

Old Wine in the New Wine Skins: A Comparative Semiotic Investigation of *Orí-Òkè* Symbolism in Yorùbá and Christian Beliefs

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Abstract

Prayer Mountain as a product of Yoruba Christian regime is characterized by the belief that God dwells on mountain top. Within the ambit of Yoruba Christianity, Prayer Mountain describes various prayer regimes, rituals, religious beliefs and practices which evolved largely to alleviate the existential problems of attendees through the help of the Divine. *Ori oke*, in recent times has become a source of refuge and succor to the troubled and a haven from the billows of life. Studies have revealed that Mountain top is believed by the Yoruba to be the abode of Olodumare—God, which has been brought by Yoruba Christians into its fold, in order to retain its relevance and spirituality. Therefore, this paper adopted historical, comparative and semiotic methods of ethnographic research. The study discovered that *Ori oke* is a rendezvous between humankind and the Divine, and these two trajectories are full of codes and symbols as tenor of discourse. They demonstrate the fact that the old wine is in the new wine skins as explained.

Introduction

The thrust of this study is the relationship between *Orí-Òkè* (mountain top) in Yorùbá religious belief and Christianity. This is necessitated by religious observation, demonstration and association of *Orí-Òkè* with the African Indigenous Christianity generally. *Orí-Òkè* is one of the features of Yoruba religion, the belief that the abode of *Olódùmarè*, the Supreme Being is in the high place. Among the Yorùbá Christian Churches, *Orí-Òkè* is a social construct that depicts the abode of God. The realization of *Orí-Òkè* in the open places as “outdoor” such as in the bush, on the rocks and hills is equally discovered to be realized as “indoor.” *Orí-Òkè* is referred to by the Christian Missionary as ‘Top of the Mountain’ which can be described also as an ‘altar’ and/or ‘podium’. This is the “heart” and rallying point of the Church, where the control of the entire Church resides. The place is

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mounted by some officiating ministers that have met some requirements to mount *Orí-Òkè*. However, this paper discusses how the traditional Yorùbá *Òrìṣà* gave birth to *Orí-Òkè*, following the traditional patterns, structures and beliefs. This is believed to be the peculiar and unique way or form of Yorùbá belief system.

Before the advent of Christianity in Nigeria generally and in Yorùbá communities in particular, there were numerous practices of the Yorùbá communities through which they accessed the Supreme Being, *Olódùmarè* in their religious beliefs, through *Ifá corpus*, the god of divination, *Ògún*, the god of iron and war, *Şàngó*, the god of thunder and lightning, among others. These divinities are generally called *Òrìṣà*. However, among these divinities, *Ifá* is unique. This is probably because, “*Ifá* is regarded as the spokesperson not only for the gods but also for the living. It is regarded as the living foundation of Yorùbá culture” (Abímọlájá, 1977a). The importance of *Ifá* is equally felt on *Orí-Òkè*, because, *Ifá* prescribes and directs about sanctification, purification and consecration of *Orí-Òkè* as the “power source” of shrines or groves. *Orí-Òkè*, as a religious symbol in the Yorùbá religion is here discovered to have metamorphosed to *Orí-Òkè* in the Christian religion. In addition, a comparative analysis between the Yorùbá religious beliefs about *Orí-Òkè* on one hand and *Orí-Òkè* in Christian religion on the other hand is undertaken in this study.

Munoz (2003: p. 179) sees *Ifá*'s scope beyond the Yorùbá cultural society when he says “*Ifá* is the most universal divinity among the Yorùbá and other West African people.” *Ifá* is known to different people by different names throughout the world. For example, *Ifá* is known as *Fá* among the Fon of Republic of Benin, *Eva* to Nupes, *Ifá* in Cuba, USA, Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Surinam and Togo. *Ifá* is referred to by the Ewe as *Afa*, *Ephod* by Jews, *Geomancy* by Europeans and Margays (Odeyemi, 2013: p. 5). With these different realizations of *Ifá* nomenclature which cut across nations of the world, the prominence of *Ifá* is not in doubt. In fact, *Ifá* has over 70 million followers in Africa and the Americas (Odeyemi, 2013). In 2005, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) proclaimed *Ifá* as one of the 86 traditions of the world to be recognized as a masterpiece of oral and intangible heritage of humanity (Robinson, 2008: p. 1). By this proclamation, *Ifá* joined the league of heritages and therefore requiring urgent preservation. *Ifá*, as a religion, science or literary text, has over time been of great interest to scholars in different areas of human endeavors, like medicine, philosophy, religion, art, and culture.

The association of *Ifá* with humans by some scholars involves the two aspects, which are scientific knowledge and religion (Abímbá, 1976: p.71 and Sàlámi, 2000: p.36). For example, Yemitan and Ógúndélé, 1970: p. IX assert that *Ifá* can be divided into two broad areas—as a science and as a religion. In their opinion about *Ifá*, “ó je ámojinle lo ó ara re, ohun tí a lè pè ní eka imọ́sáyẹ̀sì. Èkejì, ó je ọ́rìṣíí eṣìn ibíle ilẹ̀ Yorùbá kan.” (It is a branch of science on its own. Secondly it is a separate Yorùbá religion).

The extent to which we associate the symbol of *Orí-Òkè* in Yorùbá beliefs on one hand and *Orí-Òke* symbol in the Christian beliefs on the other hand is open to research. Before now, no attempt has been made to establish and link the concept of *Orí-Òkè* with the *ilé òrìṣà* and shrine or groove with *Orí-Òkè* in Yoruba churches generally to the best of knowledge.

Semiotic Approach as a Theoretical Framework

Semiotics, which is the study of science of signs, is better understood through symbolism. This approach is adopted because, *Ifá* that is the central element in this work communicates in signs and symbols with the interaction of divination and objects. Semiotics can be traced to the pioneering works of Charles Sanders Peirce, the American philosopher and Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss Linguist. According to Saussure, semiology is the study of signs as part of social life. He focuses on the functions of social and cultural phenomena within the semiotic system. Saussure (1974: p. 60) classifies signs into two entities: “signified and or sign-vehicle or meaning.” He refers to the signified, mostly in form of materials (objects, images, sounds and so on). Saussure is credited with Structuralist approach. To him, language is formed by signs which are related in multiple ways, as well as a sign or a word that consists of two parts: one part is its form; the other part is its meaning. The association between form and meaning of a sign is fixed by conventions of language use. The link between the form and meaning is inseparable.

According to Peirce, Semiotics is an abstract entity and a sign of something which stands for somebody or something in some respects or capacities. This relation of ‘standing for’ is mediated by an interpreter. According to Peirce (1931: p. 35), “a sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way the interpretant becoming in turn a sign.” This means anything can be adopted as a sign.

Three modes of signification are regarded to be sufficient to describe any form of sign. These are icon, symbol and index. In an iconic mode, the

signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified in one way or the other. According to Peirce, one can perceive a direct resemblance between the signifier and the signified. For instance, a picture of an individual is an iconic symbol. This may be in form of an animal. This belief is associated with some Yorùbá traditions that forbid some families to eat, kill or harm some animals. It is forbidden for the *Alápà*'s family to eat, kill or harm snakes, just as for the twins or the family of twins to eat any species of monkey. These animals are believed by Yorùbá tradition to be the families' ancestors (Káyodé, 1984).

In symbol mode, there is no resemblance or connection between the signifier and the signified, that is, the object and what it stands for. A symbol's connection with its object is a matter of convention, rule or agreement between the users. In Yorùbá tradition, it can be realized in form of *Àrokò*, in which an object or something stands for something or somebody in real life. For instance, the Yorùbá believe that 'fish' stands for negative and 'crab' for positive or to determine the 'yes' or 'no' of an interrogative statement such as 'eja n bákàn?' (fish or crab?). It is culturally accepted that 'fish' symbolizes (stands for) no or negative and 'crab' symbolizes (stands for) yes or positive.

In an indexical mode, the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some ways (casually or physically) to the signified. For instance, "odour" is an index for the presence of a he-goat around. This makes Yorùbá to say "*òrúkọ dé òórùn dé*" (a he-goat is around with odour) or in a statement such as "*bíná bá jó lóko mọ jàlà ni yóó sòfófó*" (*mọjàlà* is the tell-tale of the bush burning) (Şótúndé, 2009: p. 178).

The link rules of signs and their meanings are made known by code. According to Geoffery and Short (1981: p. 124) a code is "a means of conveying messages, a vehicle of communication." This may be realized in a multi-level coding. Code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. Codes are realized in different forms—behavioral, verbal, gnomic, among others.

Some cultural terms or names are not translated to preserve the local or cultural flavor, color and values of African oral arts; this is to avoid misinterpretation, misrepresentation and low comprehension "since the indigenous language is more conducive to the interpretation of an indigenous genre" (Ilésanmí, 2004: p. 111). The data from *Òrìṣà* shrines or groves and *Orí-Okè* are compared with that of the *Orí-Òke* in Yoruba Indigenous Churches of today, so as to establish their relatedness. Combs and Freedman (1990: p. 126) assert that, by comparing or linking two

things, including human beings or animals with each other, one would eventually realize, by symbol “association”, their relationship.

The basic strategy in using a symbol as a cue is to pair something with the thing that it is to cue. Depending on the particular person, if this pairing is done often enough with enough intensity, over a long enough duration, or in an environment sufficiently free of distraction ... the person will come to associate the two things with each other. Such a symbolic association allows one thing to be used as a cue for the other.

The Yorùbá adopts this consciousness of pairing two similar things that share related features, values and forms in common. This is why Yorùbá do say that “*Ohun tó bá jọ ohun ni a fi ní wé ara wọn; ẹ wo èèpo ẹ pà bí i pòsí ẹfírí, àrán ọ pẹ jọ ọwọ ọlábahun.*” (What are similar are comparable, the peanut shell resembles the midget rat’s coffin) (Şótúndé, 2009: p. 285). In this case, the relationship or synergy between of *Orí-Òkè* in the Yorùbá beliefs and Yoruba Christianity is established. The use of symbols is therefore inextricably linked with human societies and religions. Symbolisms have been used to serve many purposes at different times including a vehicle for communicating meanings and spiritual forms and ideas (Dzobo, 2011: p.76).

An Overview of Ori Oke in Yoruba and Christian Beliefs

The adoption of *Òkè* or *Orí-Òkè* as a point of religious or spiritual contact with the Supreme Being, *Olódùmarè*, evolves as a result of “Yoruba belief system” of practicing Christianity. *Ori oke* as a Yoruba concept has many connotations. Etymologically, *Ori oke* means “destiny at the top”. Metaphorically, it means to be on top (Oyetade, 2018: p.76). Therefore, in Yoruba theology, it depicts mountain top, hill top and in Christian theology, it means Prayer Mountain (Omotoye, 2016: p.16). Today, *Ori oke* is synonymous with Christ Apostolic Church and Cherubim and Seraphim Sect. For instance, Christ Apostolic Church names its branches (*Oke-isegun*) mountain of victory, (*Oke-idande*) mountain of deliverance, (*Oke-igbala*) mountain of power, (*Oke-Alafia*) mountain of peace, among others (Alamu, 2016). Also, *Ori oke* connotes that mountain top is closer to God and not everyone can climb it, while, some indigenous churches like Celestial Church of Christ and Cherubim and Seraphim sect can refer to

their altar, podium or pulpit as *Ori oke*. Periodically, it can be said by some Christians when fasting that they are on the mountain (Alamu, 2016). This opinion of combining Yoruba belief system with Christianity is equally expressed by Harris (1972: p. 205) that:

...from about the last decade of the nineteenth century, some mission trained Africans began to demand greater religious responsibilities for themselves, greater respects for African culture (music, dance, language, beliefs, customs) and racial equality. These concerns lunched the independent church movements which objective was to develop separate African churches that would be Christian while identifying with African cultural and physical needs.

Ori-Òkè (mountain or hill or rock prayer) arises as a result of the Yorùbá beliefs towards *Ori- Òkè* or *Òkè* symbolism; in which, when embedded into the Christianity religious practice among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria, is a better and unique way of their faith.

It is observed in this study that the general religious beliefs of the Yorùbá people on *Ori-Òkè* is associated with recognizing and regarding *Ori-Òkè* as a divinity like other Yorùbá deities. *Òkè* or *Ori-Òkè* may take the form of hills, rocks or stones; since this has created a spot that is above the level of the ground. Just like the physical components of *Òkè*, it symbolizes defense, security, victory, longevity and immutability. For example, Mustapha et al. (1986: p. 21) assert that:

*Òkè, Òkúta máa ní dáabòbo àwọn èniyàn l'owóogun àti
otá;...láti mọ rírì àwọn nńkan wọnyí ní a fi sọ wodi òrìṣà
àkúnlebo, bí ó tilẹ̀ jẹ̀ pé àwọn kan sọ pé èniyàn ni wọ ń nígbà
ìwáse kí ó tó dipé wọ fi kerekere di ohun tí wọ dà báyií...Díe
nínú àwọn Òrìṣà beéni Òkèèbàdàn, Òkè Írágbijí àti Òkè
Olósunta ní Ìkere-Èkìtì*

Mountain, Stone serve as refuge for people in terms of war. They are deified because of their values, even though, some people said they were once human beings in the ancient time before they are what they are presently... Few of such gods are *Òkèèbàdàn*, *Òkè Írágbijí* and *Òkè Olósunta* in *Ìkere-Èkìtì*

This shows that *Ori-Òkè* or *Òkè* is a deity, an iconic symbol of defense and security. This belief is associated with Yorùbá Christians towards the establishment of *Ori-Òkè*. Most of those that mount *Ori-Òkè* are those in a severe or turbulent period or problem. Their belief is that, as *Ori-Òkè* is a symbol of victory, protection and shield, so they are secured by presenting their prayer request thorough the medium or symbol *Òkè* or *Ori-Òkè*. In the same manner, *Òkè Olúmọ* rock in Abeokuta in Ògùn State of Nigeria, serves as a formidable shield of protection, defense and security for the people of Abeokuta. This makes Henry Townsend impressed about the *Olúmọ* rock. According to Ọmọyájowó (1995: pp. 19-20):

The *Olúmọ* Rock was of particular interest to him. He learnt how this had served the people as a place of refuge against slave raiders. And dotted around the *Olúmọ* Rock were the villages of the people who had once fought a common foe and began to share a common legacy of freedom. Townsend saw Abeokuta in 1843 as a collection of township each with an *Ògbóni* (Chief) and a war chief called the Balogun.

However, the beliefs of the Yorùbá people about *Ori-Òkè* is not limited to the presence of mountains, hills, rocks and stones in the bush or open space alone but, is brought closer to the church. Every church has a place separated and dedicated as *Ori-Òkè*. Thus, *Ori oke* is a meeting point or a rally point as earlier observed. Among Yoruba Christians, *Ori oke* in the church means altar, podium, pulpit or platform. It symbolically means a meeting place between God and man. In the yore, it was specially reserved for the Priests chosen by Yahweh Himself or the Levi who were in the lineage of priesthood. Again, it was called “holy of holies”. Nobody was allowed to enter the holy of holies except the priest who would have sanctified himself, else he would die there.

Furthermore, In the Old Testament days, “the Ark of the Covenant” represented *Ori oke* and as such it was those who were holy that could carry the ark. The ark could not dwell in a filthy place and as well could not be carried by filthy people. The story of Uzza in 2 Sam 6: 3-7, suffices here for those are qualified to carry the ark, and mount *Ori oke*. Therefore, *Ori oke* in Yoruba Christianity symbolizes a place of authority, holiness, purity, atonement, consecration and sanctification. Within the agora of spirituality, holy of holies depicts God symbolically. In addition, Oduro (2011: p.73) opines that in Old Testament times, God used symbols to reveal Himself to

the Hebrews through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which signified the awesome holiness of God. Some symbolisms in the Old Testament pre-figured the vicarious deed of Jesus Christ; such symbolisms included the seven branched candlesticks, the altar of sacrifice, the sacrificing of animals, Ark of the Covenant, and the brazen serpent on a cross.

Among the independent churches in Yorubaland today, especially in Cherubim and Seraphim Movement, Celestial Church of Christ, Christ Apostolic Church, among others, signs, symbols and codes are used to communicate spiritual ideas about life and its meaning. By extension, symbols are bifurcated into those that have been intentionally crafted which most human beings came to meet, and the category of languages and signs, such as shaking of hands and embracing someone. To this end, symbols, signs and codes are inseparably tied with human societies and religions cum Christianity. The symbolization of *Orí-Òkè* in this instance is not different from the traditional belief about *Orí-Òkè* as explained earlier.

***Orí-Òkè* Symbolism in Yorùbá and Christian Beliefs: A Comparative Analysis**

It has earlier been demonstrated in this study the iconic feature and symbols of *Orí-Òkè* in the Yorùbá belief system. However, in this section, the realizations of *Orí-Òkè* in the Yorùbá Christian churches are to be established. This makes the Yorùbá Christian churches unique and peculiar forms of African Christianity. What makes *Orí-Òkè* in the Church unique, peculiar and differentiated is informed by the initial or earlier orientation in regard to traditional beliefs on *Òrìṣà* shrines and grooves. The “secluded portion” called *Orí-Òkè* is set aside for some traditional spiritual “atonement, purification, sanctification and consecration” conducted by the priest. The *Orí-Òkè* is exclusively to be mounted by specified priests or religious leaders.

The structural pattern of the Church’s *Orí-Òkè* is usually raised above the level of the ground surface. It will be recalled that *Orí-Òkè* is naturally and physically above the ground level in form of hills, rocks or mountains with its entrance(s), marked or separated and guarded from the entire building or place of worship. This structural idea and pattern is observed in this study to have been borrowed from the Yorùbá traditional *ilé Òrìṣà* (house of deities). For instance, McKenzie (1997: p. 147) reports about the descriptions and observations of Golmer on the “sacred grove” that was “*ilé Òrìṣà* with enclosures, in Badagry in 1884. Golmer referred to a “sacred grove with few young trees and a small hut.” The grove and shrine were

enclosed by a six-foot high fence. The entrance to the sacred enclosure formed the place of execution and in the grove were the executioners to carry it out.”

It is clear that the sacred grove of *ilé Òrìṣà*, is an iconic symbol of authority. A place saturated with the invisible spiritual or divine power. This is the same about the *Orí-Òkè* in the Church, where the Church programmes are being exercised. It will be recalled that, the Yorùbá beliefs in *Orí-Òkè*, symbolizes the sacred or divine abode of the *Olódùmarè*, the Supreme Being. This is constructed in Yorùbá Christian Churches. The propagation of Christianity in Yorùbá communities gives recognition to the traditional religion as well. In other words, the Yorùbá Christians did not “throw away” their traditional religious beliefs. They prefer to introduce their religious (Christian) ideas into their traditional beliefs. According to Ọmọyájowó (1995: p. 23), “Townsend noted that people were very religious and recognized a Supreme God, *Olo ńun* to whom the great ruler *Şódeke* had built a temple. Other deities like *Ifá* (oracle of divinity) *Ògún* (god of iron and war) and *Şàngó* (the god of thunder) were also held in awe by the people.” In this instance, *Orí-Òkè* known or associated with *ilé Òrìṣà* shrines or grooves is incorporated into the new religious belief system (Christianity) as *Orí-Òkè*. Even though, the Christian Missionaries regard this as pulpit, altar, or podium, the Yorùbá Christians prefer to regard and refer to it as *Orí-Òkè*. This is informed by the equivalence with the symbolic significations of pulpit, altar, or podium in shrines or groves in the *ilé Òrìṣà*. The iconic symbols of *Orí-Òkè* are realized in *Òkè* (in form of hills, mountain or mountains) recognized by the Christian Missionaries. In other words, the Missionaries did not kick or preach against such. This religious or spiritual recognition was accorded with *Òkèèbàdàn*. For instance, “At Ibadan, some years earlier, Kefer, the Swabian pastor stationed there, visited an *Òrìṣà* shrine in the form of a sacred grove. It was devoted to the hill deity of *Ìbàdàn*, *Òkèèbàdàn*. It is laid at the Northern extremity of the town” (Mckenzie, 1997: p. 147).

The iconic symbol of *Orí-Òkè* known with shrines and groves is equally known with the Church buildings or Temples. This is known with Churches in *Ìbàràpá*, *Òkè-Ògùnpa* and in *Ìjàyè* of Yorùbá communities. Mckenzie (1997: p. 139) reports that;

a general word may be said about new *ilé Òrìṣà* shrines: their foundation, and their influence upon the way the early Yorùbá Christian edifices were dedicated. That the foundation sacrifice

was essential for the new *ilé òrìṣà* has already been noted in related to the house shrine. There are three interesting references to the shrines still under construction or recently built, but no account of a foundation sacrifice. One new *ilé òrìṣà* built in the Ìbàràpá country was on the site of a chapel, illustrating the well-known continuity of sacred space. Samuel Doherty, Ègbá catecheist at Abeokúta found this to be the case when he reached B'Ọlórundúró in the Ìbàràpá country in 1875. "Upon the very spot of the old chapel is now built a fitish (sic) house for the whole town." Isaiah Lashite had used old chapel at B'Ọlórúnpehù before 1866. James Okusehìndé, Yorùbá catechist stationed at Oke Ogunpa, was passing along the street when he saw men putting up an "orisha house". He talked with them and they parted on friendly terms but no description of the building is given. Thirdly at Ìjàyè in 1854 Mann, the Swabian pastor went out one evening towards the Ibadan gate. Kurumi, the Ààrẹ ọ̀nà kakannfò was sitting on the gate back from visiting" a new and large Òrìṣhà house".

From the observation on the new *òrìṣà* shrine, it is clear that, the traditional *ilé orìṣà* was adopted from the foundation as samples that were followed for the new chapels in the Christian churches. It is noted that such a place—*ilé òrìṣà*, is visited for power, especially, by notable people in Yorùbá communities such as Ààrẹ ọ̀nà kakannfò (head of the Yorùbá warriors and commander in chief of the Yorùbá army, Kurumi). The present day *Orí-Òkè* is the continuation of "illustrating the well-known continuity of sacred space—*ilé òrìṣà*".

The structural pattern of *ilé-òrìṣà* was copied in other places with other traditional symbols and objects. For instance, Mckenzie (1997: pp. 139-40) reports thus:

In default of material on foundation rites of the *ilé òrìṣà*, we may know some instances of these for new churches in Ègbádò, Ègbáland and Oyo Northwest. Janes Whites, Ègbá pastor at Ota notes in 1875 that at the foundation of the large roomy new church "a paper was placed in a bottle in the corner of the foundation" by William Morgan, the first C.M.S agent at Ota,...It seems clear that traditional elements have been incorporated into these foundation rites such that the kings, chiefs, warriors and other group of olòrìṣà could comfortably

take a prominent part in them...as they appeared in the different religions starting with the Ègbádò-Àwórì and going to the areas of Lagos-Ìjẹ̀bù-Òndó, Ègbá, Ketu, Ìbàràpá, Ìbàdàn and Ìjáyè.

The propagation of Christianity did not bar the Yorùbá people from “total incorporation” of the new religion; but they prefer ‘partial incorporation.’ Traditional religious rites were performed at the foundation lying of new churches (Mckenzie, 1997: p.145). This is observed in all parts of Yorubaland. Likewise, the traditional rulers and leaders were given due recognition in the programmes or activities of the church. The traditional Yoruba fundamentals gave birth to the modern way of incorporating churches vis-à-vis religious syncretism. This is equally known in the service of some Christian churches till today. During the Christian festivals such as Christmas, New year and Easter, political leaders who are Christians such as president of Nigeria, senate president, speaker of house of representatives, and so on, are sometimes invited by church leaders to *Orí-Òkè* (pulpit, altar or podium) as a mark of recognition or honour. The recognitions accorded to the traditional rulers in the new *ilé Òrìṣà*, are what the church also extends to political Christian leaders in Nigeria today.

The *ilé òrìṣà* is an iconic symbol of victory, defense and security. As the *Orí-Òkè* such as that of Okèèbàdàn and Òkè-Olúmọ in Abẹ̀ ọ̀kúta serve as places of refuge, shield, security and defense as earlier explained this is extended to the new *ilé òrìṣà*. People run to the *ilé òrìṣà* for “deliverance and salvation.” Mckenzie (1997: p. 147) reports that:

ilé òrìṣà served importantly as asylum for fugitive. Crowther, Yorùbá pastor and later bishop, was reminded of this at Badagry, not long after landing there in 1845 when a female *Olórìṣhà* came to him after taking refuge at a *òrìṣà* shrine as a fugitive slave “They [the fugitive] were at liberty to go wherever they please under the protection of the god”. This was in return for occasionally sweeping the *ilé òrìṣà* or supplying it with holy water. The protection of the *òrìṣà* seems here to involve light duties and to extend beyond the shrine to its surroundings. At Abẹ̀ ọ̀kúta in 1853, women working on a CMS building site for a station at own township were similarly in a state of sanctuary from the dangers of the nearby Orò grove. During the time of the Orò festival the women could not help seeking everything going on in the grove, being “not under the power of the Orò” but in sanctuary and out of reach of this powerful Òrìṣà...

The belief that no matter the magnitude of sin committed, such will be forgiven by God, so far the culprit runs to the sanctuary of God, is equally associated with *Orí-Òkè-ilé òrìṣà*, grove or shrine.

In Yoruba theology, Mountain top, religious rituals, religious beliefs and practices, contextual or local liturgies, are all Yoruba credentials with montage of unique religious values are quite fascinating and subsequently found as in-road into the Aladura churches. A handful of these religious ingredients or materials are suffusely used in Cherubim and Seraphim Movement and Celestial Church of Christ. In these Aladura (praying) churches, there are some Yoruba cultural manifestations such as clapping, dancing, stamping of the feet and the use of native musical instruments such as Maracat (*sekere*), *Omele* and *Gungun* which Ayegboyin and Ishola (1999: p.25) refer to as Yoruba daily life's experience and ingredients of African cultural manifestation which created and satisfied the spiritual hunger of the Aladura churches. However, we must not fail to emphasize at this level of scholarship that it is not all of these Yoruba credentials that found a pride of place in Yoruba churches despite the syncretism. Some Yoruba cultural credentials that could not match or fit into Yoruba Christianity were either screened out or totally jettisoned.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored the overview of *Ori oke* symbolism in traditional Yoruba and Christian beliefs. Again, the study has equally and lucidly showcased the areas of common interest and point of departure comparatively through the semiotic approach. The study has revealed that symbols are used to communicate subtle knowledge or idea and abstract truths about life and its meaning. Semiotic method which is the tenor of discourse in this effort seems to elicit that symbols have the propensity of communicating spirituality and spiritual meanings, while code helps to simplify phenomena in order to make it easier to communicate experience. Our effort has revealed that *Ori oke* is a meeting place, holy of holies, altar, podium and pulpit where God and man converge in Christianity. While in Yoruba beliefs, *Ori oke* is where *Olodumare*—God, resides and also a meeting place for Supreme Being and *Orishas*—deities. Comparatively speaking, both Yoruba and Christian beliefs recognize the fact that at *Ori oke* help is being sought from the Divine to alleviate human existential challenges in life. This theological syncretism is strong and well pronounced in both Yoruba theological beliefs and Yoruba Christianity, though not without exceptions.

To this end, Yoruba beliefs and Yoruba Christianity are beyond shrines and church walls, rather their spirituality is not in the books, but in their heads, thoughts, utterances and day-to-day actions and life modes, which semiotic tenor of discourse on symbols, signs and codes tend to posit. Hence the old wine is today re-emphasized and expatiated in the new wine skins.

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