halted or disturbed. This is necessary because the *Ori-Oke* which used to be a secluded place before, are now becoming fast surrounded by residential houses and or a market place, thus there is the need for public awareness of the importance of this entity to all and sundry in order to avert crises that usually erupt between the *Ori-Oke* visitors and the residents surrounding it.

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