

AFRICAN SACRED KNOWLEDGE IN OPERATION: REFLECTIONS ON SELECTED YORUBA PENTECOSTAL HISTORICAL SITES FOR ENHANCING CHRISTIAN TOURISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Sacred knowledge is a religious concept of global discussion. Religions are attached to myths and legendary assumptions in their narratives and historic presentations. Most of these values are kept sacrosanct and preserved for references and sometimes attract tourism on the global scenes. There are popularities and values attached to indigenous sacred objects than most of the historic sacred objects in African Christianity, particularly in Nigerian Pentecostalism. These esteemed values and propagations have attracted international observations and ethnographic studies in indigenous religion. The purpose of the study is to highlight selected sacred historic valuables in Nigerian Pentecostalism, using Yoruba as example for the enhancement of Christian tourism. The study adopts historical, phenomenological and survey types in participatory observation of the selected sites. Two historical sites were picked as specimens of sacred knowledge (The great revival site of 1930 in Oke-oye & River Ariran where God called Joseph Ayo Babalola in Ikeji-Arakeji). It was discovered that the tourist attraction of these historic sites is not highly laudable, compared to the magnitude of the manifestation of God reported in history. There is no clear-cut awareness and global attraction of these historic sites under the current tourist discussion. The researchers recommended that the Apostolic sister denominations should team up to re-package these historic sites, not for any show of veneration, but carve a date for global resort and pilgrimage, that would further communicate the self-disclosure of God in African Pentecostalism. This will generate wealth and more popularity for this brand of Christianity like African Indigenous religion.

Keywords: Historical Sites, Sacred Knowledge, Pentecostal, Yoruba and Christian Tourism

Introduction

Sacred knowledge is a generally understood parlance that evokes preservation and sanctity in world religion.¹ More so, the sacredness is categorically couched in legends, fables, symbols, identity, time and space.² The demonstration of human responses or discoveries of mysteries are sometimes, associated with historical sites that are bound by time and space. These discoveries are enameled on the relative object (man) with deep sense of nostalgia, communicated and transmitted orally until they become fixed historical narratives.³ There is an amplified tune of rites and rituals, as such site appears sacrosanct in expressions, communicated to non-experienced observers for due respect. This is chiefly peculiar to all religions, though more popular than each other.

While there are broad expressions of sacred knowledge in African indigenous traditions, (considering symbols and sites) with considerable attraction of international observers, practitioners and commentators,⁴ little or less information or popularity is attached to the prodigious historical events in Nigerian (Yoruba) Pentecostalism, in terms of global recognition and values given to indigenous historical events. Given that such historical sites exist in Nigerian Pentecostal history, yet they are not well packaged like the indigenous values that are fixed and popularised in global context. How many people, in terms of relationship, could measure up the Faith Tabernacle experience in *Oke-Oye* in 1930 with *OsunOsogbo* indigenous tourism on the same global identity? Could the therapeutic identity of the river *Ariran* at Joseph Ayo Babalola divine calling site (*Ikeji Arakeji*) be quantified with the popularity of *Olumirin* Waterfall (*Erin-Ijesha*)? Most of the sacred knowledge, toned with high publicity and attention, espouse indigenous heritages, values and also communicate the holistic disclosure of divine revelation, that transcends cultural and racial background.

Thus, the purpose of the study is to advance more sensitivity on the need to propagate sacred knowledge in Nigerian (Yoruba) Pentecostalism and present it in a comparable manner, in a competing global context with indigenous tradition. The *Oke-Oye* experience of 1930 in Ilesha and the historical site in *Ikeji Arakeji* where the divine call of Joseph Ayo Babalola took place would be considered in the study. The study adopts historical and phenomenological data analysis, pointing out some salient historical occurrences and deciphering it within the context of Pentecostals practices and experiences for tourist attraction. More so, the study will roll out suggestions on how Nigerian Pentecostalism could raise a value system and exchange of religious ideas, by communicating to the world that she has wonderful stories to tell through historical sites tourism.

African Sacred Knowledge: Yoruba Ideology

Sacred Knowledge, in the general sense, is an exclusive devotion or understanding of a deity or to some religious ceremonies or rites.⁵ It is an object or a space regarded with reverence, awe or respect that is protected by superstition or piety from irreligious actions, connected with or intended for religious use.⁶ In Africa, the sacred bodies of knowledge are expressed in religious and societal beliefs. Thus, the beliefs and the knowledge contained in them influenced the collective consciousness of the people.

For instance, the sacred knowledge of the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria is mapped out from the mystical and repository figure of *Ifa* or *Orunmila*.⁷ A deity of wisdom and intellectual development, *Ifa* divination system becomes an extensive corpus of texts and mathematical formulae, practised not only in Yoruba communities, but also by the African diaspora in the Americas and the Carribeans.⁸ Against other forms of sacred outlets, the knowledge of *Ifa* is on system of signs that are interpreted by a diviner. The performance of *Ifa* divination is called *Ifa dida* or *Idafa*. This *Idafa* is performed by a *Babalawo* or *Iyaalawo* or *Iyanifa* (an initiated priest or priestess).⁹ The *Babalawo* or *Iyanifa* provides insights about the current circumstances impacting the life of a person requesting this information and provides any necessary information to the individual. This is then applied whenever an important individual or collective decision has to be made.

While analysing the process of *Ifa* divination, Wande Abimbola asserts that the initiation into this sacred body requires rigorous study of the literary corpus.¹⁰ It is then important that a *Babalawo* or *Iyanifa* must learn and understand these literary chapters. The sacred knowledge of *Ifa* is gathered from the literary corpus, called *Odu* that has 256 parts and subdivided into verses called *ese*.¹¹ The number of the *ese* is unknown as they are constantly increasing (there are around 800 *ese* per *Odu*). The minimum of four verses will of necessity include 'ebo' and 'Ogun' (medicine) that are embedded and relevant to each of the verses, plus other issues that complement the divination. It is believed that an accomplished *Babalawo* must know about ten verses of each of the 256 chapters of *Ifa*, regardless of gender. This is the overall qualification for any intended practitioner.¹²

Ifa practice does not impede a woman, provided such woman possesses the required qualification. However, *Odu*- a special *orisa* can only be received by a *Babalawo* who decides to perform the special initiation that will allow him access to *Odu*. Therefore, a woman cannot be initiated into *Odu*. This is because since she already has a womb, she has no need to receive *Odu*. Each of these 256 *Odu* has its specific divination signature, with sacred knowledge, determined by the *Babalawo* using sacred palm-nuts and a divination chain.¹³ Apart from the group of sixteen *Ikin* (Palm-nut) There are also 'Iyerosun' (A dust from the *Irosun* tree), 'Ajere *Ifa*' (A vessel for the seeds), 'Opon *Ifa*' (A divination tray), 'Iroke *Ifa*' (A tapper instrument) and *Irukere Ifa* (A fly whisk) in the process of *Ifa* divination. Though divination can be done through 'opele' (Chorded divination cowries), however 'Ikin' (Palm-nut) is considered superior.¹⁴

More so, the *ese*, considered the most important part of divination, is chanted by the priests in poetic language. This contains the sacred knowledge that promotes Yoruba history, language, beliefs, cosmo-vision and contemporary issues. The integral nature of *Ifa* as a repository body of knowledge is substantiated in Sophia Oluwole's argument that, apart from spirituality, the nature of *Oyeku meji* and *Owonrin meji* reflect Western intellectual disposition of thesis and argument.¹⁵ Therefore, *Ifa* is a viable philosophical system that impinges concept and nature of ideas for clarity. Thus, the sacred knowledge of *Ifa* has been preserved within Yoruba communities and transmitted among *Ifa* priests.

Apart from the prominent knowledge and substance attached to *Ifa*, it is also apposite to understand the extension of sacred information in Yoruba folklores, concerning some breeds of persons, whose attributes were recorded in oral tradition. It is on this note that Sola Adebajo laments that the sacred knowledge of about four hundred and one deities in Yoruba country has considerable diminished compared with their popularities during the days of the forefathers.¹⁶ Moreover, the sacred knowledge of some deities, particularly that of *Kori* gives a unique hint of children and motherhood. Samuel Johnson has debatably revealed *Kori* as the only object of worship in his masterpiece; the history of the *Yorubas*. The unique worship of *Kori*, according to him, consists of hard shells of palm nuts strung into beads and made to hang from the neck to the knees.¹⁷

Johnson also discovers the opera in the performative worship of *kori* as beads is wore by one of the children, who goes before his mates singing and shouting praises of this goddess. Wande Abimbola even comments further that it is by receiving gifts from the people that the little children perpetuate the memory and worship of this deity.¹⁸ In proving that *Kori* predate some others gods, *Kori* is the only deity that shares palm nuts with *Orunmila*. In spite of the two conflicting traditions of *Kori*, the minor poem of *Ifa* has it that *kori* was the head of the Youth in heaven.¹⁹ She came to the world as a human being and was beset by problem of childbearing, poverty and general lack of worldly materials. As *Ogbenkusa* recital would have it, what she did to solve her problems was to ask an *Ifa* priest named “*Osalufogbejo Oromojogbo-laaro Olorun-soko akara sile*” (*Osa* drums for *Ogbe* to dance, *Oromojogbo-laaro*, God throws beans-loaves from above).²⁰ After strictly following the *Ifa* priest instruction and provision of sacrificial items, her existential problem was solved. Her aura of attracting children then gave her a public perception of motherhood, as parents entrusted their kids to her care. Her praise is expressed in one of the *Odu Ifa*:

Olori akewe won ee rebi
Agbalagba Oyo won ee rajo
Babaagba Oyo lo ree rajo
Ta a ni o file e re e le fun?
A difa fun Konkoto
Ni jo ti nkomo wee re rale odo
Ta a ni kori ogbe?
Afemi, Afiwo
Ta a ni Kori I o gbe?
Afemi, Afiwo.²¹

The head of the youths goes nowhere; Oyo elders do not go on journeys. If Oyo elders go on journeys, to whom would they entrust their homes? *Ifa* divination was performed for *Korikoto*, when she was taking the children to the stream, *Konkoto*, the goddess of the children. Who would *Kori* support? It is me, it is you. Who would *Kori* support? It is me, it is you.

There are many more inherent deities that have folkloric attestations in *Odu Ifa* for the production of sacred Knowledge in Yoruba tradition. As the significant symbol of *Kori* is

Palm nut shell and care of women, so also there abound symbols of sacred knowledge in Nigeria Pentecostalism, particularly the Yoruba extraction. But before then, it is appropriate to sketch the historical emergence of Pentecostalism in Southwestern Nigeria.

Emergence of Pentecostalism in Southwestern Nigeria

The acerbic and monstrous outburst of influenza epidemic in 1918 produced the scenery that placed Nigerian Western Pentecostalism on an outstanding footing. Around 1918, an Anglican in Ijebu-ode formed a classical and charismatic prayer group known as the Precious stone (Diamond) Society to heal the influenza victims.²² The dynamics and ingenuity of their new found faith expression caused the group to leave the Anglican Church in the early 1920s and affiliate with Faith Tabernacle, a church based in Philadelphia.²³

The relationship between Faith Tabernacle and the stock of indigenous believers did not survive after the great Revival of 1930 (Led by Joseph Ayo Babalola) because of the cold attitude of their foreign sister affiliate during their trying times. The quest to be globally recognised and the correspondence magazine, found as the publication of the Apostolic Church Great Britain, further initiates the ties of another European Affiliation in 1931.²⁴ Later, the association dissolved over the use of modern medicine, as a cluster group hold onto the European side and others found an independent Christ Apostolic Church, which according to Anderson is estimated to have over a million members by 1990.²⁵ The possible accommodation of this pattern of faith-practice gave rise to the subsequent Apostolic expressions, sponsored by Foreign Pentecostal denominations such as The Assemblies of God (1939) and the Foursquare Gospel Church (1954).²⁶

The history of Pentecostalism is somehow identical in shape with African Instituted Churches (AIC) in terms of reactions, methods, worldviews and ideologies. This inclusiveness covers the organic formation of Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim (1925), Church of the Lord Aladura (1930) and Celestial Church of Christ (1950).²⁷ The tone of Pentecostalism in 1960s was the beginning of sophisticated and outright reflection of the materialistic, charismatic and dramatic sense of the American Televangelists. The wave drummed hard around the circle of teeming youths who were students of higher learning. Matthews Ojo exposes the dynamics of 1960s Pentecostal formation, as he pointed out the innovation from Evangelical student revivals.²⁸ The wave of this Pentecostal expansion spawned new churches in the 1960s and 1970s. Mention must be made of Benson Idahosa, who was one of the Africa's most influential Pentecostal Preachers. The continued wave of influence that led the formation of Church of God Mission International in 1972 also reflected in the establishment of The Deeper Life Bible Church in 1975.²⁹ The Phase of 1980s Pentecostal evolvement promotes a new chapter of Pentecostalism that is tied with different chords of Western charisma and deep African worldview and textures. In its miles wide assessment, the Forum's 2006 Pentecostal survey suggests that renewalists- including Charismatic and Pentecostals- account for approximately three-in ten Nigerians. The Survey also finds that roughly six-in –ten Protestants in Nigeria are either Pentecostal or Charismatic, and three-in-ten Nigerian Catholic surveyed can be classified as Charismatic.³⁰

Selected Yoruba Pentecostal Historical Sites for Christian Tourism

Attention would be given to two Yoruba Pentecostal historical sites for the enhancement of Christian tourism in Nigeria. The former hubs on the divine manifestation at Oke-oye in 1930 while the latter focuses on the place of divine call of Joseph Ayo Babalola. The popular experience in Oke-oye Ilesha in 1930 continues to place an indelible mark in the wise of genuine Apostolic move of God and central to deep Pentecostalism in Nigeria. On the actual reposition of the renowned revival, Samson Fatokun comments that it is in cycle of assessment with the popular Azusa Street Revival of 1909. While William Seymour was the man at the centre of the former (Azusa), Apostle Ayo Babalola was at the core of the latter (Oke-oye).³¹

Borne out of the foremost revival of 1918, the metamorphosed group from Ijebu-ode was known for fervent prayers, manifestation of the Holy Ghost signs, particularly glossolalia. Their influence spread across the stock of Yoruba people in the nation and was making meaningful impact, as sections of the movement were known in Lagos, Ilesha, Ibadan and other places.³² The narrative became more remarkable upon a series of hitches and doctrinal problems, which was to be addressed at the Oke-oye Ilesha branch of Faith Tabernacle. At the helm of the Faith Tabernacle then were Pa Sadare (Eshinsinade), the leader, Pa Isaac Akinyele, (later the Olubadan, and the pioneer President of Christ Apostolic Church), Odubanjo, Joshua Medaiyese, Daniel Orekoya and others. Joseph Ayo Babalola, according to the report, was not a delegate for the council meeting.³³ Therefore, he was put in another room at the venue of the meeting. The reason attributed to his non-representative presence could be due to his new convert identity.

Samuel Adegboyega calls attention to the sudden uproar from outside as the meeting was going on. Attention was on a woman who was weeping profusely as a result of the death of her child.³⁴ According to the information on the revival, Ayo Babalola came out and requested the child to be brought. In the course of restoration, He rang his bell and called the name of Jesus, the child was resuscitated and that was the beginning of the revival. Frankly speaking, the 1930 revival at Oke-oye was never a deliberate move, neither was it a planned revival to gather people for ministration. The woman whose child was raised called on people all around, testifying of the miracle that was done.³⁵ While reconciling the recent Asbury revival with the incontrovertible move of God in Oke oye, Deji Okegbile pointed out the rediscovery of the Apostolic and missionary character and identity of the church. He added that other testimonies from the revival included the hopeless barren women who were made fruitful, women who had been carrying their pregnancies for long years were wonderfully delivered at Oke-oye.³⁶ The uniqueness of the space includes dosages of miracles; such as the healing of dumbs, confession and renouncement of witchcraft and sorceries. Recalled that members of Mainline churches were converted through the wonderful act of God that took place in Oke-oye.³⁷ Okegbile adds that many patients in Wesley Hospital, Ilesa abandoned their beds to seek healing from Apostle Joseph Ayodele Babalola. This fame of this spiritual reawakening in Oke-oye turned Ilesa to a corporate city of Pentecostal revival throughout the nation. In spite of the jaw dropping

demonstration of God's power in the anal of the Pentecostal events in Nigeria, particularly in Yorubaland, the popularity of Oke-oye, in terms of identity is not as amplified on global awareness and tourism for sacred profiling.³⁸ That also leads to the site of divine call of Joseph Ayo Babalola in the estimation of sacred knowledge for more global awareness in Christian tourism.

The Call of Joseph Ayo Babalola and the Sacredness of Ariran River

Joseph Ayo Babalola, whose sacred identity was attached to River Ariran in Ikeji-Arakeji was born 25th, April 1904 in Odo-owa, Ilofa, Kwara State.³⁹ An Anglican born and brought up, Babalola was born into the family of late pa David Lawani Rotimi and Madam Martha Talabi Rotimi. Having attended elementary schools briefly, Babalola stopped schooling to learn Blacksmith and later became a stream roller operator under Public Works Department.⁴⁰

The hand of God was heavy on him for divine assignment on a fateful day in 1928 when he was working with his roller coaster on Akure-Ilesha road by river Ariran. On October 9th 1928 by the river Ariran, Babalola heard a loud voice from above like the roar of thunder which called his name thrice saying “Joesph! Joseph!! Joseph!!! Leave this job you are doing; if not, this year you are going to be cut off from the earth”.⁴¹ Again on October 11th 1928, while trying to repair his machine, he heard an audible voice from the Lord to abandon his job and start preaching. Since then, there has been myth of sacredness tied around the river. It is reported that the water has been source of healing to many people.⁴² The popular knowledge that the water has no end or begin and that it has never gone since 1928 has been disputed by a reference pointing out that at some point in time, the water was reducing in volume, moving towards dryness. There is copious amount of reasons from both spiritual and geo-physical point of views in explaining this experience. People are known to be using this river, for all sorts of therapeutic and prophylactic deliverances of their lives.⁴³ There are series of prayer and performative activities that normally go on due to the inclined sacred attachment to the river as the spot of the message of God to His servant Joseph Ayo Babalola. However, despite the towering nature of these selected sacred sites in the history of Pentecostal development in Yorubaland, the global identity and spectrum of legendary tourist attraction of the sites are not well-packaged within the tune of international significance. This study intends to hoist this banner, not to stage any form of syncretism, but for effective exchange of sacred knowledge, Christian internal revenue capacity and specific reckoning in the celebration of mysteries.

Exploring Selected Yoruba Pentecostal Sites for Christian Tourism in Global Context

As far as field study is concerned, Babatunde Fakeye argues that the popularity of the historical site (Oke-oye) where the Great revival of 1930 broke out is limited in recognition, shape and identity.⁴⁴ One thinks that such a place where the intervention of God was highly demonstrated should be reformed and re-packaged in tune of global tourism. However, hardly would residents or visitors of this great city be attracted to the place where miracles had earlier manifested, because there is no obvious or elaborate reference point to the incidents and the significant objects therein.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that

these reference objects abound on the site, one observes that there is no clear directory and classification of these sacred historical knowledge into a mini museum. More so, there is no competent organization of these sacred and historical heritages for global tourist project. Hence, the need to revamp these historical legacies for possible Christian tourism and ideological communication of divine self-disclosure.

Based on the commendable level of spirituality and deliverance inclination of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), the River Ariran, where Babalola was called, is relatively popular than Oke-oye, considering the face-lift.⁴⁶ There is a segment of the river that has been dammed for spiritual rituals of the participants. The exact place of his (Babalola) divine call, where the roller coaster stopped is sizably camped and sometimes open for prayer and assessment. However, the coverage for international observation and tourist attraction is low.⁴⁷ The only consistent activities are prayer rituals, therapy of constant bath and loads of water storages in gallons of kegs than the tourist exploration of global standard. Moreover, there should be a thought beyond the box, as there are availabilities of significant historical objects that could enhance Christian tourism in Nigeria. The suggestions call the Classical Indigenous Apostolic Movement (CPFN) for collaboration.

There must be proper exploration of the potentiality of sacred knowledge from these selected historical sites. The Apostolic sister denominations, that share in the common experience of the recurrent move of God should come together, and promote the global identity of these two historical events.⁴⁸ There should be advancement of these historical sites for competing global value; where certain date would be promoted on annual basis for celebrating divine providence, sacred legacies and historical significance.

More engagement on publicity, within the towering stature of international recognition is needed. This would further enhance home grown pilgrimage, adventures and visitation in Nigeria. Sacred and historical objects suitable as reference point should be showcased as indigenous Apostolic Museum items. This will retell the story of God's dynamic intervention in Nigeria Pentecostalism that unleashes sense of tourism. The exploration impinges on the need to possess documentaries of these selected events, that is thoroughly produced and judged within global standard. This could be streamed locally and globally as part of the story of African Christianity that beckons for field investigation, ethnographic and eye witness involvement.⁴⁹ This would popularise Pentecostal realities as story of inclusion in global pedestal. The narrative, characters, symbols and derivable objects from these historical sites attract tourism. This projects the distinctive production of Pentecostal events, doctrines and practices to the larger world.

Conclusion

Sacred Knowledge is the heritage that promotes the uniqueness of every religion. The constant production of this knowledge gives people accurate information about sacred existence and stimulating spiritual experiences of man. African Christianity, particularly Nigerian Pentecostalism could explore the working wonders of God in their history and

experience, to tell more of their stories and exchange ideas with international communities. This would aid Christian tourism and affect multi-dimensional phase of human lives positively. Moreover, this experience must be well articulated with global project that encourages tourism, where relative experience of man would be promoted to other stock of human race, just as it is done in African Indigenous scheme for showcasing sacred knowledge.

End notes

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29. The Pew forum on Religion and public life releases results from a 10-country public opinion survey of Pentecostals. This survey demonstrates that Pentecostal beliefs and practices are literally reshaping the face of Christianity throughout the developing world. This was the remark of Luis Lugo, the director of Pew Forum. "And with religion playing an increasingly prominent role in global affairs, we need to pay closer attention to Pentecostalism-arguably the most dynamic religious movement in the world today."
30. According to the World Christian Database, at least a quarter of the world's 2 billion Christians are thought to be renewalists, an umbrella term referring to Pentecostals and Charismatic as a group.
31. S. A. Fatokun, "The Great Move of God in an African Community: A Retrospect of 1930s Indigenous Pentecostal Revival in Nigeria and its Impact on Nigeria", 34-57.
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36. This extraction is from Deji Okegbile. Okegbile is an ardent scholar, writer and a Nigerian Methodist Bishop with oversight to Nigerian Methodist Mission in UK/Ireland. He is also the Minister-in-charge of Askew Road Church.
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43. S. E. Oludare, "The Trio of CAC Founding Fathers" M.A. Dissertation, Department of Religious Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1999.

44. Babatunde Fakeye is a Pastor and a Lecturer in Church History in The Apostolic Church Nigeria LAWNA Theological Seminary Ayegbaju Ilesha. This was his take on the tourist potentials in Oke-oye, where the revival of 1930 broke out.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Wole Isiolatan is a Pastor and a Lecturer of Church History and Pentecostal Studies at Christ International Divinity College Erinmo-Ijesha. He took his time with the researcher to explain how the leadership of CAC could improve on the Ariran waterside for tourist attraction.
48. Ibid.
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