

**ROLES OF ORIM (ANCESTRAL SPIRITS) IN THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LIFE OF THE TAROH PEOPLE OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA**

**Daniel James Tali, Ph.D**

Gindiri Theological Seminary

(An Affiliate Of University Of Jos)

Plateau State, Nigeria

talidaniel@ymail.com

DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.2.25001.77923](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.25001.77923)

**Abstract**

*At the moment, the Taroh nation seems to be averagely organized, ordered, protected and guided. This seems to possibly be because of the role played by the Orim in the socio-political life of the Taroh people. The goal of this research is to find out the meaning of Orim, to investigate the role of Orim in the socio-political life of the Taroh people and to suggest ways of improving these roles. The data for this research were collected from books, journals, dictionaries and encyclopedias, among others which were sourced from the internet and libraries. The data were analyzed through the discussion, descriptive and historical methods, among others. The research found out that the role of Orim in the socio-political life of the Taroh people includes maintaining peace and order in the society, connecting marriage and ensuring that it works, making a decision for the land and initiating male children into the Orim cult. The research recommended that the roles of Orim among the Taroh people can be strengthened by making shrines for their worship, venerating the Orim, offering sacrifices for the Orim and obeying the Orim.*

**Keywords:** Orim, Taroh People, Plateau, Africa, Socio-Political

**Introduction**

Ancestral worship is a global phenomenon. It is a practice that is common in many countries and religions of the world. For some of these countries and religions, the practice is mandatory, while for others, the practice is not too mandatory. Some of these countries and religions of the world have elaborate ceremonies for this worship, while others have elaborate ceremonies for this worship. In the same vein, in these different countries and religions of the world, the practice is done differently (Kessler 1-7; Joffe 1-5; Reuter 1-12; Bae and Merwe 2-10; Morgan and Okyere-Mann 1-6).

For example, in India among the Hindus, the ceremony is known as "Sraddha", in Rome among the Roman Catholic, the ceremony is

known as “the veneration of the Saints”, in Mexico among the Mexicans, the ceremony is known as “Dia de Los Muertos”, in China among their folk religion, the ceremony is known as “Shi”, in Europe among the Europeans, the ceremony is known as “Megalithic Tombs”, in Cambodia among the Duddhist, the ceremony is known as “Pchum Ben”, in Scotland among the pagans of Scotland, the ceremony is known as “Samhain”, in Japan among the Shinto, the ceremony is known as “the Shinto Rites”, in Philippines among the ancient Filipino religion, the ceremony is known as “Paganito”, in Korea among the both the North and South Koreans, the ceremony is known as “Chuseok”, in Wales among the people of Wales, the ceremony is known as “Calan Gaeaf” and in West Africa among the Ghanaians, the ceremony is known as “Vodun”. In this modern time, some scholars argue that ancestral worship is expressed in the form of embalming and entombing the dead and also the celebration of memorial days (Kessler 1-7; Joffe 1-5; Reuter 1-12; Bae and Merwe 2-10; Morgan and Okyere-Mann 1-6). This implies that ancestral worship is a reality in many parts and religions of the world including Africa, African Traditional Religion and even Taroh People.

### **History Of Taroh People**

Taroh people are popularly known by two names: “Yar-I-gam” and “Taroh”. The first name “Yar-I-gam” was given by the Hausa traders. The name is a corruption of the Taroh word *Yar-I-ga*, which means “Carry and let us go”. This expression denotes dissatisfaction from the Taroh people with how the Hausa traders were regularly pricing their farm produce. The second name “Taroh” is derived from the word “Tal”, which is a description of where the Taroh people came from. Tal is presently located in the Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State towards the North Western part of the Taroh land. The leader of the group that migrated from Tal to found the present Taroh settlement has a son by the name *Tallok* meaning “Tal has multiplied”. It was this name “Tallok” that was later corrupted to mean Taroh. Below are the varying traditions regarding the origin of the Taroh people (Shagaya 35-51; Lannap 3-10; Dassah 29-42; Ames 12-20; Banfa 13-31; Butnap 5-17; Lamle16-27).

The first tradition opines that Taroh people came from the southern parts of Africa and as such they are said to be “Bantoid”. Although, the route of their migration may be difficult to presently trace, however, when they came, they first settled at Dip, which was an Ngas settlement before finally moving to their present-day settlements. The second tradition has it that they originated from the Middle Eastern and to be

précised, Yemen/Egypt. The third tradition argues for the Western and Eastern origin, especially when the migration routes were developed. The fourth tradition holds that they originated from the western region, this tradition argues and links the Taroh race to the western migration route due to its linguistic evidence. This tradition also links the Taroh origin to a Niger-Benue confluence, it argues that the Benue-Congo Language affirms this and at the same time challenged the opposite view that the language has Eastern and Chadic links. Although the above traditions have gotten a level of acceptance, the controversies regarding them still stand (Shagaya 35-51; Lannap 3-10; Dassah 29-42; Ames 12-20; Banfa 13-31; Butnap 5-17; Lamle16-27).

The fifth tradition argues that the Taroh people are an amalgamation of different people from different places. The composition of these different groups includes Pe, Ngas, Jukun, Boghom, and Tel (Montol) among others. Taroh cultural evidence seems to affirm the above view. It was argued that in the early twentieth century, people from other ethnic groups such as Pe, Ngas, Jukun, Boghom, Tel (Montol) and Yiwom (Gerkawa) migrated and settled together with the initial Timwat and Funyallang clans. These People came as migrant labour workers. The Timwat and Funyallang people being hospitable now accepted them and after serving them for a while, they gave them land to settle, which they later mixed up with the original inhabitants to become the present-day Taroh People (Shagaya 35-51; Lannap 3-10; Dassah 29-42; Ames 12-20; Banfa 13-31; Butnap 5-17; Lamle16-27).

The sixth tradition traces the origin of the Taroh people to the Tal people of Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State. The leader of this group has a son by name *Tallok* meaning "Tal has multiplied". As implied by the name, population pressure was the reason for their migration. This tradition argues that Taroh, Ngas and Goemai were brothers who were always moving together until at Tal when they separated to their present-day settlements because of population pressure. Gunnung who was a younger brother of Garum, Chief of Ngas moved to found Langtang, while Lekni the founder of the Goemai moved to found Shendam. Another view has it that the Taroh, Goemai and Miship (Chip) are brothers with the same grandfather who was a former Chief of Garram. Tallok who later became the leader of this group migrated alongside his three sons: Zinni, Gunnung and Bwarat to settle at Gazum. But before settling at Gazum, they first passed through Pe (Dallong) located in the present-day Panshin Local Government Area. The sons of Tallok: Zinni, Gunnung and Bwarat later

became the major Taroh clans with “Sa” as an off-shoot of Bwarat. This tradition maintained that by the mid-18th century, the migration of the Taroh race from Tal and their settlement in the present-day Langtang had already taken place. It argued that their migration took place in different phases: the Zinni family migrated and settled in Dutse (Gazum); the Namurang family migrated and settled in the present-day Kanam Local Government Area of Plateau State; Gunnung migrated and settled in the main Langtang town and thus, produced Ce; Bwarat and Sa migrated and settled in the general area presently known as plain Taroh (Shagaya 35-51; Lannap 3-10; Dassah 29-42; Ames 12-20; Banfa 13-31; Butnap 5-17; Lamle16-27).

Similarly, it should be noted that part of Plain Tarok later migrated to Wase. This tradition still held that before 1760, the Taroh of Sa, Dangal, Chuwi and Singha had already spread to the plain. It is also worthy of note that when the Taroh race left Tal and arrived at Langtang, the Gunnung clan settled in the South-west end of Langtang hill, while the Bwarat clan settled in the north-eastern part, which is below the hills. Although, the view of the Taroh origin from Tal is a widely acceptable view amongst scholars, which is affirmed by the fact that there are cultural similarities between the two groups. Nevertheless, the view is still problematic because of its inherent historical linguistics problem of Tal being from the Chadic family languages, while Taroh is from the Benue-Congo family languages (Shagaya 35-51; Lannap 3-10; Dassah 29-42; Ames 12-20; Banfa 13-31; Butnap 5-17; Lamle16-27).

Primarily, the Taroh dialect is divided into five. This division is informed by the differences in their various settlements. These five Taroh dialects include: firstly, *iTaroh* (Plains Tarok); secondly, *iZinni* (Hill Taroh); thirdly, *iGyang*; fourthly, *iTaroh oga Selyar* and fifthly, *iTaroh oga iSa*. The variations in the phonology of these dialects slightly differ from one area to the other, although, the variation is not much, implying that it is just a minor variation of intonations and lexicon. The Plain dialect is understood by all Taroh speakers and at the same time, those that speak the Plain Taroh dialect also understand the phonology of *Ghang* and *Kwallak* except *Zinni*. Amongst all the Taroh dialects, the phonological variation of *Zinni* seems to be more pronounced than all others. However, the variation is more in the intonation than in the lexical formation and thus, the sound is different from all others. Similarly, a critical look at the lexical formation between *iZinni* and *Nambar* will indicate that the dialectical gap seems to be wider between the two than the other three

(Shagaya 35-51; Lannap 3-10; Dassah 29-42; Ames 12-20; Banfa 13-31; Butnap 5-17; Lamle16-27).

### **Methodology**

The data for this research were collected mainly from the library. In this library, the researcher made use of books, journals and other relevant literature to source the needed information for this research. The libraries that were consulted include Gindiri Theological Seminary's (GTS) library, the College of Education (COE) Gindiri's library, Theological College of Northern Nigeria's (TCNN) library and the University of Jos' (UJ) library. The data for this research were analyzed through the discussion method, descriptive method, historical method and theological method.

### **Roles Of *Orim* (Ancestral Spirits) In The Socio-Political Life Of The Taroh People**

In Taroh Language, the name used for Ancestral Spirits is *Orim*. The singular form of the word is *Urim*, while the plural form is *Orim*. *Orim* denote "Ancestral Spirits or Spirits of Dead People" and this cult worship seems to be the centre and the pivoting point of the Tarok Traditional Religion. However, the word *Orim* could also mean "masquerades", in which sense; they refer to the representatives of "ancestral spirits or other kinds of good spirits". There are similarities and differences between *Orim* and *Oka*. Their similarity is that all of them are referring to the dead, while their difference is that *Orim* refers to the spirits of those who died a long time ago, while *Oka* refers to those who died recently. Therefore, *Orim* can be said to be the spirits of those who died long ago, but have come back to give direction, guidance and protection to the living faithful at the individual, family and community levels. It is believed that the living faithful usually have contact with the *Orim* through the *Orim* cult worship. Taroh people strongly believe in the reality, existence, workings and worship of *Orim* and this without doubt has an indelible impact on the people as a whole. The impact is evident in the sense that despite the influence of great religions like Christianity and Islam, this cult worship is still very viable. *Orim* do not publicly appear in persons, but are normally represented by two groups of people: firstly, males that have been religiously initiated and secondly, Post-menopausal women (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

The worship of *Orim* usually takes place in the *Ibang* meaning "shrine" and these *Ibang* are built in and around sacred groves, which are

usually located on the outskirts of almost all Taroh settlements. The appearances of *Orim* are usually done in masks, especially when discharging their routine responsibility of disciplining “stubborn” women and making prophecies. *Orim* does not usually speak through their normal voices, but instead, they disguise their voices by using dotted language with code words. Nevertheless, all these are still framed in the normal Tarok syntax and their interpretations are usually by specially selected unmasked figures (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

*Ibang* meaning “shrines” are highly valuable in the Taroh Traditional Religion. Each *Ibang* is decorated by/sacred groves. These groves are usually located outside of almost all Taroh settlements and are specially conserved for the worship of *Orim*. Not all kinds of people are allowed into the *Ibang* to consult with *Orim*, but only mature men that have undergone initiation. Whenever *Orim* are out for their routine mission, women, children and immature men (i.e. those that are not formally initiated into the religion) are forbidden from seeing them. In the event of disobedience, the culprits are severely punished as the case may be. If it becomes necessary for *Orim* to consult with women, they do it by dressing specially for that purpose, appearing as masquerades and communicating their message through an interpreter. It should be noted that only fully initiated members are granted full access to the secret of *Orim*. So, for certain secrets to be upheld, senior members or elders of the religion use special vocabulary garnished with code words to achieve that purpose. *Orim* cult worship is generally under the leadership of *Ponzi-Nbin* (meaning “Chief of the Land”). Certain things are considered taboos to the *Orim*, they include embarrassing and harassing the Christians, passing through the homes of the Christians and passing through the premises of the Church (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

*Orim* plays four roles in the socio-political life of the Taroh people as discussed below. Firstly, maintaining peace and order in society and this could both be spiritual and physical. In one sense, this has to do with dealing with external foes threatening the peace, order and existence of the community. By this, *Orim* has the duty of organizing and mobilizing commensurate counterattacks, in which case, war may even be fought. In another sense, it has to do with disciplining disobedient, rebellious, lazy and stubborn women by either beating them or fining them (to pay chickens, or goats or cook a special diet) as a punishment for their offenses. In addition, it has to do with disciplining disobedience and stubborn children and men who have

blatantly transgressed the laws of the gods or laws of the land. The types of *Orim* that carry out the above kind of function are called *Orim aga*, which means “masquerade that gives trouble”. It is believed that there is a special season called *aga*, which means a “time of trouble”. It is in this particular period that these kinds of punishments are best meted out. *Orim* has a popular practice of requesting food from women or mothers, this is to feed the spirit of dead children because they (*Orim*) are believed to regularly have contact with them (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

Secondly, *Orim* has the duty of connecting marriage and ensuring that it works. This is done by the young ladies telling the *Orim* their choices of husband and if possible, their names. Then *Orim* will now find a channel of communicating this important message appropriately. When the boys accept the *Ngya* meaning “relationship/engagement”, they give *Atiba* meaning “tobacco” in the form of “fowl”, but if the ladies refuse the gifts, it means they are not bound by that engagement. Thirdly, *Orim* is the highest decision-making body in the Tarohland and as such have the function of making decisions for the land. Their decisions are binding on individuals, families and the larger community. Disobedience to their decisions attracts punishment commensurate to the offence. Whenever there is any dispute between two or more people in the community, *Orim* is normally consulted through traditional priests by inviting the parties involved into the *Ibang* for the settlement and the final decision of *Orim* as to who is guilty stands (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

Fourthly, *Orim* has the function of initiating male children into the *Orim* cult. This is very important because until a male grown-up child is initiated into the *Orim* cult; he will never be recognized as a mature man. This initiation gives the child two privileges: Firstly, to have the needed boldness and courage to function as a mature man and secondly, to be granted access to certain secrets that are peculiar to the cult. However, these secrets are not expected to be revealed to women, children and immature men and doing the contrary usually attracts severe punishment to the level of death. Whenever *Orim* wants to punish by killing, they do not do it by spilling the blood of their culprits, but they rather do it by swallowing them (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

### **Way of Strengthening The Roles Of *Orim* Among The Taroh People**

The roles of the *Orim* can be strengthened among the Taroh people through making shrines for the worship of *Orim*, venerating the *Orim*, offering sacrifices for the *Orim* and obeying and complying with the directives of *Orim*.

*Ibang* meaning shrines are of great importance to the Taroh people because of their role in the worship of *Orim*. *Ibang* are usually made in the bush, especially forest-like bushes and their primary purpose is for the worship of *Orim*. However, they have other secondary purposes including serving as cultural signposts, markers of identity, powerful symbols of solidarity/cohesion and physical manifestations of presence and ownership, among others. So, the Taroh people have to make *Ibang* for the worship of *Orim* to be encouraged and promoted (Butnap 14-26; Galam 19-30; Yarkum 52-57; Shagaya 236-307).

*Orim* is also usually worshipped and served through veneration. Veneration is the act of bowing down and paying homage and respect. The Taroh word used in this regard is *Wop Orim*. Whereas *Wop* means to worship, *Orim* means ancestors. So, this has to do with bowing down to worship, especially higher or superior beings. It should be noted that *Orim* usually becomes happy and encouraged to play their roles to the Taroh people whenever the Taroh people venerate them. The veneration is necessary because the Taroh people usually considered their ancestors to be glorified fathers. The veneration usually takes place in the *Ibang*. Among the Taroh, every family, clan and community has its own *Ibang* for the veneration of their *Orim* (Butnap 11-23; Galam 17-29; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 236-307).

*Orim* is usually worshipped and served with the offering of sacrifices. These sacrifices are offered either to make the *Orim* happy with their followers or as a way of atoning for a wrong committed against them. So, the first kind of sacrifice is offered as a way of worshipping God while the second kind of sacrifice is offered as a way of paying for one's offence against the *Orim*. Sometimes, specially cooked foods are offered while other times, the foods are offered raw (Butnap 10-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 45-55; Shagaya 240-310).

*Orim* is also usually worshipped and served through the obedience of their member. The obedience is very important because it is a mark of loyalty of the members. *Orim* normally have rules and regulations guiding their worship. These rules and regulations are expected to be strictly obeyed so that *Orim* will become happy with them. For example, one of the ways the Taroh people are expected to show their obedience

to the *Orim* is for those alive to give befitting burial because it is a way of sending their fathers into the land of the ancestors for the later reincarnation back into the family. This practice is usually garnished by the practice of Funeral rite. This funeral rite is done by the children of the deceased which denotes honouring the dead father and showing that the children are disciplined and responsible (Butnap 9-20; Galam 15-27; Yarkum 50-57; Shagaya 237-310).

### **Conclusion**

Taroh people who are believed to originate from the Tal people of Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State believe in the existence of ancestral spirits called *Orim*. These ancestral spirits play important roles in the socio-political life of the Taroh people. These roles include maintaining peace and order in the Taroh society, joining and connecting marriage, making final decisions in the Taroh community and initiating grown-up male children into the *Orim* cult. However, for these roles of *the Orim* to be strengthened, the Taroh people should endeavour to make shrines for the worship of *the Orim*, venerate the *Orim*, offer sacrifices to the *Orim* and obey the *Orim*. This will strengthen the *Orim* to bring peace, prosperity, orderliness, and organization to the Taroh people and their community.

### **Recommendations**

1. For the roles of *Orim* to be strengthened among the Taroh people, there is need to build shrines for their worship.
2. Veneration of *Orim* which has to do with bowing down to worship, paying allegiance, reverencing and adoration, among others is necessary to strengthen the roles of *Orim* among the Taroh people.
3. Offering sacrifices for the *Orim* is also necessary to strengthen their roles among the Taroh people.
4. Obedience to the *Orim* is also key to strengthening their roles among the Taroh people.

### Works Cited

- Ames, C. G. *Gazetteer of Plateau Province, Nigeria*.  
[www.biblio.com/./302905503](http://www.biblio.com/./302905503). Accessed 25th April 2016.
- Bae, Choon Sup and Merwe, P. J. Van Der. *Ancestral Worship: Is it Biblical?* <https://www.scielo.org>. Accessed 28th June 2023.
- Banfa, S. *Towards a Yergam History: Some Explorations*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982.
- Butnap, K. *Spirit Possession in the Yergamland 1900-1972*. Bachelor of Arts Education Project Submitted to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1975.
- Dassah, Justina. *Tarok Pronouns*. A Project Submitted to the Department of Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, University of Jos, in partial fulfilment for the award of the Bachelor of Arts Honours (Linguistics), 1988.
- Galam, Lami. *Courtship and Marriage*. Jos: Jos of University Press Limited, 1999.
- Joffe, Glen. *365 Memorial Days Per Year-Ancestor Worship Around the World*. <https://www.bepreimitive.com>. Accessed 28th June 2023.
- Kanu, I. A. (2013). "The Quest for the Nature of Being in African Philosophy". *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 2. No. 2. pp. 391-407.
- Kanu, I. A. (2013). "The Dimensions of African Cosmology". *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 2. No. 2. pp. 533-555.
- Kessler, Sarah. *12 Types of Ancestral Worship from around*. <https://www.joincake.com>. Accessed 28th June 2023.
- Lamle, E. N. "Corporeality and Dwelling Spaces in Tarokland". *Journal of Tarok studies*, vol. 1 no 1, 2005.
- Lamle, Elias N. *Cultural Revival and Church Planting: A Missiological Perspective*. Jos: CAPRO Media, 1995.
- Lamle, E. N. *Cultural Revival and Church Planting: A Nigerian Case Study*. Jos: CAPRO Media, 1995.
- Lamle, E. N. "Origin, Migration and Clan Structure of the Tarok People: Tree in the Forest Mandyeng": *Journal of Central Nigeria Studies*, 2012.
- Lamle, E. N. *The Essentials of Traditional Education in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Tarok People*. Jos: Crossroads Communications, 1998.
- Lamle, E. N. *The Light Shines in their hearts: COCIN and the Gospel in Tarokland*. Jos: Crossroads Communication, 2000.
- Lamle, E. N. *The Role of the Tarok Woman in the Home Management*. In the Tarok Woman, A.L. Lannap (ed.). Jos: Jos University Press Limited, 1999.

Lannap, A.L. *The Historical Roots of Tarok*. Jos: Jos of University Press Limited, 1999.

Morgan, Stephen Nkansah and Okyere-Mann, Beatrice. *The Belief in and Veneration of Ancestors in Akan Traditional Thought: Finding Values for Human Well-Being*. <https://philarchive.org>. Accessed 28th June 2023.

Reuter, Thomas A. *Is Ancestor Veneration the most Universal of all the World Religions? A Critique of Modernist Cosmological Bias*. <https://www.researchgate.net>. Accessed 28th June 2023.

Shagaya, John Nanzip. *The Historical Development of the Taroh Society: Taroh History*. Ibadan: Daybis Limited Jericho, 2005.