

The dynamic nature of Christianity has necessitated its movement from the cathedral to the mountain top. This has occasioned a proliferation of Prayer Mountains throughout Africa. In Yorubaland of southwestern Nigeria, Prayer Mountain is known as Ori-Oke. Like many communities in Africa, the Yoruba are confronted with fundamental challenges in life for which people do not rest until they find solutions. Within the praxis of Nigerian Christian lexicon Ori-Oke is synonymous with the enactment of a sacred space on a mountain top characterised by various prayer regimes, rituals, exorcism and religious practices, aimed at eliciting the help of the divine to alleviate the existential challenges of devotees. This book explores the resacralisation of space on the mountains, highlighting how humans and the divine interact in Yorubaland. It brings into conversation 35 empirically rich scholarly essays on the role of Ori-Oke to those seeking divine intervention in their lives. Today, Ori-Oke have become centres of pilgrimage as a result of the lived experiences of devotees, creating unique religious value quite distinct from the aesthetic value of these mountain tops. The spirituality of Ori-Oke is anchored on the absolute belief in God and the infusion of traditional African worldview sensibilities in religious rites and worship. Ori-Oke spirituality employs resources of Christian tradition, introduced by the formal agents of Christianity, synthesised with traditional culture, to develop a life based on the precepts of an African Christianity. The book is an intellectual discourse on Ori-Oke spirituality, reflecting its contemporary relevance in a context of religious innovation and competition.

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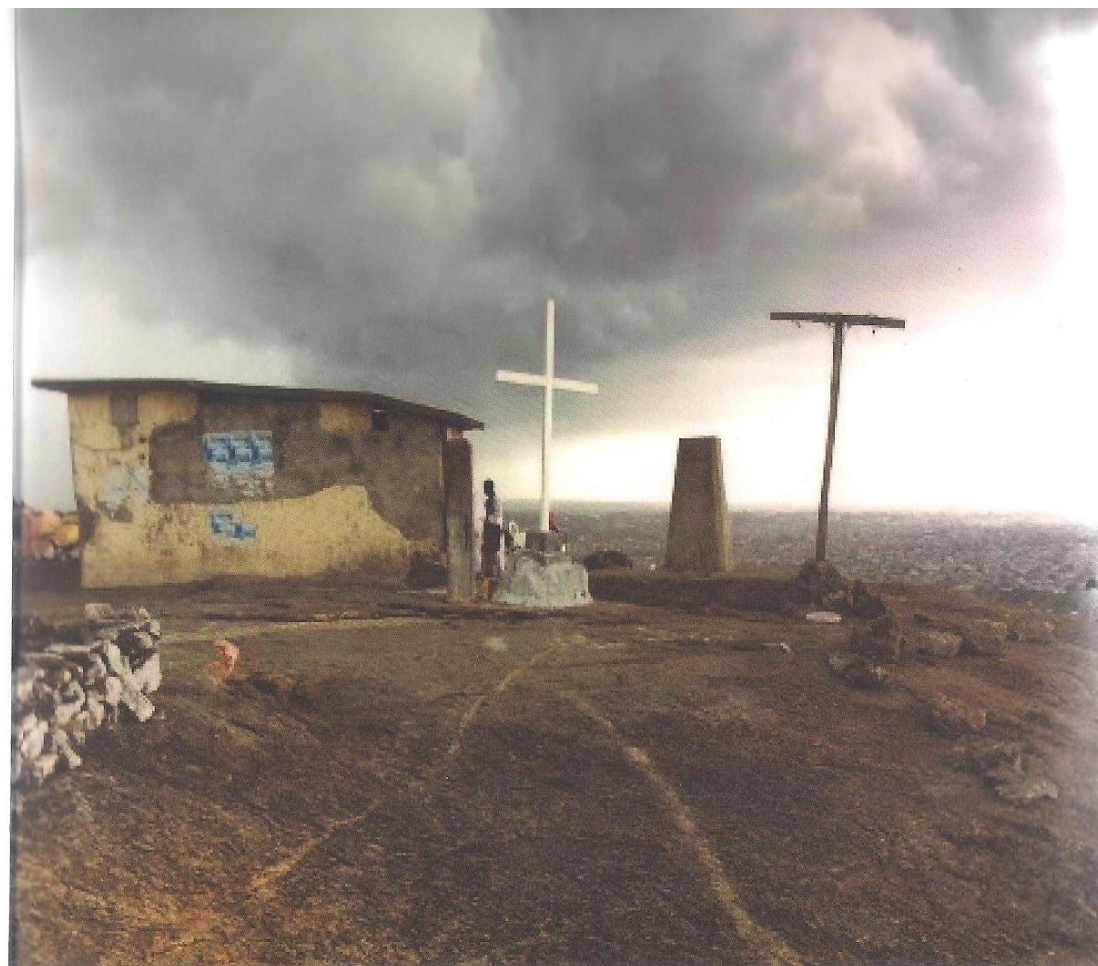


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CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

Soede Nathanael Yaovi, Patrick U. Nwosu, Akiti G. Alamu, Lemuel E. Odeh
and A. Y. Mohammed

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Dedication

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Notes on Contributors

Aboyemi, A. J. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
aadeniyijustus@gmail.com

Aboyemi, O. S. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
oyespeaks24@gmail.com

Adebayo, R. I. Ph.D. An Associate Professor of Islamic Theology and Knowledge, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
adrahope@gmail.com

Adedibu, B. Ph.D. An Associate Professor, Department of Christian Religious Studies and Philosophy, Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria, and also a Research Fellow, Department of Practical Theology and Missiology, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.
babatunde.adedibu@rcbc.edu.ng

Adesupo, P. A. A Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Oyo State College of Education, Oyo

Akano, E. K. Ph.D. Chief Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Oyo State College of Education, Oyo

Amali, O. O. Ph.D. An Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences Education, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
oteikwu2007@yahoo.com

Alamu, A. G. Ph.D. An Associate Professor, Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
agalamufreelance2004@yahoo.com

Alanamu, A. S. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of Christian Studies, Kwara State College of Education, Ilorin, Nigeria.
koroagba@yahoo.com

Aiuko, O. I. A. Ph.D. Student in the Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Ngwube, A. A Lecturer in the Department of General Studies, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Ekiti State. ngwube@hotmail.com

Abdulbaqi, S. Z. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Ayoola, A. A. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Oyo State College of Education, Oyo

Balogun, O. S. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. salbaq@yahoo.com

Eseyin, G. E. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Nigeria

Friday-Otun, J. O. Ph.D A Senior Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin, Ilorin

Issa, M. B. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Kadiri, K. K. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Lawal, O. J. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of Christian Studies, Kwara State College of Education, Oro. josephowolabilawal@gmail.com

Meleki, A. O. A Lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. adecoluwadarasimi@gmail.com

Muhammed, A. Y. Ph.D. An Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. aymuhammeduilu@yahoo.com.

Nwosu, P. U. Ph.D. A Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. nwosu.pu@unilorin.edu.ng

Odeh, L. E. Ph.D. A Senior Lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. lemuelodeh@gmail.com

Odeigah, T. N. Ph. D. A Lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. todeigah@yahoo.com

Ogunade, O. R. Ph.D. A Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. raygade@hotmail.com

Ogunbiyi, O. O. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Ogunkunle, C. O. Ph.D. A Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. calebogunkunle@gmail.com

Ojetayo, G. K. Ph.D. A Principal Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo.

Okewande, O. T. A Lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. oluwoletewogboye@yahoo.com

Olatunji, A. G. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Olaleye, O. G. A Post-Graduate Student in the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. adipeloyindamola@gmail.com

Olowonibi, F. A Ph.D Student in the Department of Religions,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
Omede, J. A. Ph. D. An Associate Professor in the Department of
Political Science, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Omotoye, R. W. Ph.D. A Professor of Church History,
Department of Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria.
graquarters@gmail.com

Orji, B. I. A Lecturer in the Department of History and Diplomatic
Studies, Crown-Hill University, Ilorin, Nigeria.
orjibonifacesly@gmail.com

Osaji, O. J. Ph. D. A Lecturer in the Department of Religions,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
jacobosaji59@gmail.com

Oyetade, M. O. Ph.D. A Lecturer in the Department of Religions,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
droyetademich@gmail.com

Raji, A. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of
Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

Salawu, B. Ph.D. A Professor of Sociology and the current Dean
of the Faculty of Social Sciences. He was one of the lead paper
presenters.

Soede Nathanael Yaovi, Professor, Institut Catholique
Missionnaire d'Abidjan, Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire
ysoede@yahoo.fr

Tejideen, T. O. A Lecturer in the Department of Sociology,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

Zaccheaus, G. A Post-Graduate Student in the Department of
Religions, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

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Veneration of Mountain-spirits in Yoruba Traditional Religion: The Igbomina Example

Aboyaji, Adeniyi Justus & Aboyaji, Oyeniya Solomon

Abstract

The mountaineering spree that is rife in Christian religious worship today is probably an African heritage of spirituality in religiosity. The height of this belief in most African churches today suggests firmly or tacitly that there is a strong connection between answerable prayers and mountaineering experiences. While some believe in ascending the physical mountains like Jesus did, some believe that one can make a mountain even of a valley like Daniel in the Lion's den or Jonah in the Whale's belly. In other words, wherever a Christian prays becomes his mountain, which could be anywhere, anytime; thus introducing a psychological dimension to the Ori-Oke phenomena. This paper does not attempt to research into the proliferation of Prayer Mountains all over, these days. Rather, it traces this to a general belief rooted in African worldview that every inanimate object, including hills and mountains, possesses spirits that could be beneficial or inimical to humanity. The paper adopts a historic-structural, systematic and analytical approach, with a combination of primary and secondary sources of data collection. Our findings reveal the tolerance of pluralism as one remarkable element of Yoruba religion. As such, one area of common ground between the indigenous and foreign religions, which is also one of the areas of continuity in African traditional beliefs, rooted in Afrel, is the veneration of mountain spirits. Our conclusion is that Christian religious worship has today, been greatly influenced by certain elements of the Yorùbá culture. One of such is the Ori-Oke phenomena in Christianity, which shares similar sacred creed with the Yoruba veneration of mountain-spirits. Examples would be largely drawn from among the Igbomina sub-group of the Yorùbás.

Introduction

Religion, a phenomenon which exerts great influence upon the conduct of a people, is described as the “collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to spirituality and, sometimes, to moral values” (Odejobi, 2014: 584). Indeed, much of humanity find it difficult or at best unthinkable to exist outside of spirituality—religion. As such, all mankind worship something, whether we know it or not; as whatever we devote most of our attention or time to is often considered either an object or subject of worship. Religion is therefore, perhaps the strongest element in African culture. For the Yorùbá in particular, religion is perhaps, at best, inseparable and intertwined with the traditional way of the people’s life. Consequently, religion has shaped the lives of the Yorùbá people, just as life has in turn shaped their religion. Indeed, religion is considered central to Yoruba culture. As such, Borokinni & Lawal (2014: 25) revealed that there are about 201 deities, 30 of which are commonly worshipped in Yorubaland. Most of them are believed to manifest interdependent physical qualities. Meanwhile, as against 201, Odejobi, (2014) in a contrary opinion, recorded that there are indeed more than 401 deities or divinities in Yorubaland, among which included *Ori* and *Oke*, both of them being among the prominent deities of the African pantheon. *Ori* (literally head) is the universal household deity believed as the god of fate or destiny. It is believed, according to Afolabi (2006: 40) that fortune or misfortune attends one according to the will or decree of this god. The synergy provided by the couple-deities resulted into *Ori-Oke*, with strong spiritual significance attached to it in Yoruba religious worship¹.

At the very heart of the concept of religion is worship, a tool employed by man in his quest to please the heart of the approved Supreme Being. Prayer, man’s means of supplication and appeasement to his creator, is generally considered central to any religion, be it foreign or indigenous, Western, Eastern or Traditional. Generally speaking, Africans believe that all inanimate objects such as groves, rivers, crossroads, hills and mountains have demons or spirits dwelling in them. It was this same belief that was extended to

every tree and herb, which they believe possesses spirits in them, which empower the herbs for medicinal purposes. It was generally held that every plant or animal had its esoteric or original name at the time of creation by the Supreme Being, the Creator (Borokinni & Lawal, 2014: 22).

The Igbomina people, like most others in Africa, prior to the advent of foreign influence, practiced African Traditional Religion, which unlike other world faiths, have no predominant doctrinal teachings. Rather, they have certain vital elements that function as core beliefs. Among these beliefs are origin myths, the presence of deities, ancestral veneration and divination. African cosmology (explanation of the nature of the Universe) tends to assert that there is a Supreme God who is served by a number of lesser deities and spirits believed to be the connection between the living and the invisible world. Spirits may be divided into human spirits and nature spirits; both of which have a life force devoid of the physical form. Individuals, who have died, usually ancestors in particular lineages, constitute the human spirits. These spirits play a role in community affairs and ensure a link between each clan and the spirit world. Natural objects such as rivers, mountains and trees represent the nature spirits. Africans integrate this religious worldview into every aspect of life (Rauf, 2016).

In line with the aforementioned beliefs, the Igbomina people worshipped a number of deities such as Orisanla (Obatala); Sango, the god of thunder and lightning; Ogun, the god of warfare and Iron, Esu, Oya, and Osun some of who were held to be the guardians of the land and sea, the giver of bumper harvest and protector of life and property through whom they can relate with the Supreme Being (God) (Rauf, 2016). They also worshipped several other spirits often associated with natural physical phenomena.

Igbomina: A People and Land

The Yoruba constitute the largest ethnic group in the forest belt of West Africa, though geography-wise, monolithically positioned (Ayandele, 1983: 88). At all events, by the 16th century, a number of

distinct sub-cultural groups were identifiable in the Yoruba area, based on regional variations of the common language differences in political and social arrangements, details of land tenure and local emphasis on particular deities from the common pantheon. The principal ones were the Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti, Ebira, Owo, Akoko, Ondo, Ilaje, Ijebu, Egbado, Awori, Egba, Owu and Oyo. On the eastern and western fringes and around the coastal lagoons, there were other related groups. Prominent among those in the north-eastern section of Yorubaland were the Igbomina (Aboyeji, A. J., 2015: 26). To the eastern fringe of Yorubaland whose geography has long been conducive to human habitation (Aboyeji, A. J., 2004: 30-35) lived many sub-units such as the Ila, Ipo, Oro, Aran, Iyanga, Isin, Irese, Esisa, Ile-Ire, Oke-Ode and Share who constitute one of the major ethnic groupings there.

The people who live within longitudes 8° and 9° N, and latitudes 4° and 6° E are pure Yoruba, called 'Igbomina' or alternatively 'Igboona' (NAK ILOR PROF. 2700 Vol. II). The term is used to connote this distinct dialectical unit of the Yoruba, the land they occupy and the language they speak. They are bounded in the West by Ilorin; north east by Yagba; southeast by Ekiti; north by the Nupe; southwest by the Ibolo, and south by the Yoruba of present day Oyo State. To the north of the Ijesa and the Ekiti, and east from Oyo live the Igbomina (Aboyeji, A. J., 2015: 26-36). Ila is the most southerly town of this area. The Igbomina area was said to have originally included Illofa, Ekan, Odo-Owa, Osi, Osin, and Obo whose peoples are no more particularly keen in joining their Igbomina brethren (NAK ILOR PROF 5083). The Igbomina who were said to have formed at least three-quarters of the inhabitants of Ilorin province, occupying a large area extending as far as Ila-Orangun in Oyo province, predominate in the area to the south and east of Ilorin town (Hogben, & Kirk-Greene, 1966: 285). All Igbomina, apart from the Ila sub-unit are presently located in Kwara State of Nigeria. They are particularly found in the whole of Isin, Ifelodun and Irepodun LGAs of Kwara State and Ila and Ifedayo LGAs of Osun State.

One easily notable fact with the geography of Igbomina is that apart from nearness to water or availability of water in the location

of a settlement, availability of mountains seems to be the next most important variable. Obayemi (1976: 196) noted that hills exceeding 600 meters (2, 000 feet) were found in northeast Yorubaland. He observed that although the hill country was difficult, it was inhabited. Temple (1965: 444) equally noted that the southeast of Ilorin province was extremely hilly, with precipitous rocks while tin had also been found in the extreme southeast of the province. The Igbomina country was extensive, having streams, forests, rocks and hills, with many curious and beautiful things. Aboyeji (2004) revealed that one major factor that led to the formation of most of the settlements in the region, was the desire for safety. Besides, the rugged topography and marshy section provided adequate places of refuge for those fleeing from enemies. Adeyemi (1984: 9) particularly observed that hill-settlements were usually resorted to for protection during the pre-colonial era of slave raids and wars. Undoubtedly, this is not unconnected with some fundamental facts about the people's belief system woven around mountains as well as the reality and exigency of that era.

The Igbomina area was well noted for its many hills, some of which stretch in long range for many kilometres, culminating in the adoption of hill-settlement styles by the people. Aiyedun revealed that, whereas the towns on the hills relied on the hills enveloping them for defence, with no tradition of wall-building, settlements on the plains such as Igbaja, Adanla, Ofarese and Agunjin, built walls round themselves for defence and also relied on bushes surrounding them (Aiyedun, 1976: 8). Considering the sites of many Igbomina settlements such as Alabe, Oreke, Oke-Oyan, Afin, Owode Ofaro and Ikosin, one would better understand with Bowen when he concluded that: "Nothing but the terror of war could have planted these villages in such places as these." (Bowen quoted in Gleave, 1963: 344; Aiyedun, 1976: 35-36 & Asonibare, 2000: 19) However, following the introduction of British administration and the relative peace that followed, many of the settlements on the hills moved down to the plains while those on the plains expanded from their former compact character. Thus, as revealed by Aiyedun, in 1914, Oke-Aba moved down from the hill noted for Aba trees, Oke-Ode between 1919 and

1921, Afin 1930, Oreke 1931, Ofaro 1930 as well as Alabe and Ikosin (Aiyedun, 1976: 51-52).

The importance of hills and mountains as places easy for defence and therefore, focal points for settlement, need not be over-emphasised. Igbominaland is blessed with such prominent natural physical phenomena such as Osa, Odia, Oke Owa, Oke Ayin and Oganyin in Oro-Ago District, (Malomo, 2001: 8), Agunbelewo Hill in Ila area, Alaguso in Ijara-Isin, Awoji hill and forest at Iwo (Lasisi, 2016: 29), Atawara/Jewo-ese/Oke-Alagba (Isanlu), Alaguso, (Ijara), Jawoese (Pamo), Osa, Odia, Oke Owa, Oke Ayin, Oganyin (Oro-Ago District), Oke Agbana (Share), Oke Ora (Ora), Oke Ayeye/ Oke Ogegemo/ Oke Ija Osi/Oke Apata/ Oke Ijaka (Oke Oyan), and other impregnable hills in Olla, Oke Ode, to mention just a few. The hilly sections of Igbominaland create a mountainous scenery which equally provided natural and adequate safe places of refuge for those fleeing from enemies (Aboyeji, O. S. 2015: 60). These so-called fetishes in traditional African beliefs, which include specific kinds of animals and plants, trees, stones, statuettes, rivers, hills and mountains and are mostly believed to possess supernatural powers (Borokinni & Lawal, 2014: 25), were venerated in Igbominaland as it was throughout the entire Yoruba society. The place-names of some Igbomina communities have the 'Oke-' prefix, such as Oke Oyan, Okeya, Oke-Oyi, Oke-Onigbin, Oke Ayo, Oke-Aba, Oke-Ode, etc. It may, however, take a separate research to fully determine the esoteric extent of the 'Oke' prefix in all of these place-names.²

Specific Instances of the Roles Played by Hills and Mountains in Igbominaland

Like Òkè-Ìbàdàn (Oyo State), (Orosun) Asabari Hill (Saki, Oyo State), Idanre Hill (Ondo State), the Olosunta in Ikere-Ekiti, Oke-Iragbiji (Osun State), Olumò Rock (Abeokuta-Ogun State), etc.; Òkè Festival (Hill Worship) is one of the common annual traditional festivals in almost all the towns with notable hills in Igbominaland. Such hills include Para Oke (Ila Orangun), Oke Agunjin (Agunjin), Oke-Qra (Qra), Oke-Qdè Hill, Gegele (Igbaja), Oke-Awoji (Iwoland),

Oke Alaguso (Ijara), etc. These hills offered protection and brought fertility. On this note, we will consider specific instances of roles played by hills and mountains such as the *Awóji* in Iwo, the Apate episode in Isanlu and the Oro-Ago hill-top warriors, all in Igbominaland which necessitated the veneration of hills and mountains.

Veneration of Awóji in Iwo

Although Christianity and Islam predominate the religious atmosphere in contemporary Iwoland, Sango, Oya, Mogala, Orisa, Erinle, Ibeji, Ogun and Osun have been identified among the idols worshipped (Alawoji, 1972: 13-14) in the years preceding the advent of foreign religions. While Isin had *Àgbààsin* as the soul of Isin Kingdom, Iwo Kingdom (Iwo, Oke-Aba, Odo-Ore, Sabaja) had *Awóji* as its religious and cultural soul. The *Àgbá* and its *Awòrò* (priest) never crossed his boundary to Iwoland just as the *Awóji* would either.

Undoubtedly, one of the most important traditional rites in Iwo was the veneration Awoji—a hill of historical background around which the history of the people revolve (Alawoji, 1972: 13-14). The founder of Iwoland, Ogbayigbayi, a certified prince migrated from Ile Ajiborò in the Old Oyò Empire during the beginning of the universal civil and chieftaincy tussle in company of his three other classified brother princes who settled at Igbaja, Qra and Ikòsin (now in Ifelodun L.G.A.). The Oníwó (owner of Iwoland) brought along the *Awóji* statuette with other insignia of royalty. Since then, the *Awóji* spirit might have resided in the seven-fold hill in Iwo known today as *Awóji*. The *Awóji* hill has ever since been venerated throughout the land and dominions of the Oniwonate.

The *Awóji* Festival was always celebrated annually at the peak of the harmattan season when *Awòrò* (the priest of *Awóji*), clad in flowing white³, holding dressed palm branches in his right hand went to perform required rituals and offer statutory sacrifices. Gorgeously dressed, jubilant and expectant worshipers, particularly women, including girls, who patiently waited for the *Awòrò* beneath the hill, accompanied him, amidst repeated chants such as "*Kulukulu se, ojo ti*

baluwe se wowo..." (meaning something is drizzling like rainwater from the bathroom). Activities on such an occasion, included eulogies, dances and gyrations to *Awóji*. On such a day, barren women and others who had specific requests would bring hens and goats for sacrifices. Particularly noteworthy and as sign of answered prayers was the traditional and miraculous rain that usually fell, drenching the people as they descended from the hill shrine to the town (Alawoji, 1972: 13-14). So sacred was *Awóji* that no other community could come to the shrine of *Awòrò* (situated on a hill) except the *Awòrò* himself. The *Awóji* Festival was also said to have the *guaranteed* sound health and welfare of all the communities that became settlers and sojourners on Iwoland.⁴

Like the *Àgbààsin* goddess, *Awóji* was a god of fertility as many supplicants (usually with new requests and vows) and testifiers at home and abroad made it a date. Goats, hens, etc. were often brought to be sacrificed as thanks offerings (Aboyeji, A. J. 2015: 26). This became an annual socio-cultural and religious festival where supplicants would at the mount of *Awóji* offer thanksgiving and make their petitions. It was also customary that the *Awóji* grove was the first to be hunted in Iwoland annually. It was believed that the *Awòrò* lived longer in Iwo because of his unique position (Aboyeji, O. S., 2015: 104-105)

The Apate Episode in the Isanlu-Agannigan Raid

The period 1829-1835 was not only an era of open door policy but also one of peace and consolidation in Yorubaland. This is because, initially, Ibadan did not pursue any policy of aggressive imperial expansion. However, beginning from 1840, Ibadan's aggressive war policy began. This has been interpreted as the Ibadan wars of expansion. Indeed, by the mid-nineteenth century, Ibadan had emerged as the dominant power, on the relics of the Old Oyo Empire throughout the Yoruba country, although the Fulani of Ilorin were also fast expanding (Akinjogbin, 1998: 33-48). Prior to 1840 Ilorin had invaded and acquired some Ekiti and Igbomina towns. Nevertheless, after 1840, due to Ibadan's success at the Osogbo

Battle, which brought her into limelight as the defender of the remnant of Old, Oyo heritage and Yoruba tradition, Ibadan was prepared to expel Ilorin from the Ekiti towns, due to the change in the BOP in her favour. Because of her proximity to Ilorin, much of Igbomina fell under Ilorin's hegemony (Gege, 1987: 58-60).

Consequently, Ibadan's martial impact was felt virtually everywhere in Yorubaland, Igbominaland inclusive. Ibadan's official maiden incursion into Igbominaland came from the south-east, on invitation from Otun under Oderinlo, the Balogun around 1847. Indeed, the vicissitudes that followed the 19th century Yoruba wars and the battle for supremacy, particularly between Ibadan and Ilorin, the two contending super powers, had grave consequences for the Igbomina. It exposed Igbominaland to the constant raids of the Ibadan thugs/marauders, popularly referred to as *Agannigan*. The *Agannigan*, as they were referred to, borne out of their guerrilla approach, possibly pushed westward through Olla into the southeast of Isinland and plundered the Isolo group, like Oke-Ara. Ibadan reportedly, succeeded in defeating the Ilorin, Ekiti and Igbomina people. Efforts to resist the *Agannigan* might have been frustrated by poor visibility. Although in Gege (1987: 62)'s assumption, it could have been due to the harmattan haze at the time of invasion, the phenomenon could also be attributed to Ibadan's supernatural and herbal military weapons or charms—an important aspect of the 19th century militarism in Yorubaland (Adefila & Opeola, 1998).

Although some local sources recorded by Dada (1984) and Ajide (1985) have revealed that the inhabitants of these villages were scattered while many of them enslaved and taken captive to Ibadan, traditions among the Isin people, recorded by Gege (1987: 58-60), have denied any Ibadan defeat, in any war, others have portrayed Isanlu, for example, around the 1860s, as being victorious over the *Agannigans*. Some Isanlu warriors such as Esinkin Owokunrinmogbo and Asanlu Odasodekun, who were also reported to have been renowned for their charms and magical arts, after due consultations with the oracle in one of such military advances by the Ibadan *Agannigan*, were said to have been instructed by the venerated spirit-god—*Olooke* in Isanlu to simply lay some poisoned clubs beside the

hill. The *Agannigan* were reportedly beaten and defeated with the aid of those clubs by the *Olooke*. Hence, the theatre of war in Isanlu is said to have been christen *Apate* (i.e. merciless killing) (Gege, 1987: 62-64). This is said to have brought about the coinage of the orile by drummers and ballad-singers in praise of the Isanlu men of valour as "*Isanlu iyeye, omo a-jo-kogun*", meaning Isanlu, progenies of those who danced to embrace warfare (Dada, 1984).⁵

In Gege (1987: 63-65)'s narrative, the mortality rate on the side of the *Agannigan* was estimated at about 100, 000 of Ibadan forces hit and killed by the small poisoned clubs (*kukute*). The Ibadan *Agannigan*, it is said, could not in a haste forget the humiliation they suffered in Isanlu in the 1860s to the extent that Isanlu citizens at Ibadan dared not declare their true identity. The mortality rate of the *Agannigans*, reportedly, made them to shift focus to Ijara via the route from *Igbo-Olomi-merindilogun* at Illa via Omo'lepo (Eleyin) plundering Ijara and looting the people of their valuables. Some Isanlu people such as Winlola and Ibitayo who had gone to Ijara for a wedding ceremony were reportedly captured by the *Agannigan*, who carted away with their loots before the Isanlu army could catch up with them at Oke-Emila near Eleyin. However, they might have been accosted, courtesy of the Isin irregular army under Esinkin Olusin and Ijimawo Jakolodi. The *Agannigan* had as one of their objectives, attacking Ilorin from the Omirinrin side through Otun-Ijaka via Igbaja. It was another strategy to attack Ilorin from Anyara-Ilorin war camp and farm settlement. At Isanlu, they encamped at Pagun, near Gaa-Omidoyin, but the town could not be taken as it was well garrisoned, having been fortified by the construction of deep trenches round it. The *Agannigan*, as a result, were routed by the Isanlu troops under the leadership of Ijimawo Erinjogunola. The *Agannigan* continued their raid of other places in Igbomina such as Okeya, Esie, Oro and Iludun.

Role of Hills in Oro-Ago Military Campaigns in the 19th Century

Samuel Johnson (1921; See also Aboyeji A. J. 2004: 84-85) put it on record that, "...the Oro warriors possessed poisoned arrows which enabled

them to do more damage to the ranks of their invaders". However, this had not always been as their resistances have not always met with success, especially as the Igbomina groups were initially apparently poorly coordinated. This led to several of their people being taken as slaves by the Fulani. This was also said to have resulted in the destruction of Ahun, an ancient settlement in the Oro District. As the inhabitants fled, some were captured as slaves while numerous others escaped north-westwards to establish Share on the Igbomina-Nupe boundary (Malomo, 2001: 23-24). However, as time went on, they were able to offer some more formidable resistances, by forming a series of alliances to resist their invaders (Aboyeji, A. J., 2004: 129-131).

The bravery that the Oro-Ago people later became renowned for in warfare may be attributed to two important factors. On one hand, the settlement had numerous blacksmiths who are said to have produced most of the arrows that the warriors in Oro-Ago used for most of their campaigns during the wars of the 19th century (Malomo, 2001: 19). On the other hand, the hilly terrain of Igbominaland, as in Oro-Ago and surrounding Districts were used to maximum advantage against their enemies. This enabled them not only to resist the invaders, but as oral tradition revealed, the Oro-Ago people usually fled up-hills, stationed themselves there and rolled heavy stones and rocks against the ranks of their enemies who dared to climb up their hills to attack them.⁶ In most cases, the Oro-Ago soldiers confronted their enemies from the hill-top to deal with their invaders. This made many Igbomina people, during this era, to seek refuge in the area (Malomo, 2001: 23; Aboyeji, 2004: 129-131). Most of the refugees fleeing from the Yoruba wars in the 19th century reportedly fled to Oro-Ago further north. There, at Oro-Ago, the Ibadan troop was effectively resisted and repelled by the legendary arrow men of Oro-Ago (Akintoye, 1971: 43).

The Incursion Advent of Foreign Religions into Igbominaland

a. Islam

Although dating the entry of Islam into Yorubaland with precision may be a hollow ritual, Adam Abdullah quoted by Aboyeji

O. S. (2015: 145) has suggested that Islam first became known in Yorubaland during the reign of Mansa Musa Ali (d. 1337). Nonetheless, it is at least, certain that Muslims had existed in Yorubaland as far back as the 17th and 18th centuries; and by 1840, there had been a considerable level of Islamisation in Yorubaland, probably through the proselytising efforts of Hausa and Nupe traders and Mallams by the beginning from the 17th century when a considerable number of Nupe merchants and Mallams operated in the Old Oyo's capital and in the Empire's provincial territories, including Ilorin and the Igbomina country. By the early 1770s, for instance, a Muslim cleric of Epe origin, reputed to have warded off the later Nupe raids from the frontiers of Oke-Onigbin during the reign of Etsu Maijia II (1769-1777) was said to have settled in Oke-Onigbin.

b. Christianity

In the course of the 19th century, several Missionary societies came into Nigeria in repeated attempts to evangelise the black people of Nigeria. It is worthy of note that interior Missionary activities began relatively late compared with the coastal region. Hence, initial contacts were with the more accessible and more conducive coastal areas before they eventually gained their in-road through the so-called 'impenetrable jungle' of the forest zone into the hinterland. Prominent among these Missions were the Church Missionary Society (CMS) which established its Mission in Badagry in 1842, Abeokuta in 1846. It later spread into the interior of Yorubaland. This brought about changes to the existing indigenous institutions just as it challenged the already firmly established religious belief systems in the area, including Islam.

The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) which played a particularly prominent role in the spread of Christianity in many parts of Igbominaland set its feet on the Nigerian soil on 4th December, 1893. Despite initial challenges, some of which resulted to the death of some of the pioneering missionaries, between 1901 and 1915, a number of Mission Stations were established over the interior of the Sudan. Some of these included Pategi (1901), Wushishi (1904), Egbe

(1908 by Rev'd Tommie Titcombe popularly referred to as *Oyibo Egbe*), Oro-Ago (1912 by Rev'd Guy Playfair, *Oyibo Oro* and superintendent of the Mission in Nigeria) and Agunjin (1915). The Mission, especially after the establishment of a Mission Station at Agunjin in 1915, diverted its attention to the Ile-Ire, Igbaja and Oke-Ode Districts (NAK Ilor Prof 1105, 'SIM Site at Agunjin, 1915').⁷ The SIM extended to Igbaja in 1923 (NAK Ilor Prof 1105, 'SIM Site at Igbaja, 1923').⁸ That of Iwo and Owu came in 1924. From here, the proliferation of the *Good News of Peace* spread wide and fast to the rest of Yagbaland, Igbominaland, including Ilorin and elsewhere.

Hence, Islam had penetrated into much of Igbominaland before the advent of Christianity. For instance, while Christianity penetrated into Iwo in 1924, Islam had taken roots since around 1910 (Aboyeji, 2001). Consequently, the Igbomina, like all other Yoruba people, for that matter, could not preserve their indigenous religious creed *ad infinitum*, as the proselytising efforts of these Missions soon reached Igbominaland. The Igbomina, therefore, also gave in to the modernity of Christianity and Islam as these foreign religions found their inroad into the different Igbomina communities at different times.

Establishing Common Grounds between the Indigenous and Foreign Religions

One of the crises the early African/Yoruba Christian converts had to contend with in the 1880s was discrimination. Yoruba traditions and culture came under the threat of Christianity as British control was steadily consolidated when the policy of developing a self-governing native pastorate was abandoned (Odejobi, 2014: 587). Generally speaking, whites believed that blacks, particularly Africans were incapable of producing their own ideas. This Eurocentric belief and supremacist disgust for blacks and Africans has long been entrenched in such efforts as the Darwinian Theory, Hegel's *Philosophy of History*, etc. all of which became part and parcel of the historical orthodoxy of the 19th century,⁹ and which is still strongly

upheld till today. Among such are words frequently and recently attributed to the incumbent American President, Donald Trump.¹⁰

What the missionaries failed to realise objectively and scientifically was the African social structure and their concept of God. As such, most of the Missions considered African religions and cultural values as primitive and pagan. Their agents, the missionaries must have erroneously perceived African religion as mere expressions of 'heathen unbelief and evil superstition'. Little wonder, the world outside church became dubbed as the 'kingdom of darkness' (Odejobi, 2014: 587) that must be prayed against and completely annihilated. This explains why the

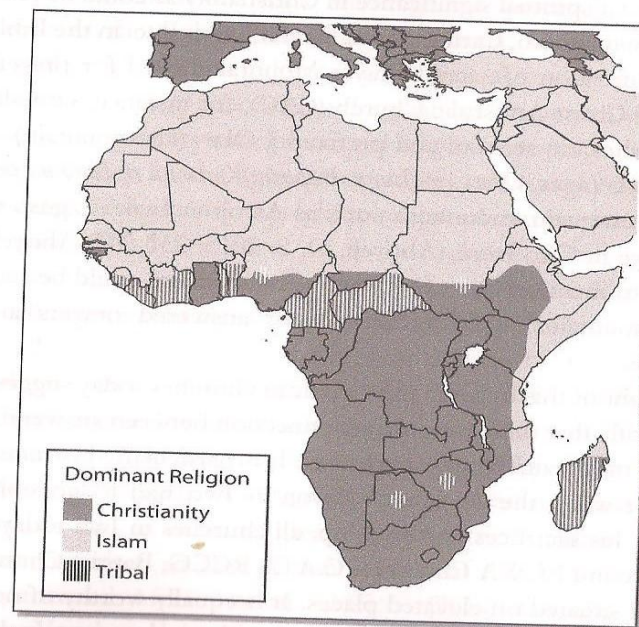
...missionaries tried to force African Christians to reject most of their cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Faced with continued missionary opposition to adapting Christianity to African culture, some Christian leaders decided to leave mission churches and form their own independent churches that incorporated aspects of African cultural practice that they felt were not inconsistent with Christianity....This discontent at European paternalism was one of the factors that led to the foundation of the African churches and by the late nineteenth century some African Christians decided to break away from missionary churches and form their own churches. The birth and rise of Pentecostal Indigenous Churches called Aladura (Praying ones) presents an interesting episode of protest and adaptation. The Churches were started by charismatic leaders of Yoruba descent such as Moses Orimolade, Emmanuel Akinsowon, Joseph Babalola and Bilewu Oshoffa who were aflame with desire to practicalize the saving and healing powers of God over people particularly in the superstition, poverty and disease-ridden societies as found in Yoruba land. Some of these Churches which started since the 1920s included 'Cherubim & Seraphim Church', 'Christ Apostolic Church', 'Church of the Lord' and 'Celestial Church of Christ'. These churches are largely Yoruba in character and population (Odejobi, 2014: 588).

By the early 20th century, the indigenous (Yoruba) Christian churches broke loose from the imperialist mission churches, a move

that was exceedingly beneficial to indigenous religious movements in Yorubaland. As Odejobi (2014: 587) further elucidated,

...the African Church (incorporated), when it began, reformed the elements of colonialism in the Church practices and doctrines replacing them with Yoruba substitutes; for example, praying for the Obas and Chiefs in their prayer book instead of praying for the Queen of England. It was evident that this group of people came out simultaneously in a way conducive to the Nigerians, taking into consideration the culture, customs and manners of the land in which they lived and relating to their God particularly to the life of their people.

A Map of Africa Showing Areas of Dominant Religious Concentration



Source: Strmiska, Michael F. *African Traditional Religion and the Coming of Christianity* Global Initiative: Africa SUNY-Orange, October 9, 2013.¹¹

Scholarly works have identified a number of common grounds paramount in the belief systems between the foreign (modern Western and Islamic) religions and the indigenous African Traditional Religion, not only in Yorubaland but in Igbominaland specifically. Particularly prominent among these include the belief in the existence of God—the Supreme Being, the use of intermediary, belief in invisible spirits (be they malevolent or benevolent), belief in societal moral order in consonance with Islamic and Biblical injunctions, belief in the Mundane world, and belief in sacred places, cultic functionaries and objects of worship such as shrines, temples, mosques and churches (Aboyeji, O. S. 2015: 230-247, Aboyeji, O. S. 2014: 19-43).

It is our contention in this paper that the sacredness of mountains is one particularly important identifiable common ground between Christianity and African Traditional Religions. Hills and mountains have spectacular spiritual significance in Christianity as could be seen in Mounts Sinai, Horeb, Carmel, Zion, Arafat, Hiraa, etc. in the Bible and the proliferation of sacred Prayer Mountains used for prayers today. In the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), for instance, virtually all their parishes are seen and prefixed a Oke- (i.e. mountain)—*Oke Aanu, Oke Isegun, Oke Ayo, Itunu, Irapada, Ko sehun ti, Isoro mi tan*, etc. In the same vein, mountains such as Awoji in Iwo, Alaguso in Ijara, Onitoye in Oko Irese, (Aboyeji, O. S. 2015: 230-247; Aboyeji, O. S. 2014) to mention but a few, were venerated and could be seen as prayer-mountains, with testimonies of answered prayers and supplications.

The height of this belief in most African churches today suggests firmly or tacitly that there is a strong connection between answerable prayers and mountaineering experiences. It is particularly instructive to note that while the Aworo of Awoji in Iwo had to go uphill annually for his sacrifices and worship, all churches in Iwo today—First and Second ECWA Churches, C.A.C., RCCG, Baptist Church, etc.—are all situated on elevated places. It is equally worthy of note that while some believe in ascending the physical mountain like Moses when he went to receive the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19: 3), Prophet Elijah and his encounter with the

Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18) his encounter with God on Mount Horeb (I Kings 19), Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-8), among other instances too numerous to recount, some believe that one can make a mountain even of a valley; like Daniel in the Lion's den (Daniel 6) or Jonah in the Whale's belly (Jonah 1 & 2). In other words, wherever a Christian prays becomes his mountain, which could be anywhere, anytime; thus introducing a psychological dimension to the prayer-mountain or mountain-prayer (Ori-Oke) phenomena.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the tolerance of pluralism is one remarkable element of Yoruba religion. The Yoruba may be said to have one of the richest, enduring and perhaps the most sophisticated ways of life on the continent of Africa. Although the Yoruba have many states (such as the Egba, Ilaje, Ikale, Igbomina, Ekiti, etc.) within the Yoruba nation, their culture is analogous as evident in their beliefs, values, customs, practices and social behaviours. Although today, Islam, Christianity and Traditional religions are practised side by side one another by the Igbomina people, traditional religion was the ancestral religion of the Igbomina people since time immemorial (Lasisi, 2015: 1).

Contrary to popularly held opinion that the Western culture might have swept clean the African culture, of its heritage and values in all its entirety, interestingly, some aspects of indigenous African culture have survived/escaped Western civilisation and modernisation holocaust. Although a great deal of the African culture might have been lost to modernity, it is worthy of note that certain aspects of indigenous culture have been preserved from extinction. Indeed, just as certain aspects of the African culture experienced westernisation, so also certain aspects of the Western culture also experienced Africanisation. Odejobi (2014: 584-595) has revealed how Yoruba culture, for instance, has influenced certain aspects of the Christian religious worship. Our focus in this study is to connect

the African belief in mountain-spirits with the prevalent mountain prayer phenomenon in Church worship today.

It suffices to note, at this juncture, that Christian religious worship, today, has undoubtedly been greatly influenced by certain elements of the Yorùbá culture. One of such areas is the Ori-Oke phenomena in Christianity, which shares similar sacred creed with the Yoruba veneration of mountain-spirits. As such, the mountaineering spree that is rife in Christian religious worship today is probably an African heritage or in the least, a toleration of the foreign spirituality in religiosity. Certain aspects of the two foreign religious cultures appear appealing to the traditional religion and vice versa. These two foreign religions provide functional alternatives in terms of culture to those of the Yoruba traditional religion, and tolerate certain aspects of the traditional religion (Lasisi, 2015: 100). Religion is therefore, both a factor for cohesion and disintegration. Emphasis on either the common grounds or differences consequently makes religion a tool for co-habitation or disharmony in the society (Aboyeji, O. S., 2015: xi).

We hardly can overemphasise it as we reiterate it, in the final analysis, that one area of common ground between the indigenous and foreign religions in Africa, Yorubaland and Igbominaland particularly, is clearly evident in the veneration of mountain spirits. This without a doubt constitutes one of the areas of continuity in African traditional beliefs.

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Notes

1. Oral information from Okewande, O. T. 27/01/2017, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
2. Oke-Aba, for instance was said to have been originally sited on the 'Aba' tree hill. However, during the reign of Oba Ranni Awo Olodoko Ayiku, the then Oniwo of Iwo lands, the incident of continuous fire outbreak which was destroying the Oke-Aba settlement and crisis of epidemics ravaging the town and which threatened to extinct the village made the Ifa Oracle to instruct them to vacate their land and sojourn on another land for the town not to be destroyed and suffer extinction. This incident reportedly made Oke-Aba to, in an unwritten but certified treaty, to be re-settled on a portion of Oniwo's land. Thus the name changed to Obate (i.e. the village the King of Iwo re-settled Oke-Aba on). See A History of Iwo Community in Isin L.G.A. (Kwara State) Presented to the Igbomina/Ekiti Traditional Council at Ajase-Ipo on Thursday 29th April, 2002, 3.
3. Indeed, customs forbade him from putting on black cloths and from travelling out of Iwoland under whatever circumstance.
4. A History of Iwo Community in Isin L.G.A. (Kwara State) Presented to the Igbomina/Ekiti Traditional Council at Ajase-Ipo on Thursday 29th April, 2002, 2.
5. Oral Tradition from Isanlu shows that this is being recently re-coined and modernised to "*Isanlu iyeye, omo a-jo-kore*" (i.e. Isanlu, progenies

of those who danced to embrace good/fortunes). See also Dada, S. O. "Isanlu-Isin, Since 1900" Unpublished B. A. Dissertation, Department of History, University of Ilorin, 1984.

6. Oral information received from Mrs. C. E. Comfort Dada (Oro) on 29/12/2003. In a comparative analysis, Mr. Jide Ige (Oral information, Ilorin, 24 January, 2017) also described how some Kogi people, in defence also cultivated the habit of mounting uphill against the enemies and pouring red on after them. By so doing, any of the invaders who dared to chase them uphill would always slip off while those uphill are at the advantage of hurling rocks and pebbles against the ranks of their invaders.

7. NAK Ilor Prof 1105, 'SIM Site at Agunjin, 1915.

8. NAK Ilor Prof 1105, 'SIM Site at Igbaja, 1923.

9. For the documentation of more of such Eurocentric prejudices, see Curtin, P.D. "Recent Trends in African Historiography and their Contribution to History in General" in J. Ki-Zerbo (Ed.) *UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. I*, Heinemann. California. UNESCO, 1981 and Fage, J. D. "The Development of African Historiography" in J. Ki-zerbo (Ed.) *UNESCO General History of Africa, Vol. I*, Heinemann. California. UNESCO, 1981.

10. Words attributed recently to the incumbent American President, Donald Trump, in relation to his supremacist disgust for blacks, Africans and Arabs, if true, are particularly unfortunate. In one of such, he reportedly argued that, "...the white man is created to rule the black man....The fact that blacks and Arabs look like humans does not necessarily make them sensible humans. Hedgehogs are not porcupines and lizards are not crocodiles because they look alike. If God had wanted us to be equal to blacks and Arabs, he would have created us all of a uniform colour and intellect. But he created us differently. Whites, blacks, yellow, the rulers and the ruled. Intellectually, we are superior to the blacks and Arabs. That has been proven beyond reasonable doubt over the years...." WhatsApp message titled: "Donald Trump's Full Speech on Why He Hates Africans and Arabs." Received on 19 January, 2017.

11. It also provides this breakdown of religions in Africa today: About 40% follow Christianity, 40% Islam, and 20% African Traditional Religions.