

Ori-Oke Spirituality
and Social Change in Africa
Contemporary Perspectives



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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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Chapter 28

African Spirituality and the Presence of God's Power on Ori-Oke among the Yoruba of Nigeria

Meleki, Adeniyi Oluwole

Abstract

The existence of a massive body of writing specifically on African religion, and the institutionalization of this field in academic has tremendously helped the existence of African spirituality (or religion) developed into at least a globally recognised social fact. The Yoruba word 'Aladura' literally translated as "Owners of Prayer" or "The Prayer People", refers to various independent churches of West African origin characterised by their belief in prayer, divine healing, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The belief in the possibility of deliverance from evil forces reflects a perception of the continual presence of God's power, and the need to pray, to prophesy and to heal assumes the possibility of immediate divine intervention. The Aladura Churches which began the indigenous Churches, by indigenous persons, and run under indigenous leadership, are champions of this course. The pivot of the Pentecostal churches world over is Prayer and the members are encouraged to commit every situation of life in the hand of God through it. Emotions and feelings are very important elements in prayer and they determine the depth, the sincerity and the worth of the prayer. Such prayer can only be spontaneous, long and at times accompanied with fasting; and they are often regarded more effective when said on a mountain top (ori-oke). Members therefore throng these sacred places for effective powerful prayers. Psalms in the bible are read, water or oil are blessed and sanctified for healing and other reasons. But what makes a mountain top (ori oke) a place of prayer? What biblical reference supports such practice? What takes place on Prayer Mountains? These are the focus of this paper that employs historical and analytical approaches in its findings.

Among the collapse of the Prophet and professed founder of the Christ Apostolic Church, late Ayodele Babalola is remembered and not forgotten. Then whatever he went on to plant any church, he would look for a Prince Moshood where he would pray for the growth of God in that movement to continue the spiritual process that was affecting the community where he went to or where he is going and the established around Prince Moshood where he went with his followers to her and pray to other to seek the face of God before going for service. Even many years after his death, some of his followers in the ministry where God calls that from now onwards one of his followers.

Nigeria is a religious movement among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, embracing some of the indigenous prophetic healing churches of West Africa. The movement has several branches of spiritual influence that began among the younger elite in the middle Christian community. They felt dissatisfied with Western religious forms and lack of spiritual power and were influenced by liberation from the divine healing Faith Tabernacle Church of Philadelphia in the U.S.A. In the 1910s, a certain would influence spiritual empowerment the formation of a prayer group of Nigerian leaders in the One Lord's Church, Indianapolis in Indianapolis, Ohio, USA. The main emphasis of the group was divine healing, prayer, protection, and a pastoralist moral code. And by 1922, divergence from Anglican practice forced the separation of a group that became known as the Faith Tabernacle, with several small congregations.

The main separation occurred when a prophetic leader, Joseph Babalola (1906-55), became the source of a more divine healing movement in 1930. Yoruba religion was rejected, and Pentecostal features that had been suppressed under U.S. influence were revived. Opposition from traditional rulers, government, and mission churches led the movement to request help from the Pentecostal Apostolic Church in Britain. Missionaries arrived in 1932, and the Nigerian movement spread and consolidated in the

prophetic Church. In support of my own philosophy, I believe that the movement was a response to the spiritual needs of the community, and their rejection of all control over the movement. Babalola (1906-55) Christ Apostolic Church was formed by leaders which included Joseph Babalola Babalola and late Dr. Babalola who was known as a leader. By the 1950s the church would have of about 100,000 members with no central authority and had spread to 100,000.

Notes on Terminology

Christians generally simply acknowledge that belief and practice work on and define every facet of human life, and therefore (Christians) religion cannot be separated from the structure of human life (Nigeria 2010). For instance, the word "religion" is problematic for some Christians, as it suggests that it is separate from the other aspects of human culture, society, or environment. For many Christians, religion is all-encompassing as it can never be separated from all these processes. It is a way of life, and it can never be separated from the public sphere. Religion affects everything in traditional African society, including political life, marriage, health, the arts, economics, and death. This is not to say that Christians generally represent a form of discourse or religious institutions. Christ Apostolic is truly African. The Yoruba also have a concept of a Supreme Being called Olunla or Oludumare, and the Olunla God of the universe empowered his various sons (Christians) to create the earth and carry out all its natural functions, including creating the people and civilizations of the Yoruba people (Johnson 1979). These powers were then are offered in the movement to help the earth where it is believed the gods reside. This idea of creating the earth for collective power was important and justified by the Olunla (Christians) simply found among the Nigerian churches.

Preference for Sacred 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. The general belief of the people is that such prayers if/when offered in these sacred places are always very efficacious. Consequently, they use these sacred places as a sort of prayer closets. Occasionally, (especially during their festivals), some of these churches perform ceremonious ascending of sacred mountains (*gigun ori oke*) where they spend three, seven, twenty one to forty days alone in spiritual exercises. These *ori oke* (mountain tops) *agbala* (vine yard) and *eti odo* (river side resort) are numerous around Yorubaland and their epithets betray their importance.

The practice of visiting sacred mountains by the *Aladura* constitutes a major factor of deliverance and conversion for these churches. Usually, the general atmosphere in these sacred places particularly on the mountains gives psychological and tension relief to worried soul as they 'climbed' *ori oke Olorun k'ole* (Mount of God), *Ori oke atunse* (mount of restoration) *oke igbala* (mount of salvation), *Oke Itusile* (mount of deliverance), *ori oke Olorun be mi wo* (mount of God's visitation), *CAC ori oke baba abiye* (CAC's mount of safe delivery) - located at Ede, Osun State, Nigeria, *ori oke Olorun seun* (mount of thanksgiving) *ori oke isegun* (mount of victory) among others scattered all over the entire region of Western Nigeria.

Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains)

Prayer Mountains made popular by the first generation indigenous churches abound across Nigeria. As noted in the introduction section of this work, some States of the South Western Nigeria have these Mountains with varying names such as Ori Oke Aluyo (Breakthrough Mountain) located at Afijio Local Government Area, Oyo State; Ori Oke Ikoyi, (Ikoyi Mountain) Osun State; Ori Oke Agbara Aseyori (Power of Success Mountain), Osun State; Ori Oke Akoko Mi To (My time has come Mountain), Osun State; Baba

Shiloh Prayer Mountain, Ibadan-Ife Expressway, Oyo State; Ori Oke Irapada Oluwa (The Redemption of the Lord Mountain), Ibadan-Ife Expressway, Oyo State; Ori Oke Atunse (Mount of Restoration), Ibadan-Ife Expressway, Egbeda, Oyo State; Rehoboth Prayer Mountain, Ajegunle, Ogun State; Ancient of Days Prayer Mountain, Abeokuta, Ogun State; Erio Prayer Mountain in Ekiti State, Ori Oke Baba Abiye (Mount of safe delivery), Ede, Osun State among others.

Biblical basis for Prayer Mountains

Prayer is defined as a means of communication between man and the Supreme Being (God). People throng the Prayer Mountains in order to avoid unwholesome distractions. A visit to the Prayer Mountains is likened to being alone with God. In the Bible, Jesus took three of his disciples to the mountain during the transfiguration and also taught and prayed with them there (Mark 9: 2-7; Mt. 17: 1-13; Lk. 9: 28-36). Moses also was reported to have communicated with God on the mountain where he received the Ten Commandments (Exo. 19, 20). The practice of praying on mountains has its origin in the Bible, and offers many spiritual benefits for those who understand the importance. Praying on mountains (Ori Oke) helps a person stay focus, unlike what obtains when there is a mammoth crowd. Anyone who is desirous of serenity or calmness when praying, as well as a place that is very quiet, should go to any mountain to pray. This does not mean that if a sinner goes to Ori Oke (mountain tops) God will not answer. No! What these *Aladura* Churches are stressing is that the heart with which one prays is the germane thing. If one prays to God anywhere with a clean heart and with strong faith, the prayer will be heard (Uche: 2014).

Peculiarities of the Ori Oke

Some religious leaders as well as worshippers believe that Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains) are open to all people, depending on what the rules of the mountain specify. In the words of Prophet Michael Olubode "the Lord gives us freedom to pray anywhere, whether on

the mountain, inside your house, while bathing, eating, on your bed, anywhere". Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains) could be said to be special because of the inspiration people draw from such environments. It could be observed that at wake of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), they were known for praying on the beaches. But the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) and some other denominations are known for going to Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains). There are three issues that make the Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains) peculiar. Foremost of these is that since the Prayer Mountains are not constituted into a church, it is expected that the place should have a leader. Again, there are rules guiding the activities taking place there. Also, the Prayer Mountains are multi-denominational, that is, open to people of many denominations.

The activities that occur on Prayer Mountains are numerous. On the mountains, people who have been favoured testified to the miracles they have received as a result of spending time on the Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains). Prayer Mountains welcome all, irrespective of denomination or religion, provided the individual is ready to follow the guiding rules, which include no burning of candles; no bathing of anybody on the mountain; no lying with one's spouse on the mountain. It is also against the rules to pay for prayers on the mountain. There are security guards at the entrance to the mountains and who inquired from new faces what their business at the mountain was. All Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains), contrary to assumptions, are not all gloom. Business activities take place such as sale of cooked food, snacks, bread, sweets, among others. And they are restricted to outside the premises of the holy ground.

A Prayer Mountain is a place of holiness. The prophet in charge of the mountain must also be genuinely called by God. Only the Bible is the possession allowed on the mountains. Eating as well is not allowed. They are strictly for prayers.

It is surprising at the kinds of people that go to Ori Oke for these prayers. Ideally, one would expect that only market women or illiterates and semi-literates would be seen visiting the Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains). However, a visit to any of the Ori Oke available in the areas aforementioned in this work reveals that not only the

destitute or those we can call the underdogs in the society go to these places but even the elites, the rich, the poor, educated and uneducated, students, bankers, celebrities, travellers, businessmen and women among others go there for success in life endeavours. The mountains are open to everyone who is interested as long as they are willing to follow the rules guiding the activities of the places. They are open to those looking for jobs, promotions in their chosen careers, those waiting on the Lord for the fruits of the womb, those searching for spouses, peace of mind, and success in all life's situations and circumstances.

One thing so expected of anyone desirous of visiting Prayer Mountains is that such an one must be fully prepared in his/her spirit, he/she must also as a matter of requirement be holy and sanctified in order to receive of the Lord as the motive is. It was clearly and specifically stated in the Bible that anyone 'who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place, (must be) he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully' (Psm. 24: 3-4). The body is seen as the temple of God and thus for a person to ascend the mountain he must be free of sin. He must be one with God in body and in spirit. One is climbing a place that is higher than things of the flesh and earthly thoughts. And for those who believe, God will bless them with his abundance.

What makes Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains) a holy place?

Ori Oke (Prayer Mountains) are places people withdraw themselves from all distractions of this world in order for them to concentrate on their communication with God and experience His grace and favour. As expected with any ventures of this world, in spite all sorts of oddities that do take place on the Ori Oke, one observes that have genuine Prayer Mountains still abound. A genuine Prayer Mountain must necessarily have a godly background with founder divinely directed by the spirit of God. This must come after several prayers and fasting. And the place itself sanctified with prayers, so that people who seek God in such places can have their

prayers answered unhindered. Thereafter such a place becomes a holy/revered ground. Some of these Prayer Mountains ensure for instance that women are separated from men to discourage distraction as it is believed that one who prays with a divided mind as he beholds the beautiful work of God in some women might have his prayers truncated thus leading to unanswered prayers. More so, no individual is allowed to stay beyond seven days so as to discourage them from abandoning their domestic duties under the guise of being on the mountain.

Prayer Mountains do not only provide a good environment for spiritual communication, they have also helped to boost religious unity, going by their multi-religious nature. Prayer Mountains offer spiritual sanctuary for their occupants and provide an almost direct link with God in the spirit. However, many reports have dotted the media space of various oddities (such as undue extortion of the visitors to the mountains by the hawkers of food items, promiscuous men and women to the places, among others) that take place on these mountains. Hence, it is important for clerics in charge of these mountains to enforce such rules that discourage distraction, immorality, proliferation of vices and illegal profiteering, whether in cash or in kind, by virtue of these mountains of prayer.

Pentecostalism on *Ori-Oke*

At the inception of the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), the emphasis of the founders then - Pastor Isaac Babalola Akinyele (later the Olubadan of Ibadan land), David Ogunleye Odubanjó, Joseph Sadare, Miss Sophia Odunlami, and (later apostle) Joseph Ayodele Babalola who fashioned it out as a "Prayer Group" characteristic of Faith Tabernacle witnessed in the early 20th century - was a paradigm shift in orthodoxy. However, when Joseph Ayodele Babalola became its leader in 1930, the group witnessed a significant transformation, it was a time of serious doctrinal disagreement between it and Anglican Communion on "divine healings, opposition to infant baptism, reliance on dreams and visions, abstention from

dancing, drumming, debt owing, drinking of alcohol, and mixing with non-Christians".

The doctrinal disagreement between these Christian groups went for years without resolution. By mid - 1930s the Anglican Synod took a far-reaching decision, removing all the group's members from posts held in the Synod, expelled their children from Anglican schools. With this development, the group leader, Joseph Ayodele Babalola, wasted no time to adopt all the Faith Tabernacle beliefs, even went a little further to accept "baptism by holy spirit, spiritual manifestation of seeing visions, prophesying, speaking in tongues and dreaming".

The position of the group on new beliefs only set the pace for what would happen in the future - as two different camps within the (Pentecostal fold) the pro-European and Nigerian camp saw "Divine Healing" differently. The Nigerian camp under the leader of Joseph Babalola ultimately had an upper hand. In 1939, the Nigeria group adopted a new name "Apostolic Church," but later changed the name to "Nigerian Apostolic Church" in 1942. Between 1930 and 1959 (when Babalola died), the Church had undergone many structural and pastoral changes, the Church has nearly a century-old Pentecostal activity in Nigeria with thousands of members in Nigeria and other countries.

Some *Ori Oke* (Prayer Mountains) in existence

Ori Oke Ikoyi (Ikoyi Prayer Mountain)

Ori Oke Ikoyi, established in 1935, at a time when idol worship, rituals, black magic, witchcraft and so many devilish acts were at their peak in the continent is known as a refuge in the mountain of God. It is located at Ede in Osun State Nigeria. This Prayer Mountain was said to be the most favourite of the late Apostle Babalola among the others from which he chose a particular spot where he did spend days praying before proceeding on any crusades. In 1959, shortly after the death of the late Prophet, as a result of the covenant of God that was believed domiciled on the mountain, people from the world over throng the place for miracle wrathing prayer. Like any of its

counterparts and other life ventures, it is expected that anyone going to this mountain must need go with his faith and with his/her anointing oil. Ikoyi Prayer Mountain has several prayer spots where both male and female do pray together but the top hedger on the mountain is strictly for men. This is a mountain where prayers are held for twenty-four (24) hours on a daily basis with instantaneous and one gets result immediately. This is one mountain that is been patronized results as it is noted that the power of God resides there with His people on this mountain. Consequently we see all the crème-de-la-crème in Nigerian society and in the diaspora trooping to this mountain to pray on yearly, monthly or quarterly basis.

Ori Oke Aanu (Mountain of Mercy)

Ori Oke Aanu (Mountain of Mercy) Praying Ground located at Erio-Ekiti in Ekiti State Nigeria is another of the earliest Prayer Mountains established by Prophet Joseph Ayodele Babalola during his life time. There is a spot on top of the mountain rock where he knelt to pray and his knee pierced through, leaving a giant hole in the rock due to his long hours in praying. Many celebrities and men of God have one or two testimonies coming to Ori-Oke Aanu. And the mountain is open to everyone while some great prophets who believe in Babalola's wonders link their own calling to God of Babalola Ori Oke Erio to start their own ministry there on the mountain.

Ori Oke Babalola (Babalola's Prayer Mountain) at Odo-Owa

This mountain is situated in the ancient city of Odo-Owa in Oke-Ero Local Government Area of Kwara State the hometown of the Late Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola. Most Christians and especially the adherents of Ayodele Babalola prefer to tag this birth place of the Apostle as mini holy land in the manner of the Muslims who pay yearly pilgrimages to mecca the birth place of prophet Muhammed their leader. There is a small stream called Odo-Iwosan (healing stream) said to have been sanctified by the Apostle to heal the community at the time of the ravaging chicken pox in the time of the Apostle's evangelism that killed the adults and children then. This stream on information gathered, is said not to have for once run dry

since the sanctification in 1946. Due to this special quality of the stream, lots of people from all walks of life are seen on regular trooping in with kegs to take the water. It is also given testimonies to the superlative healing power of God in the stream.

Ori Oke Efon Alaaye (Efon Alaaye Prayer Mountain)

At Efon -Alaaye an ancient town in Ekiti West Local Government Area of Ekiti State, many of these Ori Oke under view abound. "Prayer town" as is popularly referred owing to numerous Prayer Mountains where people who have business with God concerning their lives go for spiritual incubation and special prayer. It could also be observed that Efon Alaaye has metamorphosed into a tourist centre as many of the adherents of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) as well as other believers go to either to pray at the grave side of the late Apostle Ayodele Babalola or sleep in the mausoleum with the sole belief that the spirit of Apostle Babalola would ameliorate their problem. Kegs of water are taken to the grave believing that the power of the Apostle is still potent and could still perform miracles as done when alive. Omi iye (stream water popularly called Holy water, said to have been blessed by the late Prophet Babalola, potent for healing and miracles is also a feature one gets to see on this mountain. People come from all walks to take from the Omi iye (Holy water) said to be blessed before the departure of the late Prophet Ayodele Babalola. After taking the water from the stream, the water would be taken to the grave side for prayer. By this onerous act, many people have received miracles and healings from all kinds of diseases as people have it that the power of Babalola is still there. In all of these, faith is the basic requirement before any miracle can happen. One peculiar thing about the Efon Alaaye Prayer Mountain is that the olive oil or water pray upon at the grave gives an instant healing, since people have the belief that when prayer is said on the oil or water that is placed on the grave and is taken home, rubbed on the body or drank, whatever the curses or bad dream laced on one will stop. As earlier referred, celebrities in the society as well as renown men of God pay visits to this prayer ground at intervals of 15 days or every month as majority were won't do.

Ori Oke Ido Ajinarere (Mountain far away)

This Prayer Mountain was discovered by the late Apostle Ayodele Babalola in early forties. Its location is in Ido-Ile town of Ekiti West Local Government Area. From available evidences gotten from the custodians of the mountain, and like most of the sites of many church buildings and sacred places in Yorubaland, Ido Ajinarere was a forbidden forest that inhabited lots of evil spirits and dangerous animals and as its name sounded, it was very far away from the town. However, Ayodele Babalola received the direction from God to go to this mountain and meet with Him. Abinitio, this seemingly highest mountain ever discovered or established by Apostle Babalola had no stairway that leads to its top thus puzzling majority at how he was able to ascend it. But now stairways had been provided to making it easy for visitors to ascend it without much stress. The Ido Ajinarere Mountain has three specifically different hills - the first being said to be meant for general; the second, about twenty minutes' walk to the main one is meant strictly for women while the third which is on the hill is reckoned as the "power house" of the late Apostle Babalola in his life time. Tradition has it that he started from the very first till he got the instruction from God to proceed until he got to the last. And while on this mountain, a huge python snake came out of the thick forest crossing over the Apostle where he laid flat. As the snake was moving down his body, the miraculous was happening in that the snake was detaching and drying off instantaneously. This mountain takes about an hour when ascending it and most of its visitors are "men of God" designate who claimed they heard God asking them to meet Him there. The presence of God on this mountain is a matter of attention to many today.

Conclusion

A common feature of these Prayer Mountains is their emphasis on or reliance on prayers. It is observable that prayer not only forms their bedrock but they also believe that prayer is the fountain head of all their blessings and successes. Visitors to these Ori Oke (Prayer

Mountains) are encouraged to come frequently to them as if its in the hand of God. In our investigation, we observed that many of the people visiting these mountains are not members of the CAC but members of the mainline churches and some Pentecostals as well as the so called white garment churches. They attend different programmes on the mountains in order to pray and seek solution to their problems. Aylward Shorter opines that prayer in the mission churches is stereotyped, memorized or read, fitting all circumstances. Emotions and feelings are very important elements in prayer as it is understood by the African and they determine the depth, the sincerity, even the worth of the prayer, not to talk of the wording and the mood. Such prayer can only be spontaneous. African prayer is what may be termed "charismatic improvisation" prompted by the need of the moment. Such prayers are long and at times are accompanied with fasting. In some of the churches the members are encouraged to bring bottles of water for prayers especially as they go to seek the face of God on the mountain tops so as to pray about protection and find solution to some (if not all) of their problems.

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