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## Ori-Oke Spirituality and Social Change in Africa

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# *Ori Oke* and National Development in Nigeria: A Geo-Political Analysis

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### **Abstract**

*Ori-Oke, Prayer Mountains in Nigeria, are a rational phenomenon. They are a form of physical asset, spiritual arsenal, sacred geography and geopolitical utility which have benefited Nigeria. Several mountains for contestation of space exist in the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. These have been utilised for all kind of activities, ranging from economic to social, political and religious activities. The summation of the utilisation of this contestation of space, to a large extent, has brought about development. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to conceptualise the importance of Ori-Oke in Nigeria from geo-political stand point. Ethnographic research design was employed to obtain and analyse data. The paper, therefore, recommends to the government of all the tier levels and the Ori-Oke attendees, to optimally explore the geo-political benefits of the natural facilities. The paper concludes that, as man is a part of spiritual being, he needs spiritual things to survive and explore.*

### **Introduction**

*Ori-Oke*, mountain prayer, is a national heritage in Nigeria. Since mountains exist, man has taken shelter on them and within the caves that might be in them. Mountains are natural highlands above the sea and the low lands. Several activities, therefore, exist on the mountain so far as man's habitation has been shifted to the natural fortress. During periods of crises and inter-tribal wars, concerned communities escape to the mountains for refuge while purported enemies retreat from pursuing their victims.

In periods of natural disaster, such as floods and some epidemic outbreaks, the mountain has been a close and safe destination. The

mountain is perceived as a spiritual zone where the tides of evil are sent back, where the enemies of war are defeated and where sicknesses are not heard of. Therefore, to buttress the spiritual utility of man's interaction with the natural feature, special accolades are given to the mountain as a place where God grants safety, security and restoration of life when a person climbs it for the purpose of prayer.

Mountains are a form of physical asset, spiritual arsenal and geopolitical utility which have benefited Nigeria. Several mountains of various sizes and heights exist in nooks and crannies of Nigeria, so much so that a state is named after the mountains (Plateau State with Jos as the state capital). These have been utilised for all manner of activities ranging from economic to social, political and religious. The economic activities on the mountain range from tourism, to mining and quarrying. Others include hunting, sun-drying of farm produce and 'commercial praying' contractor sites. The political usage of the mountain includes geographical demarcation of landmarks and boundaries between communities and international states. The social and religious importance of the mountain is their use for sports such as mountain racing, climbing and diving. The religious aspect of the mountains is mainly the *Ori-Oke* prayers and the sightseeing of the natural wonders of God.

The summation of the utilization of this national heritage, to a large extent, has brought about national development. The economic teams in Nigeria have, to some extent, harnessed the tourist and recreational potential of the *Ori-Oke* to boost the economic activities of the area. Political crises arising from boundary disputes at the intra-state, interstate and national levels have, at times, been amicably resolved due to the use of a natural feature, such as the mountain, for boundary demarcation. These have promoted peace, which leads to a level of development in the affected states. The spiritual peace acquired from the prayers on the *Ori-Oke* is an immeasurable national benefit to the people and the entire state only for those who believe.

The objective of this paper is to conceptualise and classify the utility of *Ori-Oke* in Nigeria from a geopolitical point of view. Geopolitics was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and reborn at the

end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Park 2004; Hide and Lushaj 2014; Voss 2014). It is usually applied to the analysis of international politics and globalization. A geopolitical analysis, in this paper, is the interdisciplinary combination of geography and political science to analyse the *Ori-Oke* phenomenon. The research question this paper seeks to answer is: How do *Ori-Oke* prayers enhance national development in Nigeria? The theoretical framework of Prayer Theory is used to justify the importance of mountain prayers. The ethnographic research design is employed to obtain qualitative facts and data.

Some of the most referent Prayer Mountains in South and Western part of Nigeria include: *Ori-Oke* Aluyo, located at Afijio Local Government Area, Oyo State; *Ori-Oke* Ikoyi in Osun state; *Ori-Oke* Agbara Aseyori in Egbeda, Osun State; Akoko Mi To Prayer Mountain in Ogun State; Baba Shiloh Prayer Mountain in Ibadan-Ife expressway, Oyo State; *Ori-Oke* Irapada Oluwa in Ibadan-Ife expressway; *Ori-Oke* Atunse in Ibadan-Ife Expressway, Egbeda, Oyo State; Rehoboth Prayer Mountain; Ajegunle Prayer Mountain in Ogun state; Ancient of Days Prayer Mountain, Abeokuta, Ogun state; *Ori Oke* Aanu (Mountain of Mercy) Praying Ground; Erio-Ekiti in Ekiti State; Ido Ajinarere in Ido-Ile town of Ekiti West Local Government Area and *Ori-Oke* Babalola, in Odo-Owa, among others.

The geopolitical benefits of the natural facilities are essential to the local communities that house them. Many of the *Ori-Oke* have become tourist and prayer sites. The local communities' economy is enhanced and improved upon as the number of the Prayer Mountain users increase, and basic facilities are built around the mountain, such as guest houses. There is also employment of security guards, general cleaners and maintenance officers who attend to members. Food and some other essential prayer items are also provided at the foot of the mountain for would-be users. Another usage of the mountain for national spiritual benefit is that the state can send national, state or local delegates to the mountain to pray and retreat on spiritual matters, just like holy pilgrims, if their politics and governance are not translating into sustainable development and shared peace. However, the use of the mountain should transcend the prayers alone

and also include sporting activities and excursion tourism to develop and employ young talents.

### **Conceptualising *Ori-Oke***

*Ori-Oke* is a new concept in the academic circuit, but it is regular nomenclature in the circle of prayers and spiritualities. *Ori-Oki* is a Yoruba term which implies ‘head of the mountain,’ ‘mountain head,’ ‘mountain top’ and more religiously, ‘mountain prayer.’ Mountain prayer might mean other things in other languages across Africa and the world. It will be novel to perceive *Ori-Oke* from both phenomenon and feature perspectives. *Ori-Oke* is a phenomenon whereby the creature meets the creator for divine encounters on hard land higher than the regular plain lands, usually secluded for spiritualities.

*Ori-Oke* is a place where series of events takes place such, primarily prayers, but also trading activities and spiritual consultations. It is an organised meeting place where people visit for personal prayer retreats, due to the perception that divine encounters have occurred there in the past, when prominent religious leaders used them as fortresses and as a meeting point to pray, retreat and seek the face of God Almighty for divine help for themselves and others. On the other hand, it is an organised seclusion where a niche has been carved out for prayer contractors and neo-diviners to tell fortunes for people with perceived, unseen spiritual problems. This is usually to eke out a living and, to some extent, succour their clients.

As a feature and symbol of the supernatural signature on the surface of the earth, *Ori-Oke* is a geographical location where the land protrudes from the earth to a certain height or elevation to a top area (Prendergast 2005). The top area or the plateau is the usual point of convergence for *Ori-Oke* purposes. Generally, a mountain has no universal definition, but it can be perceived as a natural elevation of the earth’s surface, rising more or less abruptly from the surrounding level and attaining an altitude which, relative to the adjacent elevation, is quite notable.

In Europe, the general perception of mountains as horrible and evil places began to change in the 1800s. The fear and mountain gloominess gave way to achievements and mountain glory. High peaks are celebrated as places of grandeur. Scientists made mountains less feared by explaining their natural origins. Prendergast (2005) noted that mountain climbers attempted summits in search of the aesthetic sublime are no longer feared; mountains became a place of inspiration, reverence and exhilaration. Byron referred to the Alps as ‘palaces of nature.’ Wordsworth walked the high ridges of the Lake District which was awed, delighted and amazed (Prendergast 2005). Enlightenment scientists such as Agassiz and Tyndall made mountains less fearsome by explaining their natural origins (Fleming, 2000). According to Raymo (2004), in the 1800s, there was a swing of focus from ignorant fear to unquenchable curiosity, from a world ruled by divine whim to a world that might be understood by the human mind.

As a prayer city, *Ori-Oke* is a mountainous land, where various groups, churches, families and individuals converge for a mission to pray. Prayer is a medium of communication with God. The *Ori-Oke* as a prayer city, in recent times, has taken a dimension of having other places other than mountain for prayers, but still named as *Ori-Oke*. This is a trend for people or worshipers who admire the mountains but for whom the distance to the feature is a barrier. It is also important to clarify that the various *Ori-Oke* have several names, usually the town’s name, or the prominent pastor who made use of the mountain as a prayer fortress.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Empirical research concerning the psychology of prayer has increased significantly in the last decade. In Judaeo-Christian society, prayer has always been recognised as a way of ameliorating distress. Thomas Aquinas, a major exponent of prayer theory discusses the nature of prayer in ‘Summa Theologica’, IIaIIae, q. 109, a. 2 ad 4 [1], distinguishing between *veracitas* and *simplicitas* as different forms of relating to truth. *Veracitas* implies a .Therefore, it is considered

relevant for a link to justice and the conscious confession of truth. *Simplicitas*, on the other hand, implies an uncritical and spontaneous relation to truth (*facit intentionem rectam*) (Karlslake, 1912). It is on this concept of simplicity (with obvious roots in the New Testament) that an observation from ‘Summa Theologica’ was made that prayer is a rational and deliberate action and at the same time, a divine action, joining the body and soul together in divine contact (*Deo traditio et unitio* a. 1) in which divine nature can inspire the objects of prayer.

One question still remains to be considered, viz. what is the origin of the idea of the efficacy of prayer? Where has it arisen? How are we to account for the notion that prayer has the power to influence the Almighty God of the universe and to draw down a blessing from Him? Is it derived from natural instinct? Or, is it simply the result of an instruction or an example with each person training others to pray, and spreading by example the idea of the power of prayer? Now all questions on the nature of natural instincts or natural intuitions may be very difficult, if not impossible, to solve. The idea of the intellect, and the affections of the heart, does not come into existence. By analysing the category of attention in prayer, an interesting fact about the ultimate form of prayer is revealed. Prayer renounces self-perception, as if it were an act which could hinder the soul’s accomplishment of divinity (Fenwick 2004; Baumgarten 2013).

Prayer is a widespread practice in the US. *Newsweek* found in a 1992 survey that nine out of ten Americans prayed at least once a week. In 1994, *Life magazine* found out the same proportion believed that God answers their prayers, while *Time* found in 1996 that 82% of Americans believe that prayer heals. In the last few years, there have been a number of high quality double-blind randomised control trials of intercessory prayer, the majority of which have been positive, and which have produced good supportive evidence that prayer is effective. Numerous other studies have shown the success of spiritual medicine in general. These studies come from a wide number of fields and deal with many aspects of religious and spiritual practice (Fenwick, 2004).

A study on prayer theory by Koenig, et al. (1999), for example, was able to show that church attendees were more likely to be alive

after six years. A further study by Koenig et al. (2001) has shown that over 65 year olds, who went to church at least once a week had lower levels of cancer and heart disease, suggesting an up-regulation of the immune system, and showing the beneficial influence on health of having a religious or spiritual belief. One of the most persuasive prayer studies is from the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at Columbia Hospital, New York, by Cha, Wirth and Lobo. Cha, et al. (2001) carried out a prospective double blind randomised control trial on the effects of intercessory prayer on in-vitro fertilization and embryo transfer in a group of patients in Seoul, South Korea. There were three praying groups: one in Australia, one in the USA and another in Canada. They prayed for the groups, showing higher implantation rates (16.3% against 8% for the control) ( $p=0.0005$ ) and higher pregnancy rates (50% against 26%) ( $p=0.0013$ ). The high significances suggest again that prayer is effective, and the fact that the people praying were widely separated from those they prayed for, suggests that action at a distance has to be postulated, and that some kind of intention to heal, on the part of those praying, crosses the space to influence the target group. This study is thus a parapsychological study on healing, and suggests the possibility of direct effects of mind beyond the brain, a possibility that must be considered in any current theory of prayer spirituality and consciousness.

Janssen, Hart, and Draak (1990), and Janssen, Prins, Lans and Baerveldt (2000), on the theoretical construct, distinguished four variants of prayer. These include the petitionary prayer, religious prayer, meditative prayer and psychological prayer. The petitionary and religious prayer are usually concentrated and directed towards God and they take place at a fixed moment in a church. The meditative prayer is focused on action and is performed anywhere and anytime. This classification easily encompasses the *Ori-Oke* prayers. The psychological prayer concentrates on concrete problems and needs, and it is mostly said at night. Janssen et al opines that prayer, for few young people, is a coping strategy against odds and irresolvable negative events so as to maintain a balance in life.



## Geopolitical Analysis of *Ori-Oke* and National Development Enhancement

Geopolitics as a method of analysis was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and reborn at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the need to explain certain issues arising out of the general evolution of human society and the growing influence of permanent politico-economic changes on the human consciousness and the entire system of socio-political life and culture (Park 2004; Voss2014). Geopolitics gives us the opportunity to reflect on the manifestation and evolution of power relations within a particular historical period and to assess and track changes and trends in the current system of governmental relations, giving us indicators and analytical methods that allow us to penetrate into the essence of the reality of countries and their relations with their physical features such as the sea, air space, mountain and land masses (Ormerodand Riordan 2004). The geopolitical spread of *Ori-Oke* in Nigeria is mainly in the Southern and Western part; there is a spatial mountain in the North of Nigeria.

The spread of *Ori-Oke* across states of the South West include *Ori-Oke* Aluyo, located at Afijio Local Government Area, Oyo State; *Ori-Oke* Ikoyi in Osun state; *Ori-Oke* Agbara Aseyori in Osun State; Egbeda Akoko Mi and Prayer Mountain in Ogun State; Baba Shiloh Prayer Mountain in Ibadan Ife expressway, Oyo State; *Ori-Oke* Irapada Oluwa in Ibadan Ife expressway; *Ori-Oke* Atunse in Ibadan-Ife Expressway, Egbeda, Oyo State; Rehoboth Prayer Mountain, Ajegunle in Ogun state; Ancient of Days Prayer Mountain, Abeokuta Ogun stat; *Ori-Oke* Aanu (Mountain of Mercy) Praying Ground; Erio-Ekiti in Ekiti State Nigeria; Ido Ajinarere in Ido-Ile town of Ekiti, West local government area; *Ori-Oke* Babalola in Odo-Owa, among others. They are geographically located across Nigeria and are used for prayers. Geopolitical analysis takes into account a nation's geography, and the inevitable consequences of that geography (Voss 2014). It analyses the political relevance of geographic feature and the effect on the human life. This analysis will be done under the classification of *Ori-Oke* (Prayer Mountain) into socio-political usage and typology of patronage and religiosity classification of *Ori-Oke* (Prayer Mountain)

## **Classification of *Ori-Oke* (Prayer Mountain) into Socio-Political Usage**

There are various uses of the *Ori-Oke* in Nigeria, Africa and in other parts of the world. The utility of *Ori-Oke* can be broadly classified into two: the general usage and the specific usage. The general usage directly involves the government. These include the political utility, economic utility and social utility. The political utilities are for boundary and land demarcation between communities, intra-states, interstates and international communities. The economic utilities of *Ori-Oke* include quarry and mining sites, tourism and special attractions. The social utility is basically for sports.

The specific utility of *Ori-Oke* (mountain prayer) is for religious activities. These religious activities are collectively summed up as prayers. The prayers utility can therefore, be personal prayer utility or collective utility. The personal usage can be for ones' self, ones' family or the two together. The self-Prayer Mountain usage is subdivided into two: prayer only and other motives. These motives include activities with economic motives: being prayer contractors, prayer helpers or mountain spiritualists. The mountain can serve as shelter for those who want to spend few days on the mountain. The family Prayer Mountain utility is also subdivided as the self-utility for economic motives and shelter. The collective utility is then divided into the family and other groups. The family and other groups' utility is classified as prayer only and other motives. The figure I below gives the pictorial *Ori-Oke* Prayer Mountain utilities.

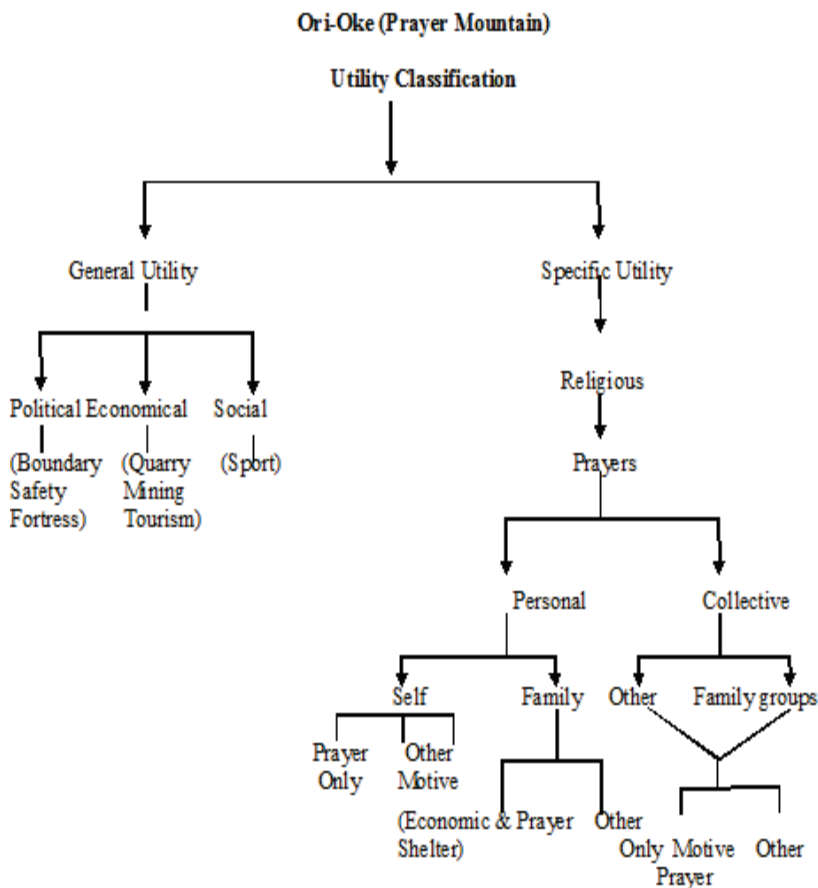


Figure I: Ori Oke (Prayer Mountain) Classification into Usage

### Typology of *Ori-Oke* Patronage and Religiosity of Users (Prayer Mountain)

The typology of *Ori-Oke* utility in relation to national development is plotted out under the lens of patronage and religiosity. This typology clearly shows the type or group of people that patronise the *Ori-Oke* in relation to their level of religiosity. There are four typologies which depict the church or group of people. The first group is the group with low religiosity and low patronage. This group is consists of the Orthodox Church/groups. This is because they have other objects of worship, which are confined in other

places apart from the mountain. Their mode of worship is confined around the object of worship. The second group are those with high religiosity but low patronage. This group consists of the Protestants and the charismatic groups. They have high religious tendency, but their patronage level is low, because they are the very immediate offshoot of the orthodox groups. As a result, they have the same mind-set that the place of prayer should be somewhere other than the mountain.

The third group are those with low religiosity and high patronage. This group consists of the new generational group/church. They believe in mild religious radicalism and a new order of service. The group has more liberty to use other places of worship and prayer styles, such as the mountain, apart from the designated places of meeting. The fourth group are those with high religiosity and high patronage. This group consists of the indigenous or African churches/groups. They are a blend of the orthodox, protestant and the new generational groups. They believe in more religious radicalism and a new order of service. The group also has more liberty to use other places of worship and prayer centres, such as the mountain, apart from the designated places of their meetings.

All the four groups identified have various level of usage of the *Ori-Oke*, and therefore their level of contribution to national development via the mountain utility varies. It is depicted that the more they use the mountain, the more they contribute to national development via the mountain. This implies that the personal and collective utility classification all have a means of creating employment and resolving frustrations, disappointments and hardships accrued from state failure. Therefore, instead of causing acrimony and violence in the community, *Ori-Oke* Prayer Mountains are a place where the divine intervention is sort for state failure. When there is peace instead of frequent protest of the people, both individual and national development will be achieved in the country. Figure II, below, shows *Ori-Oke* Prayer Mountain patronage and religiosity typology which depicts the rate of patronage of the different groups in relation to their religiosity on the Prayer Mountain.

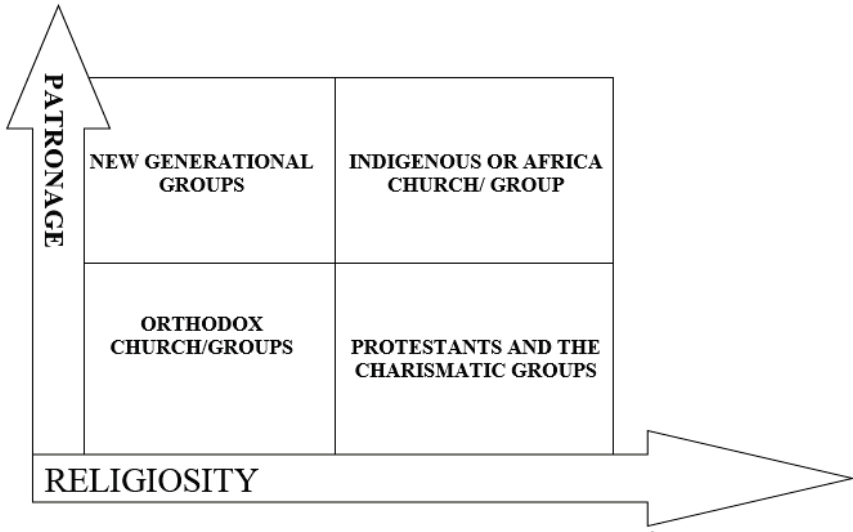


Figure II: showing groups patronising the *Ori-Oke* and their Religiosity

### Conclusion and Recommendation

The following recommendations are proffered to the government at all levels and the *Ori-Oke* users, among other groups. The government at all levels can harness the benefits of the mountain prayer by encouraging its usage for prayers and intercession for the nation. This is because its usage has brought relief and calmness to the nerves of the aggrieved people, encouraging them not to disturb the peace of the community, but to hope in God for a better day ahead. Also, due to potential national peace that their usage brings, the government should ensure the various *Ori-Oke* are not encroached by government buildings, mining and other activities, which can disperse the user from the mountain.

The economic activities on the *Ori-Oke* have created employment for some users, thereby, relieving the government of the extra cost of unemployed people in the society. The buying and selling, consultation and spiritual satisfactions of the users should be ensured

by the government by making the *Ori-Oke* environment more attractive and less hazardous to the users. This can be done by writing adequate legislation to protect the lives and properties of the people at the *Ori-Oke* from harassments from any counter groups.

This will be accomplished when the motive of prayer is made more a priority than the economic motives. This will bring sanity to the *Ori-Oke* as places of prayers and not strictly business centres. Also, the families or groups taking shelter on the *Ori-Oke* should take responsibilities for securing and keeping the mountain clean. The communities closer to the mountain should harness both the social, economic and the religious opportunities of the *Ori-Oke*.

*Ori-Oke* Mountain Prayer is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria or Africa. Many groups of people patronise other places to pray apart from their conventional places of worship. The *Ori-Oke* are more popular among Christians in Africa than any other group, and their primary motive is to pray in a free style different from the regular church pattern of solemn prayers. Various groups visit the mountain for various reasons which include Spiritism, economic motives and social reasons.

This paper's objective is to conceptualise and classify the utility of *Ori-Oke* in Nigeria from a geopolitical analysis. Various dimensions and perspectives were raised in the quest to conceptualise *Ori-Oke*. These include perceiving it as a phenomenon, a feature and practice. The research question raised seeks answer to is how *Ori-Oke* prayers enhance national development in Nigeria. This was answered by the classification and typology analysis of the Mountain Prayer utility. The theoretical framework of prayer theory is used to justify the importance of religion as part of human needs and the mountain prayer as an inevitable avenue to pray for national development.

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