

“The Developing Underdevelopment”:¹ Democracy, New Political Elites and the Emergence of Mountain Tourism in Nigeria.

By Paul Ugor

“Geography and identity seem always to have been closely related” (Dirk 1992:07).

I. Introduction.

The significant point has been made severally that geographical exploration, geological survey and mountain culture as begun by the British was inextricably tied to imperialism (Slemon 16; Said 21-29; Mills 1991; Pratt 1992). The declaration by Walt Unworth that “the spirit which animated the attacks on Everest is the same as that which prompted arctic and other expeditions, and in earlier times led to the formation of the Empire itself” (Qtd. in Slemon 21) justifies these “discourses linking science, empire and exploration” (Sparkes 216). Wherever British civilization “extended its imperial arms” (Hammer ix), especially at a time when the scramble for colonies by Europe was at its feverish zenith, it sought to maintain absolute control over its territories through the extraction of data that enabled it to keep tabs on conquered places. Stephen Slemon’s interpretation of this as “a specific form of symbolic management” (16) has clarified the practice described by Thomas Richards as “archival confinement,” that brand of colonial surveillance during the “developing sense of crisis over the actual administration of an expanding British Empire in the latter nineteenth century” (Slemon 16). British geographers, explorers, surveyors and geologists (mostly mountaineers), were at the heart of this imperial surveillance model. Mountain cultures therefore were not those innocuous pastimes or sports begun by the Victorian middle class. In the words of Claire Engel, mountain culture “was never an unrelated kind of activity, having no connection with contemporary trends of thought” (21). It fed into the contemporaneous Victorian sensibilities of the time, which were those of imperialism.²

¹ Frank Andre Gunder. “The Developing of Underdevelopment.” *Imperialism and Underdevelopment: A Reader*. New York and London: Monthly Review press, 1970. 4-17.

² Also see the position on the surveillance of the properties of natural environment in colonies by Chatterjee 19-20.

But many decades after Britain's exit from the colonies however, whether in the Pacific or Africa, its empire has left indelible cultural marks in its wake. Vestiges of Victorian culture, including mountaineering and mountain leisure and (or) tourism, have remained ingrained in both government institutional structures and the popular middle class culture of former colonies.³ In terms of mountaineering and mountain tourism as a Commonwealth culture, for instance, it has been observed that “with the globalization of sports competition, it has become de rigueur for countries seeking to relocate their position on the post-colonial world stage—for countries hoping to send out the message that they have redefined themselves in relation to a colonial past and have fully arrived within the ambit of unquestionable self-determination—to invest very heavily in trying to put a national team of climbers on Everest” (Slemon 22). John Krakauer for instance in his book *Into Thin Air* (1997) has noted different expedition teams from Taiwan and even South Africa who came to climb Everest for the sake of making national statements. This cultural phenomenon is not difficult to trace.

Apart from its remote economic intents in the colonies concerned with feeding and sustaining the growing industrial capitalism in Europe, the British empire also sought what the pre-eminent German political scientist Von Trieschke⁴ saw as Europe's engagement “in creating all over the globe a wholesale aristocracy of the white race” (Henderson 31). This civilizing agenda implied the nurturing of a new worldview in the realms of culture, social values, religion and politics in the conquered territories. Indeed, it succeeded to a remarkable extent. As western education became the determining index for participation in public service, recruitment into British colonial bureaucratic institutions was determined by a seemingly sufficient mastery of British middle class etiquette. Ali Mazrui in his seminal study *Political Values and the Educated African* also echoed this position when he observed that “The very process of acquiring aspects of the imperial culture came to open the doors first of influence and later of affluence itself” (xiii). Michael Echerou (1977) for instance has conducted a seminal study on this

³ Ted Turner (2003) in his essay particularly examines the peculiar case of Aristocratic adventure in 19th century on eco-tourism and mountaineering.

⁴ Von Trieschke was a savvy and renowned German scholar. The statement is taken from a series of public lectures he gave to graduate students in universities at Munich and Bonn in late 19th century but was published only in 1914.

phenomenon in Nigeria entitled *Victorian Lagos: Aspects of Nineteenth Century Lagos Life*.

The aping of British middle class culture, whether for economic or aesthetic purposes, has continued to persist in contemporary Africa in different institutional and individual forms. This paper attempts to examine the case of mountain leisure/tourism culture amongst one of Africa's leading nations, Nigeria. It traces the emergences of a new political elite class in the late 20th Century and evinces how this emergent ruling class is creating a distinct form of modernity through mountain patronage and tourism. But this erection of new modernities I argue is a flawed one that perpetuates underdevelopment rather than development. Needless to say then that this work is not about mountaineering as mountain tourism or leisure. But I have surveyed mountaineering culture in British colonies generally to gesture towards its genealogy as a middle class culture and as a way of sign-posting the roots of mountain tourism's modern forms in the former colonies such as Nigeria. Though the patronage of mountains began purely as a kind of sport amongst the middle class in the 19th century and has so continued even into the 21st century in different parts of the globe, mountain culture has undergone mutations in different places and times, producing new forms of identity fabrication. But what has remained constant on the compass however, is that whether as sports (mountaineering) or leisure (tourism), mountains remain metaphors for making larger cultural statements at continental, national, regional, local, and, not the least, individual levels. As a point of entry into this critique then, I propose to trace the emergence of the new middle class in late twentieth century Nigeria, and then proceed to triangulate the relationship between this class, their new economic status, and a new mountain culture.

II. The Military, Democracy, and the Emergence of New Political Elites: The Roots of Contemporary Mountain Culture in Nigeria

Nigeria as an independent nation remained a quintessential example of a political laboratory for more than thirty-nine of its forty-five years of existence. So illusive and precarious was the notion of Nigeria that by 1996, Wole Soyinka, that fine and erudite writer, scholar, and Nobel Laureate from the country described Nigerian nationhood as

“that mangy, flea-infested flag that the sanctimonious nationalist drapes around his torso to cover a repulsive nudity” (126). For almost four decades, the military’s firm grip on the nation’s machinery of state seemed not to have abated in spite of growing international pressure and global democratization. A brief mapping of this sordid national history is salient to the arguments that this paper advances in later pages. As j’kayode Fayemi has observed, “it is important to trace the sociological and institutional underpinnings of the military’s role in Nigeria’s chequered history of political transition, to enable us access ... [to] the conditions, ingredients and consequences of military projects for nation-building” (205). Bayo Adekanye has also reinforced this need for the proper appraisal of the economic imports of the military’s incursion into nation-building noting in his insightful study of the Nigerian military that “the role of the military in the transition cannot be adequately analyzed without considering the impact of ...socioeconomic factors and forces” (55).

After gaining its independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has had at least six successful military *coup d’état*; two in 1966, one in 1975, one in 1984, another in 1985, and the last in 1993.⁵ This harvest of coups has meant that of the nation’s thirty-nine years, twenty-eight have been under military autocratic governance. Of course when the military first made its foray into the political stage it was hailed by the masses because “their action was claimed as a nation-building project aimed at eradicating corruption and reordering the state” (j’kayode 208) thus reforming the crass political ineptitude and charlatanism of the early Nigerian political elites. Hence for a long time “military politics became the rule rather than the exception” in the country (Koonings and Kruijt 1). Indeed, what Kooning and Kruijt call “Political Armies” (9) was a proliferating mode of governance in the entire African continent in the mid 20th century ostensibly due to what they have characterized as “ the ineffectiveness of civilian politics” (5). Unfortunately, however, the promises that the “political armies” held for the people were no more than a flash in the pan as the military leaders turned out to be worse than their civilian

⁵ It should be noted that the ones I have accounted for here are the successful ones. There at least equal numbers of failed coup in the country accounting for the loss of several brilliant army professionals.

predecessors; they became implicated in the same rot that they sought to rid the nations of. As Diamond, Kirk-Green and Oyediran have it,

Although it began with much promise and participation...the military's political transition in Nigeria must be judged as sweeping and unambiguous failure. It failed to return the nation to civil rule (much less to democracy). It failed to bring forth a new political culture. It failed to control corruption and improve accountability. It failed to mitigate ethnic, regional, and religious conflicts and cleavages ... in the end it failed miserably to reform and revitalize the economy. After almost four decades of military rule, it was as one analyst had noted in the South African case "a long journey" that only achieved a "small miracle (3).

How did this come to be? The military, concussed by enormous centralized state power, became *squandermaniac* and the immediate result was a degenerating economy and depleted national reserves. In spite of Nigeria's huge wealth accruing from crude oil amounting to about 96% of the nation's export earnings, external debts rose at a meteoric rate: "Per capita income fell from U.S.\$800 in 1985 to U.S. \$380 in 1987" (Diamond *et al* 8). By the late 1990s when the military handed over control, income was at an all time low of about U.S.\$120. As the country's currency continued its downward plunge in the foreign exchange market, its purchasing power also saw a rapid descent to near worthlessness. Of course this dire state of the economy had direct impact on the masses: "As the purchasing power of the Naira relentlessly declined, the salaried middle class was plunged back to subsistence living...workers fell back to earning the equivalent of a few hundred U.S. dollars a year, with prices of basic commodities much higher" (Diamond *et al* 8). Instinctively, professionals such as university professors, doctors, engineers, pilots, lawyers and the like left the country for greener pastures in Europe, North America, and the Arab world in the Middle East. Furthermore, public infrastructure and services degenerated, with no electricity, pipe born water, functional health facilities and even food. Amidst this sordid social experience of the masses, the "ruling military officers (and their cronies) grew visibly rich and rumors circulated of their stupendous wealth" (Diamond *et al* 8) stacked in foreign banks in the west.

As the military stayed in power under the guise of political reform and reconstruction, they became the sole dispensers of the wealth of the state. The striking of crude oil in the late 1950s and another in the early 1970s brought about what became known in popular

parlance as the “oil boom.” The billions of dollars accruing to the nation became alluring bait for the military to continue its rule in spite of growing disaffection amongst the masses. Gradually, the regime evolved ingenious strategies to keep its administrators in power, mowing down dissent from within and without the army. The military thus became the surest route to power, wealth, and the good life, hence “those who felt excluded from the competition for political power also courted the institution” (j’Kayode 207). Alliance with a tiny segment of the civil population opened up opportunities for huge money-making businesses through inflated contracts and all kinds of administrative fraud. Furthermore, “an increasing number of retired senior officers ... combining chairmanships/directorships of their own private businesses, with part-time appointments to key governmental posts and parastatals relating to agriculture, commerce, and industry, in addition to interlocking directorships of many companies incorporated in Nigeria”(Adekanye, cited in j’Kayode 213) became the single social segment benefiting from the state. In all, the military, and its small group of cronies remained the sole possessors, dispensers and benefactors of the wealth of state while a large national population of about 150 million groveled in poverty and avoidable want.

This was the state of Nigeria’s political economy until 1999 when the military reluctantly handed down power through a general election to its very own former dictator, General Olusegun Obasanjo. The new democratic dispensation has meant the election of approximately seven thousand officials at local, state and national levels. In addition, significant numbers of government appointees hold important nominative positions at federal, state, local and ward levels. A burgeoning economy has thus suddenly emerged due to the creation of thousands of political jobs with huge remunerative packages. The new political class, which is less committed to democratic practices than to the political expediency of its principles, is also steeped in endemic corruption, fraud and unaccountability to the masses of people they represent. To signify their newfound economic status, after almost four decades of alienation from the political stage these emerging classes of elites are beginning to emblemize their improved means through varied social and cultural signifiers. Just as “the development of industrial capitalism in Britain had by the mid-nineteenth century created both an industrial bourgeoisie and an

expanded professional middle class” (Robbins 584) who expressed their new status in mountaineering, Mountain tourism and patronage in Nigeria is now one of those new middle class pursuits of a prosperous era. I critique this emergent middle class culture using the Obudu Ranch Mountain as a case study.

III. *The Obudu Ranch Mountain*

The Obudu Ranch Mountain, formerly known as the Obudu Cattle Ranch and currently referred to as the Ranch Resort, is located in Obanlikwu North of Cross River State, South-South of Nigeria. The Obudu Mountain, which is the highest in the state and the hilly lands of the Obudu and Obanlikwu areas, is “located on a plateau of about 1, 575.76 ...with an altitude of 1,716 meters above sea level” (“The Land” 18). The mountain also has a unique climatic condition in a predominantly tropical zone. The temperature in the mountain is “between 26-32 degrees centigrade between November and January while the lowest temperature range of 4 to 10 degrees is recorded between June and September” (“The Land” 18). Leading up to the Obudu Mountain summit is an 11-kilometer windy route with perilous bends amounting up to twenty-two in numbers.⁶



Figure 1:⁷ One of the 22 sharp bends leading up the Ranch Mountain Resort.

The “discovery” of this mountain summit, said to have been in 1949, remains largely conjectural. There are indeed two possibilities. The first is not unconnected with

⁶ One of which is called the “devil’s elbow.”

⁷ Cross River Sate Government. *The Land of Natural Beauty*. Calabar, Nigeria: The Department of Tourism, Cross River State Government, 2005. P22.

the usual geographic explorations and geological surveys contemporaneous with “Town Planning” offices in the colonial era. “In the interests of imperial expansion dating back to the 18th century” (Bayers 174), colonial powers (such as Britain that colonized Nigeria) always explored and surveyed the geographical perimeters of their colonial strongholds for protection from other marauding colonial powers, for the purposes of enhancing markets overseas and for local surveillance. The late 1940s particularly was a period when the present Southern Cameroon opted in a referendum to be severed from Nigeria to the Cameroon. And Cross River State shares a boundary to the east with Cameroon extending into the Ranch Mountain axis through Becheve (the border town in Nigeria) and Akwaya (the border town) in Southern Cameroon. My conjecture is that the “discovery” of the Obudu Mountain must have been during this process of demarcating boundaries with the French who were the colonizing powers in Cameroon.

Another possibility is the work of missionary agents. Calabar, the capital city of Cross River, lies at the coastal bed linking the State through the Cross River estuary to the Atlantic Ocean. This position made Calabar vulnerable to colonial incursion. Commenting on this proximity of the state to the Cross River Basin, Clement Unimna believes that “the State’s advantageous geographical location on the Calabar river estuary, was then a factor to the state becoming a pivot in religion, culture and civilization, exerting tremendous social, cultural and economic pull on all the societies of the region and beyond” (49). European traders and missionaries made their way through the town to the hinterland in the South East of Igbo land and even far North of Obudu. The first churches to infiltrate this region were the Catholics, the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), and the Assembly of God’s Mission. For the sake of proselytization, they made daring forays into remote terrains not frequented by even indigenous peoples. It may have been in the effort to reach the Becheve and Utanga people living in the summit of the Obudu Ranch Mountain that the place was “discovered.” Of course as the “naming or renaming of a place [or] ... region ... [is] an act of possession” (Deane qtd. in Bayers 178) in the imperial ethos, it was christened the “Obudu Cattle Ranch” by the “discovering” missionaries as a sign of its claiming.

Today the Obudu Mountain has been transformed from its humble beginnings to an exquisite tourist site of international standards with “85 luxurious bedrooms ... an international conference center ... a 9-hole natural golf course, a standard squash court, two tennis courts, a water treatment plant, restaurant and bar, gymnasium and health space and a night club” (Adeniyi 40). Also, “to facilitate the movement of tourists to the ranch, a 1.8 km airstrip has been constructed at Bebi, about 40 km from the ranch” (Adeniyi 40), and there are speculations that the Federal Government might aid the state to extend the airstrip.



Figure 2:⁸ Governor Duke, family, and coterie of political loyalists

From the top of the Ranch Mountain one sees the profound beauty of the last 10% of lush tropical rainforest in West Africa and enjoys a temperate climate akin to that in North America or Europe. It is from here that the new language of a progressive era in the country is spoken in different tones by a prospering political class. In critiquing this new middle-class culture, therefore, I begin with the state’s involvement as an institution struggling to assert a new rationality of modernity, one that is generally perceived as development/civilization but which I argue amounts to what Andre Gunder Frank has appropriately described as “the development of underdevelopment” (4). From thence I proceed to examine the politician as an agent of state power, and how he semiotizes this power through a specific form of social indulgence—mountain leisure. It is worthwhile to note that while I will rely on the Cross River State Government documents and other sources for this critique, some of the analysis will be based on first-hand experiences. The

⁸ Culled from Effiong Essien’s Essay “Tourism Development in Cross River State—A Tour Operator’s Perspective.” *MOFINews*. Calabar: Ministry of Finance, Cross River State. September-October, 2002. P38.

reason for this methodological choice, as Ralf Buckley has observed, is that “to evaluate any eco-tourism enterprise from published reports is an uncertain and perhaps unreliable endeavor. Published reports are written by people with very different expectations and comparative experience” (6). One might also quickly add that these reports are also written with different political and economic interests in mind, very often promotional in intent. The co-opting of informal personal experience therefore bridges the gap between supposed facts and factual reality.

IV. Eco-tourism, New Nigerian Political Elites, and the Semiotization of Modernity and Power

Generally, and in retrospect, no single historical epoch has corporatized mountains as the last quarter of the twentieth-century. Lord Hunt observes this trend, noting that “I doubt if the pioneers could have imagined the explosion of humanity onto the peaks, passes and glaciers on which they ventured, intrepid in their isolation, in those early days. The opening up of new approaches, the construction of mountain cabins and the mechanization which followed the growing popularity of the sport and then contrived to make it even more so, provide a startling contrast with the lonely remoteness of the high alleys only a hundred years ago” (5).⁹ It is pertinent to note that what Elaine Engel calls “the ancient mountain worship and mountain love” (15) has been on from the earliest ages. There have been myths of Greek gods on mountains; the Bible is replete with numerous incidences between man and God on mountains (divine revelations); there are adventure stories of hunters in mountains in most community folklores (such the chamois-hunter and collectors of rock-crystals in the Alps); throughout the 18th and 19th centuries writers used mountains as narrative locales in phantasmal literary pieces (see De Saussure’s volumes and those of French novelist E.F De Lantier); poets wrote about mountains from as early as the 16th century, and scientists from the 19th Century made research forays into the mountains.¹⁰ But none of these moments have spurned liquid capital off the mountains as the last quarter of the 20th Century.

⁹ Hunt is not alone in this marvel. Later Climbers of even the mid 1980’s, such as Reinhold Messner (1999) have also loudly decried the invasion and commercialization of mountains. See works cited for detailed citation.

¹⁰ All of these instances are cited in Engel 13-41

The commercialization of mountains, as part of a universal culture of eco-tourism, emerges from the larger global culture of capitalism. With the increasing paroxysms of profiteering culture the world over, mountains are forced to yield capital, to answer to the mercantilist cravings of the new world of capital accumulation. While I agree that the whole mountain culture itself evolved from an early European capitalist quest, before 1975 mountains were not directly prized objects of capital acquisition, but were only means to an end. Today however, they have been ripped of their hitherto sanctified status, desacriled to fit into a global capitalist system. This corporatization of mountains derives from their own distinctive natural qualities. Rousseau, for example, has noted that “there is something supernatural in hill landscapes which entrances the mind and the senses; one forgets everything, one forgets one’s own being; one ceases to know even where one stands” (qtd. in Engel 38). Some travelers have always found in “mountains a kind of novelty, a relief from close contact with too tame a world” (Engel 13). It is this unique character of mountains that the world of eco-tourism business is selling. And it will seem that it is those thoroughly steeped in the miasma of competitive political and economic pursuits that desperately need the unique calming sensation that mountains provide. After a dangerous and tumultuous navigation of the world of power and money, the modern man must return to some environment of peace and tranquility and he will pay for it at any price. The world of business and that of even nation states know this, hence the bourgeoning growth in mountain tourism/leisure. Third world countries are not oblivious to this trend and are pursuing it with undiminished vigor.

As far back as 1996, the World Tourism Organization had projected a meteoric rise in tourism journeys from 593 million in that year to over 1 billion by 2010 (Fennel 83). Furthermore, it was estimated that “earnings from international tourism are expected to climb from the 1996 figures of US \$423 billion to US \$1.5 trillion in 2010” (Lurhman 1997).¹¹ There are indeed general feelings among researchers that eco-tourism even has

¹¹ (Cited in Fennel 83).

greater potential for expansion than the general tourism industry. In 2002, the WTO claimed that eco-tourism amounts to 2-4 percent of global tourism.¹²

Undoubtedly, the tourism industry, whether of the eco-tourism bent or not, is becoming a huge attraction in both developed and developing nations. Developing nations are privy to the investment opportunities in this industry and are priming to enter into the global fray of profit maximization from nature. The numerous mountains, beaches, museums, caves and flora and fauna that dot the entire third world are becoming huge assets for eco-tourism. The Ranch Mountain in the Cross River State of Nigeria is a classical example of that quest to attract tourists carried out by governments in the developing world. A young, dashing socialite of forty-three years, who is supposedly an ardent promoter of tourism in the country, heads the Cross River State Government. Like commissioner Harkin “[who possessed] enthusiasm for initiatives that promoted tourism” (MacLaren 21) in Canadian parks, Governor Donald Duke’s commitment to harnessing the state’s tourist potential is legendary in Nigeria. He has “designed a 10 year program that will turn around the cultural and tourism potentials in the state” (“Duke Reiterates” 29) and thus put the state “on the map in terms of popular culture” (MacLaren 30). As part of the grand agenda to corporatize the state’s tourist potentials, the state government floated a 4 billion Naira (approximately CDN \$3.2 billion) tourism development bond in 2004 to finance its tourism policy. This loan, which will be repaid by the state government from its statutory federal allocation over four years, is for the:

- “- Increase of the let-able rooms at the Ranch Resort from 80-250 by December, 2005;
- Establishment and commencement of tourism bureau
- Extension of road works at the Ranch Resort
- Extension of the runway at Bebi airstrip to admit larger aircrafts
- Development of the cable car
- Development of a water park on the Ranch;
- Commencement of work to upgrade each site of the tourism circuit to ensure quality services for tourists- from creeks to our mountains including the marina, the Falls, the monoliths and the Drill Ranch”(Cross River State Budget 2005).¹³

¹² World Tourism Organization International year of Eco-tourism launching, New York: http://www.world-tourism.org/newsroom/releases/more_releases/january2002/launch

This policy thrust of the state raises a number of questions about the rationality of this kind of development strategy, in a country whose citizens live largely below the poverty line and lack the basic necessities of life such as medical care, water, food, shelter, and qualitative education. What administrative logic underlies such a huge borrowing on behalf of laboring taxpayers, for facilities that they cannot afford or will not enjoy? It might be interesting to know that since 2004, when the tourism bond was secured, the government had not given account of its expenditure nor revenue that accrued from the project. The government itself rationalizes its agenda as a development strategy intended to bring civilization to a supposedly backward place and peoples. As a way of marking a flourishing era after years of autocratic military governance, current political elites believe that such artificial initiatives (*disneyfication*) signify not only the development strategies' successes, but also the country's entry into modernity.



Figure 3:¹⁴ An image depicting improved accommodations and some sport facilities at the Ranch Mountain.

This brings me to the issue of the “subject-centered rationality characteristic of post-Enlightenment modernity” raised by Partha Chatterjee in his seminal work *The Nation*

¹³ Full text reproduced in *MOFINEWS*, September- October 2004. *MOFINEWS* is a Cross River State sponsored quarterly journal that promotes Government policies. See full citation in works cited.

¹⁴ Cross River State Government. *The Land of Natural Beauty*. Calabar, Nigeria: The Department of Tourism, Cross River State Government, 2005. P20.

and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories (1999). With Bengal in India as a case study, Chatterjee critiques the choice by postcolonial nations to form an “imagined community from certain ‘modular’ forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas” (5). “It would seem,” he continues, “history ... has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery (5). The persistent recourse by leaders of developing nations to European and American paradigms of modernity itself buttresses the permanent marks of imperialism in the former colonies. As inheritors of the political instruments of state and the economic structures of imperialist interests, Third world leaders are indoctrinated to perceive modernity as anything material (technologies, fashion and so on) or non-material from the west. Unaware that “the specificities of the colonial situation do not allow a simple transposition of European patterns of development” (Chatterjee 7), the political elites in developing nations have continued to be sheepishly factitious of western models of modernity that do not answer to the specific needs of their people. It is this social dynamic where the African political elites sheepishly and indiscriminately ape western development modules for Third World nations that David Scott succinctly characterizes as “Colonial Governmentality” (1995). Thus, according to Chatterjee “Here lies the root of our postcolonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state” (11). It is Chatterjee’s view, then, a view I consider valid in the context of this paper’s argument, that while it may seem that colonialism is over, by our involvement in the progress of the so-called modernity, we are still inadvertently enmeshed in it in varying degrees and at different places. What we witness today in developing nations is reminiscent of what had happened in early Europe, wherein “modernizers ... thought of peasants as embodying all that was backward and pre-modern” (Chatterjee 158). In their quest ostensibly to modernize their space of control, African governments such as that in Cross River State are indifferent to the specific needs and cultural concerns of the people within their modernization zones such as parks, mountain tourism sites and the like. As MacLaren has noted in the case of the

development of the Jasper National park in Canada, “native peoples and [their] trade are here swept aside and forgotten by another transcontinental concern” (27). In the case of the Obudu Mountain resort, that “transcontinental concern” is tourism.

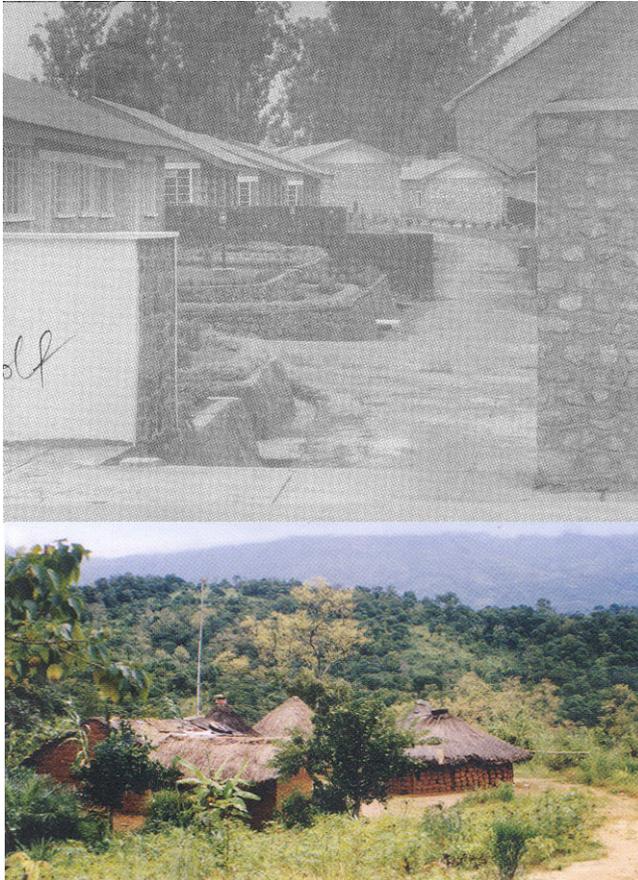


Figure4:¹⁵ A pictorial representation of the contrast between the expanded government Lodge at the Ranch Resort and the homes of indigenous communities.

This phenomenal chasm between the needs of the postcolonial local on one hand, and his political leaders’ development tastes on the other, has a deep root in colonial history. As successors to state power hitherto exclusive to European colonial administrators, postcolonial African leaders have inherited also the advantages of the colonial lords such as offices, residential quarters, cars, and numerous benefits. The case of the Nigerian politician, like all indigenous elites in British colonies, is such that the new national leaders, as M.V Pylee has noted, “inherited the British system of government and administration in its original form” (Chatterjee 15). The implication of this inheritance

¹⁵ See *The Land of Natural Beauty*. 2005. P21 & 22.

for the state, Chatterjee argues, is that the key character of the colonial modern state, which was pretty much founded on “a rule of colonial difference, namely, the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group” (10), was also absorbed by the colonial power elite. This tradition has lingered on. The modern Nigerian political elite is so alienated from its subjects so much that they do not (or pretend not to) know the development needs of the people they rule. The result is the ridiculous disparity between what the political elites think is good for the people and what the common citizens actually need. The vigorous tourist pursuits in Cross River State exemplified in the expansion of the Obudu Ranch Mountain Resort by the new political class strangely contrast with the development needs of the contiguous communities around the mountain resort. While that government is frantic about turning the Ranch Mountain into a wonderland comparable to “Disney Park,” surrounding communities are dying from avoidable diseases, lack of food and water, shelter and common paths to trek through even to sell their hard-earned farm produce.

I call attention to these issues because I mean to gesture toward the irony in the conception of development (also perceived as modernization) by the state, especially in the context of mountain tourism and what that term truly means. Acceptable indices for assessing development in terms of a nation’s social and economic advancement is usually predicated on some basic indicators such as “protein intake, access to portable water, air quality, fuel, health care, education, employment, GDP and GNP” (Fennel 7). Developed countries such as Britain, America, Canada, Germany, France, Australia, and others in Western Europe are recognized as such by these economic reflectors. Of course it is by these indicators also that the political leaders and their subjects in these countries assess their successes or failures. That the new Nigerian political elites continue to see and pursue their successes and modernity based on foreign development programs that are irrelevant to indigenous interests and needs (such as we have demonstrated with the tourism pursuits at the Obudu Ranch Mountain), bespeaks an intrinsic malaise of warped leadership.¹⁶ This fact questions what Rosalind Duffy calls “Green Capitalism’s” claim to

¹⁶ Also see the discussion of “the construction of the state by mimicry” by Bardie and Birnbaum in Bayart, pg.8.

provide the elixir to the development needs of indigenous communities in Third World countries. Rather, it proves that “Green Capitalism,” otherwise known as “eco-tourism” involves “deeply political choices by those who create the demand (eco-tourists) and by the interest groups that cater for them (primarily businesses, governments and NGOs ” (x). David Scott’s interpretation of the ulterior motive of the modern power elite (as agents of government) in the former colonies throws a significant sidelight on Duffy’s proposition. Scott writes that

[i]f modern power is concerned with disabling non-modern forms of life by dismantling their conditions, then its aim in putting in place new and different conditions is above all to produce governing-effects on conduct. Modern power seeks to arrange and rearrange these conditions (conditions at once discursive and nondiscursive) so as to oblige subjects to transform themselves in a certain, that is, improving, direction. And if this is so, if the government of conduct is the distinctive strategic end of modern power, then the decisive (which is not to say the only) locus of its operation is the new domain of ‘civil society’ (200).

In other words, the emergent power blocks in Nigeria must fabricate a new (modern) environment for their citizens, and to fit in, the common people must adjust their cultural conduct to suit the dictates of the contemporary political moment. The apparent grand agenda of modernization carried out by the Cross River State government in its mountain tourism project must then be apprehended from the point of view of the subterranean and ulterior political motives that undergird it. It is through this dimension that one can get a thorough understanding of the importation of exotic development paradigms that is ongoing in emergent democracies in the Third World. My central thesis then in critiquing the burgeoning mountain tourism projects in Nigeria’s new democracy is that the new political elites will not be able to achieve their supposed goals of development “by importing sterile stereotypes from the metropolis which do not correspond to their satellite economic reality and do not respond to their liberating political needs” (Andre 15). If they do (and it is already clear they are), then they are no longer engaged in any development agenda but in the perpetuation of underdevelopment, which emasculates, enslaves and ultimately effaces its people rather than empower and liberate them from the clutches of poverty and want. With this critique of the state as engaged in a flawed modernity project (using government tourism plans at the Obudu Ranch Mountain as a

case study), I now proceed to examine the attitude and social culture of the Nigerian politician as a patron of mountain tourism.

If the new and thriving middle classes must emblemize their political inheritance from the authoritarian military regimes as a sign of gaining control of the ship of state, they certainly will evolve a culture that distinguishes them from ordinary citizens outside the precincts of state power. This is not unusual because as Jean-Francoise Bayart has noted in his seminal work *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*, “in Africa as elsewhere, the state is the manufacturer of inequality” (60). This system of social inequality breeds what he calls “Little Men and Big Men” (60). The 1976 draft constitution of Nigeria for instance, conceived of political power as “the opportunity to acquire riches and prestige, to be in a position to hand out benefits in the form of jobs, contracts, gifts of money etc to relations and political allies.”¹⁷ Once power is acquired then, the fabrication of the new political and economic status manifests itself in different social indulgences amongst “Big Men,” and mountain leisure is one of them. As the new Nigerian political elites have been repositioned to acquire stupendous wealth from state coffers, doling out largesse to friends and loyal allies or patrons, they must redefine themselves in the context of a new progressive era. The sheer exorbitance of patronizing the Obudu Ranch Mountain Resort speaks of this new status. To be able to pay a flight, rent chalets/suits, buy foreign cuisines (of course provided by an international hotel such as the Protea Hospitality Group, ranked amongst the best in the hospitality industry in the world alongside Sheraton and Nicon Hotels), privileges an improved social standing. Also, to patronize the Ranch Mountain Resort is also to be able to buy the temperate climate of that mountain summit which runs between four and ten degrees centigrade. Since this climate condition equates the temperate climate of most of Europe and North America, to go to the Ranch also approximates (and this is conceived as such), to experience holidaying in style in these foreign lands. And it must be noted that the culture of holidaying itself is not intrinsically African (Nigerian) so to indulge in it is a mark of sophistication and indication of being *de rigueur*.

¹⁷ Cited in the preface to Bayart’s seminal work on the dynamics of governance in Africa, which he aptly calls “The Politics of the Belly.” Pg.xvii.



Figure 5:¹⁸ Governor Duke, his wife Onari, and other political acolytes at the Obudu Ranch Mountain.

The Obudu Ranch Mountain also provides the political elites some iconographic deployment of political contests between themselves. This is not an unprecedented social phenomenon because as David Robbins argues, “in reality conflicts between different bourgeois class fractions are expressed and resolved in the cultural sphere as well as those between bourgeoisie and proletariat” (582). With the reemergence of civil rule, “numerous local lordships” (Chatterjee 27) have emerged. These numerous political factions desperate to maintain a stronghold on their areas of influence are often engaged in fierce altercation between one another. I will cite the case of Senator Musa Adede and Governor Donald Duke to buttress my arguments. Between 1999 and 2003, Adede represented the Northern senatorial district at the federal legislature. In the contemporary Nigerian political world he was considered the political sheriff in his district made up of five local governments under which Obanlikwu, the municipality where the Obudu Ranch Mountain Resort is located, falls. As the political leader of this district, he ought to have unlimited access to any chosen port of call. But in 2003 he was refused entry into the Ranch Mountain on instructions from the state government led by Governor Duke (see Adeniyi 40). He had brought a powerful team of political confederates from the

¹⁸ “Congo Envoy Commends State Tourism Programme.” *MOFINews*. Calabar: Cross River State Ministry of Finance, November—December, 2004. P38.

nation's federal capital, Abuja, for consultation after his community gave him a civic reception. This act raised enormous furor because to insulate the senator from the resort was to state that he was not in charge in that district. Of course this is what the government understood by shutting the resort against him and his guests, and he perceived that gesture as such too. If this is true, how will one rationalize such an act when the resort itself was expanded by the state itself as a way of generating additional revenue? Didn't it matter that a huge crowd of influential politicians had come from afar to spend their stupendous wealth at the resort? Didn't it matter that the state was indebted to the tune of Four Billion Naira, so that such great opportunity was at hand to glean part of such a huge loan back and lessen the burden on common taxpayers from whose pockets the loan was being paid? No! The Mountain Resort had fitted into a language of political contest and was to be deployed as such. Physical geography, the summit of a small highland, had been redefined to signify new a socio-political discourse of contest, power, money, and political influence.

This brings me to the next point about the new politicians and their security. As it became glaring that political power also translated to economic power (since those who wield state power are the sole dispensers of the huge oil wealth of the nation), a rugged battle to secure elective or nominative positions emerged. According to Diamond et al "As corruption flourished (particularly after the first and second oil booms), the state became more and more preeminent as the chief instrument for obtaining both development resources and personal wealth. As the premium on state power became ever more enormous, the contest for control of it (by electoral and other means) became ever more intense, to the point where rules became meaningless and the country descended into pure praetorianism" (13). In this atmosphere of political bellicosity no form of arsenal was spared. High caliber rifles, light explosives, and other lethal weapons became normal instruments of coercion in the nation's electioneering process. When the die was cast and a winner declared, the animosity between opposing interests only but worsened as arson and assassinations became the order of the day. A number of examples will suffice: on March 5, 2003 Dr. Marshall Harry, a national vice-chairman of the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) was murdered; on February 6, 2004, Chief A.K. Dikibo, National Vice-

Chairman, South-South of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), was also murdered.¹⁹ This is just a small fraction of the uncountable assassinations that the nation witnessed.

The new political class frantically sought for fortresses to proof themselves from a consuming political climate. The Ranch Mountain resort became one of those. To go up the Ranch Mountain is to escape from the vulnerability of city streets, thus staying unharmed. As the Mountain Resort is jealously guarded by tight state security, with little escape routes for assassins because of its surrounding deep valleys and glaciers, and is often unapproachable by jobless touts who usually are ready mercenaries in the hands of jealous political opponents, it became a safe haven for the endangered political elite engaged in a precarious power play. To climb the Obudu highlands is to move above the common habitation planes of ordinary citizens and as such to remain unscathed, surveying the lower political terrain from a safe and unreachable political cum security post. I draw this conceptual framework from Elaine Freedgood's savvy interpretation of what she calls "cultural masochism" in the Victorian culture of mountaineering. She argues that, "in representations of pain in mountaineering memoirs, the world is specifically remade to allow a nation (England) a class (the industrial and professional middle) and a gender (the male one) to imagine itself as particularly indomitable" (113). To be up at the ranch, for the new Nigerian middle classes, is to remain unreachable hence invincible to a marauding political Gestapo seeking revenge from those who eclipsed their progressive quests.

But to stay away from one's political turf for fear of being in harm's way is to loose it because the expanse of one's political control shores up the politicians' political capital which is necessary in maintaining relevance in the political ambience. From the secured and safe haven of the Ranch Mountain then, the Nigerian politician must evolve an ingenious strategy for managing his political strong hold. Communication becomes invaluable in this regard. Here I am referring to the erection (at the Ranch summit) of a functional telecommunication GSM mast and the construction of an airstrip at the foot of the mountain by the state government. This indeed is not a new development in the

¹⁹ See *Thisday Newspapers* 6th March, 2003 and 7th February, 2004.

tourism industry because as MacLaren has accurately observed, “technologies of transportation and communication were seen to align with tourism” (15). Removed by thousands of miles away from the main stage of political activities, the new Nigerian middle classes keep tab of what happens in their political domains and elsewhere by monitoring and dispensing information from their safe posts. This is what Stephen Slemon refers to as “symbolic management” (16)- that social act that provides one an illusion of control over certain spaces beyond one’s direct control.

Furthermore, for continued maintenance of control over a priced political environment, one must not only spy and keep surveillance on the people from above, but also rationalize actions and utterances from that excluded zenith. Using the specific case of mountaineering in Victorian England and the prospering middle classes, Freedgood again notes, “The unprecedented extent and pace of change made the future seem unusually fraught with unknown risks and uncertainties. These risks and uncertainties, because they necessarily resided in the future, evoked anxiety. They produced a state of continued anticipation about the exact shapes and consequences of new, and as yet unknown, contingencies (105). The result of this anxiety, she argues, was that the “newly powerful class had to work out, more or less on the run, theories of government, society and economics that would explain, rationalize and stabilize the rapid and myriad changes that resulted in their rise to dominance” (105). The Nigerian state is becoming unstable because of deep disaffection with the successes of a privileged few in the new middle classes. Needless to say, the political class itself is aware, deeply anxious, and troubled by these developments. If they have to stay off the assassin-infested streets of the cities and yet maintain their firm hold of the state, they must continue to rationalize the dubious process that benefits it. Places like the Ranch Mountain then became a conclave for political consultation and strategization for the political elites. Long hours of nocturnal meetings between political groups in the country held at the Ranch Mountain. In fact at one point the president of the country, Olusegun Obasanjo, did suggest that the Commonwealth Heads of States’ Annual Meeting, planned for Nigeria in the last quarter of 2003 be held at the Ranch (Anani 6). Ensnared in their safe and private world, the new elite strategizes moves to maneuver the system (a precarious and explosive one for

that matter) and maintain their respective interests from there. In short, the Obudu Mountain Resort is now something like a shrine for a few privileged members of a political occult from whence decrees of state emerge.

Additionally, I propose to look briefly at the place of women in this social drama of political and economic prosperity. Though Africa is not exclusively guilty of patriarchal practices, it still retains vestiges of age-old perceptions of women. One such concept sees woman as a necessary symbol of male prosperity. In Nigeria, as hitherto jobless youths become municipal councilors and heads, state governors and commissioners; professionals such as doctors, professors, engineers, lawyers, pilots, become senators, congressmen, ministers, federal board members and so forth, women, often young and glamorous, become a necessary accompaniment. If there was ever a cherished audience to whom the Nigerian political socialite must display his newfound prosperity, it is a woman. This kind of masculinist disposition, as Freud has noted is not an intellectual process. "When we seek to be acknowledged and known by another it is not only for the sake of truth: it also for the sake of power. An individual has no power except there is an other to recognize one's individuality and one's action" (Valverde 38). Since most of the women are from humble economic backgrounds, they must be "spoilt" with not only cash largesse and other gifts, but titillated and dazed with lavish parties in exotic settings. This is precisely what Mariana Valverde hints at when she advances the view that "in our society, economic as well as erotic power are used to exploit people who have less power" (33). Places like the Ranch Resort become favorable playgrounds for this pastime.²⁰ As admiring witnesses to the wild spending sprees of the middle classes, women become emissaries dispensing firsthand accounts of the spending abilities of these men, which approximate the inexhaustibility of the male's wealth. As usual, there is an exchange of sex for wealth in this social dynamic. The woman then becomes a priced "commodity" to be "acquired" and the more glamorous the woman, the more expensive it will be to court her. To "attract" a flashy bevy of ladies then is to semiotize one's distinct economic status amidst a thriving political epoch. And to have them up the Ranch is a

²⁰ Also see Michel Rick for other dynamics of sex, power and leisure in tourism sites. See citation in works cited.

reflection of the sophisticated taste of that dandy. The Ranch Mountain then becomes another curious playground where an interesting dynamic of lingering social values of masculinity and femininity plays out in popular middle class culture.

V. Conclusion

The emergence of vigorous scholarship on the middle class the world over has meant that a theorization of these social classes be broached. The general feeling is that “the middle class is still much less studied than the working class and, in particular, middle-class culture remains largely unexplored territory” (Robbins 579). The dearth of scholarship on the African middle classes is even more pronounced as the large body of popular culture theory in Africa, blazed by the Birmingham school represented by Karin Barber, is limited to the culture of the common folk. Needless to say, the theory of mountain cultures amongst the middle classes that are only beginning to emerge in Europe and North America is near absent in and about Africa. This project then has been a tiny and indeed inconsequential beginning in that direction.

In doing this then, there is something to be rescued from the theoretical lacuna that has been central in cultural studies for some decades. That is, its “neglect of the insights that the structuralist tradition offers: the most important being the central role that the structure of cultural forms plays in the signification of meaning” (Robbins 583). Popular culture, whether of working or middle classes, has huge potentials to privilege insights into its symbolic dimensions for both “participants and spectators.” In this context, culture is apprehended “as forms of class expressions” (Robbins 581); what Gayatri Spivak has referred to in general terms as “the fabrication of representations of so-called historical reality” (244). The specific behavioral patterns of certain occupational groups usually emblemize and embody their values, philosophies, and tensions. And one of the numerous but unique ways to look at this is to concentrate on the use of geographical space. Of course one of the many ways in which the humanities is redefining itself and integrating into a growing dimension of sociological research thrust in scholarship is to turn its attention in many other directions including geography. As a scholar blazing the field of literature and engineering has noted: “for a number of reasons the fields of

English and Cultural Studies have lately moved toward the study of space” (Nodelman 2). Amongst the many ways of making sense of contemporary popular culture then is the use of distant geographies such as mountains for sports (mountaineering) and leisure (tourism) by different social classes. In this paper I have thus attempted a foray into this discursive dimension in the humanities using the Obudu Mountain Resort in one of Africa’s largest and influential countries, Nigeria, and the various cultural (social, political and economic) significations embedded in them. My central argument has been that the rapid and dramatic social changes actuated by the progressive democratic political era has been “a necessary condition for the emergence of the [mountain tourism/leisure] in that [it] produced an expanded professional, largely urban, middle class with the inclination, leisure and financial resources to take it up” (Robbins 586). But I argue that this new middle class culture seats athwart the leadership role expected of a nation whose common man is in dire need of economic and social palliatives from the state. Mountain tourism then, here exemplified in the Obudu Ranch Mountain Resort in Nigeria, has become a contemporary cultural practice where government as an institution of state inscribes its own perception of the newfound change (that is, freedom, modernization and progress) on one hand, and how the progressive middle classes are signifying the robustly new political atmosphere (and their place in it) in certain unique appropriation of geographical spaces such as mountain resorts, on the other.

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