



Repositioning of Tourism and Recreational Industry in Africa: The Case of Shrines and Sacred Places in Nigeria.

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Abstract. Heritage preservation brings a people's history and historic places back to their collective consciousness. Countries that have adopted tourism as a means of sustaining their economies understand that their heritage is the very essence and fabric of the people's existence and identity. It was discovered that despite the importance of this cultural heritage to national economic development and identity preservation, the majority of Africans have abandoned African traditional religion, Shrines have been left to crumble and sacred places destroyed. Many traditional rituals have fallen into disuse and various cult objects and symbols of African traditional religion are being eroded and modified as a result of the onslaught of combined forces of the agents of religious change. The work finds out that traditional shrines and sacred places can act as a hook to attract tourists. Thus, exploring the traditional shrines and sacred places in Nigeria to promote tourism cannot be over-emphasized. This can be envisaged by analyzing its impact in various areas of life. Traditional shrines and sacred places if well preserved can attract visitors to a destination who spend money within the community, enhancing the local economy and supporting the local economy through restaurants, hotels, and other tourism-selected businesses. The high inflow of tourists and day visitors into the community during such occasions contributes immensely to the economic empowerment of people through the injection of tourist expenditure into the community.

Keywords: Shrines, Sacred places, tourism and recreational centres

1. Introduction

The prospect of our cultural heritage in the face of the persistent attack of the combined forces of the

agents of socio-religious change like Western civilization, Islam and Christianity has been a source of concern to a present-day African man in a bid to preserve his cultural heritage. These external religious forces have had enormous influences and contributed to vast changes in the cultural, political and economic lives of African people. This mass drift or the tide of religious change in Africa from African traditional religion to Christianity and Islam till now assumed phenomenal dimensions to the extent that some scholars in Africa have asserted that African traditional religion will soon go into extinction (Ejizu, 1985).

Heritage preservation not only brings peoples' past and historic places back to their collective consciousness but also gives them a sense of pride, place and awareness. Countries that have adopted tourism as a means of sustaining their economies understand that their heritage is the very essence and fabric of the people's existence and identity. Hence, they have spared nothing in ensuring that their heritage is preserved not only for economic purposes but also for posterity.

Appiah and Louis (1999) postulated that tourism's new front-row seat in the African economy may remain an illusion and a daydream for a very long time to come. This is because Africa's share in the global tourism market is low. In 1996 only about 3.5 per cent of the 594 million tourists worldwide chose Africa as a destination. And of the approximately \$425 billion that tourists spent worldwide, tourists in Africa spent only \$5.1 billion, about 1.8 per cent (Appiah and Louis, 1999). This is largely because Africa, is seen as a rural continent; lacking in basic infrastructures; with a population that is largely stricken by poverty. Tourism infrastructures like the transportation system, hospitality industry and

electricity are minimal and underdeveloped; so, also, are tourist attractions in the form of man-made monuments, for instance, architectural masterpieces, and technological advancements. The strength of Africa's tourism, therefore, is not in magnificent architectural designs, due to scientific and technological innovations, which are synonymous with Europe and America. However, what technology could not bequeath to Africa, nature has abundantly lavished on her. For Africa to make a statement in global tourism and have enough of its fair share in the global tourism market, experts must begin to reposition our tourism and recreational centres to our cultural heritage; for therein rests the strength of African tourism.

Despite the importance of these cultural heritage to national economic development and identity preservation, the majority of Africans and Nigeria in particular have abandoned African traditional religion, Shrines have been left to crumble and sacred places destroyed. Many traditional rituals have fallen into dereliction and various cult objects and symbols of African traditional religion are being eroded and modified as a result of the onslaught of the agents of religious change. Mbiti (1969) described the situation thus:

Africa is caught up in a world revolution that is so dynamic that it has almost got out of human control..... The man of Africa must get up and dance, for better or for worse, in the arena of world drama. His image of himself and the universe is disrupted and must make room for the changing universal and not simply tribal man. (p. 216)

This disruption and abandonment of our cultural heritage like the shrine and sacred places necessitated the hypothesis posited by some scholars like Ejizu (1985) and Awolalu & Dopamu, (2005) that our cultural heritage is going into extinction. The fear of extinction echoed in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ayanle's collapse of pagandom in Igboland was only an illusion. Modernization, urbanization and industrialization have to a great extent influenced the practice of African religion, its beliefs and practices. People are far removed from the security of the village and many traditional rites are left unperformed. This has brought great laxity and neglect of traditional morality (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). Also due to the oral nature of the religion and no propaganda machinery, the decline of the religion became inevitable.

African religion has also been faced with the challenges of devotees. Genuine devotees are dying out in many locations and in cases where the priesthood is

hereditary; those who are to become priests are not available due to Western influence, especially in education. This constitutes a big hindrance for the religion (Awolalu & Dopamu, 2005). All these have overshadowed the significance, benefits and relevance of African religion in all ramifications. These notwithstanding, the religion is still being practiced in our modern society and has in one way or the other, been an instrument through which sustainable development could be achieved especially through tourism.

However, according to statistics, tourism provides about ten percent (10%) of the world's income and employs about one-tenth (1/10) of the world's workforce, most of which emanates from religious tourism (Mirbabayer & Shagazatova, 2009). African religion cannot be left out in this quest considering the various tourist sites it celebrates, among which are the shrines and sacred places. All these are not just ordinary sites or artifacts, as they all have religious significance, undertone and relevance which represent deities, divinities, ancestors, spirits, magic or medicine and they can also be repositioned to tourist attractions and recreational centres. Our Cultural heritage is wide and diverse and covers such areas as material culture like monuments and artifacts, handicrafts, shrines and sacred places; natural endowments—mountains and caves, hills and valleys, rivers and lakes, forests and wildlife and recreational aspects such as festivals, songs, dances, folktales and myths. For the sake of this study, we shall focus on African shrines and sacred places.

2. Definition of Terms

2.1 Sacred Places

According to Eliade (1959), a Sacred place is viewed as a place where the three cosmic levels, earth, heaven and the underworld, at once come into contact with each other, and are represented. This view projects the African worldview of sacred place which is believed to be the 'meeting point' of the three worlds of man. The earth is inhabited by man, the underworld by the ancestors and the world above by the Supreme God and gods. For the sake of this study, Sacred places are seen as areas or places that hold religious and spiritual significance to peoples and communities.

2.2 Shrines

It is a holy or sacred place that is dedicated to a specific deity, ancestor, hero, martyr, saint, demon or similar figures of awe and respect, at which they are venerated or worshipped. Shrines often contain idols, relics or other such objects associated with the figure b

ing venerated (Etymology Dictionary, Wikipedia; cited in Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004). In this study, a shrine has to do with a place of worship where venerations are ascribed to unseen supernatural beings.

2.3 Tourism

According to the World Tourism Organization (1991), tourism is defined as the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.

2.4 Recreation

Recreation is a sort of amusement or an activity a person takes part in for pleasure or relaxation rather than work.

3. Tourism Potentials in Nigeria

Nigeria ranks among the most privileged nations of the world in terms of endowment of natural attractions. Such attractions include the mountains, hills and highlands; caves and valleys (with waterfalls and water tributaries); spectacular vegetation (dense high forest, savannah and the Sahel); varieties of species of wildlife, flora and fauna. Nigeria is located on the west coasts of Africa located between latitudes 4 and 14 N and longitudes 3 and 13 E and has an estimated landmass of 923,768sq.km including its coastal and inland waterways. Hence, Nigeria's tourist attractions are indeed very great and diverse with lots of potential for economic transformations, poverty reduction, income redistribution and foreign direct investments. The extent to which these benefits are explored by any nation is subject to certain local conditions such as community involvement and sustainability measures (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). Tourism creates opportunities for local communities to benefit from their culture and natural assets through employment in tourism activities and the supply of services and goods such as food, excursions or handicrafts, to tourism businesses or directly to visitors, without having to migrate to towns in search of a better life (UNWTO, 2011). Smith (2007) argues that the economic benefits of tourism are a function of competitive market drive and community involvement that can guarantee high expectations of the tourists on destination image and facilities that will promote positive word of mouth and revisit intentions by the tourists.

Nigeria has not maximized her tourism potential simply because the Government's Commitment to providing a conducive environment and required infrastructure is inadequate. These tacks of infrastructures are worst hit in the rural areas where natural land formations and fascinating tourist sites find themselves. Moreover, efforts at developing infrastructure to support tourism are highly insignificant, and recent efforts by successive governments are concentrated in urban areas (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004)

The sites and attractions location should be the focus for infrastructural development since it is pivotal where other economic activities will revolve (Fayissa, Nsiah, & Tadaese, 2007), to bring about desired micro and macro-economic growth in the area and by extension the Country (SEPO, 2006). To maximize these stimulated economic benefits, all leakages and wastages should be minimised. To achieve that, local patronage of food, drinks, souvenirs, manpower and even facilities at the site should be encouraged (Felix & Usman, 2008).

Nigeria's tourism potential can only be utilized sustainably if there is political will by the government to provide adequate security, building roads, airports, electricity, telecommunication and even internet facilities linking the sites. And then put in place a comprehensive database for both inbound and outbound tourist movement and encourage active private participation in areas such as hotel accommodation, transportation and tour guide activities (Eja et al., 2011).

Tourism is a composite phenomenon and the inventory of its component factors, therefore, must go hand in hand with acknowledgement of the general development objectives and characteristics of the area or region under consideration especially now that tourism is market-driven, customer satisfaction must be the concern of tourism providers (Sitikantha & Tapan, 2001). No place is too remote to be visited. If the attractions are properly packaged and presented. These remote and scattered locations harbor different types of tourism systems ranging from aquatic tourism to wildlife and discovery waiting exploring to the benefit of humanity (Felix, & Usman, 2008).

4. Impacts of Tourism and Recreational Activities to the Nigerian Economy

Tourism has become a phenomenon in both developed and developing economies across the globe, owing partly to bizarre income generation, employment creation and poverty elimination potentials; and exploring development variables associated with intangible products (Andriotis et al., 2008; Meng et al., 2008).

Tourism has no doubt had an enormous economic impact on all spheres of society to become one of the fattest growing industries globally (Aliyu Abdul Kadir, & Aliyu, 2013).

The strength of tourism performance is obvious in poverty reduction, employment generation and income redistribution effect on rural communities (Kurian, Varadharajan, & Rajasekar, 2010). With the revolution in the tourism industry, both the government and private entrepreneurs have started to optimize the opportunities of attracting tourists to their countries. In other to explore these numerous potentials that are inherent in the tourism industry, many countries have started to design their regions, cities and states in a manner that will attract tourists and tourist investors (Gil & Ritchie, 2008). The development of tourism as an alternative revenue source is the new strategy in most countries because of its multiplier effect on other sectors of the economy, creating a large volume of jobs or both skilled and unskilled labour (Ayeni & Ebohon, 2012)

The impacts of tourism are felt in a nation socially, environmentally and economically. At the society's level, the benefits cut across peasants, artisans and even professionals irrespective of gender, race or age bracket. Environmentally, tourism has the potential to conserve the natural environment and preserve antiquities, historical monuments and traditional behaviours such as culture, food, language, heritage, and arts and crafts. And, economically, tourism creates wealth capable of stimulating both domestic and foreign earnings of any nation from direct activities or associated businesses (NTDMP, 2006).

However, tourism is divided into tangible and intangible assets. The physical features include natural, socio cultural events, ethnohistorical and manmade attractions; while the intangibles are the destination's image and reputation, and the technological know-how involved in tourism development (Apostolopoulos & Gayle, 2002). Tourism is perceived as a strategic medium for cultural and traditional heritage promotion in the international arena thereby bringing the custodian country to the international limelight (Meng, et al., 2008).

All the aforementioned types of tourism are in abundance in virtually each of the thirty six (36) States in Nigeria (Eja et al., 2012). Some of the attractions are natural while others are man-made ranging from hills, fall springs, caves, Lakes Mountains as well as cultural festivals, historical sites and monuments spread in Nigeria. These beautiful natural gifts and

exciting festivals provide places of leisure, recreation, adventure, entertainment, relaxation and curiosity (Bola, 2010). Tourism activities have been criticized as a posing danger to the environment through degradation, deforestation and destruction of natural habitats in its operation and social environment. Mbaiwa (2003) argues that there exists a complex relationship between tourism and the environment and for this reason, caution should be applied in all tourism related activities especially manmade features and construction of tourism support facilities. Conscious efforts are required to guarantee the replenishment and regeneration capacity of the environment in tourism development drives (Ayeni & Ebohon, 2012).

5. Traditional shrines and Sacred places in the Igbo part of Nigeria and their tourism potential

A shrine is a physical feature within a sacred space depicting the abode of divinities. It originated from man's religious quest for unseen powers controlling the universe. Based on this impulse he marked out certain spots as more significant than others concerning this religious inclination. The marked spots were symbolized by natural objects like rocks, trees, lakes, streams, etc. Later little buildings were used to replace the natural objects. These little buildings are known as shrines set apart to house the sacred emblem of the divinity and other objects of worship.

However, the shrines discussed in the pages that follow include the following:

5.1 Awhum Cave and waterfalls

Awhum waterfall is located within Amaugwe village of Awhum town close to Awhum Monastery in Udi Local Government Area of Enugu State. The waterfall flows from a massive outcrop of granite rock with water cascading over the top forming a stream. The fall is about 30 metres high and is believed to be therapeutic. Surrounded by breathtaking scenery, a part of the fall is warm all year round and a variety of bird species can be spotted within the area. Awhum boasts of numerous immaculate lakes, a waterfall and a monastery. The waterfall forms beautiful scenery where water cascades over its top forming a stream, which has become a religious tourist site.

5.2 Ani Ozalla Lake and Shrine

There is the Ani Ozalla Lake and the Ani Ozalla Shrine, both located close to Ozalla in Nkanu West LGA

. The AntOzalla Lake is a natural body of water with numerous crocodiles which are regarded as sacred, incarnations of the river goddess who at the promptings of the chief priest come to accept offerings from applicants. People from different places come to Ozalla Shrine to seek different favours while Ozalla Lake is a place of relaxation and has many tourist attractions.

5.3 Ofufe Owelle Otti Shrine

The shrine is situated at Oghe in the Ezeagu Local Government area of Enugu State. According to Chief Priest Ozo Dennis Okeke, the shrine and the activities being carried out there are registered with the government. It maintains justice in the land and hence, it is called the land of settlement. People trust any decision taken at the shrine and it is binding on everyone. Refusal to comply with the directions of Ofufe either to take up an office or a profession attracts punishments like instant death or struck with a serious ailment till such a person complies. According to the chief priests, anybody that Ofufe kills forfeits his or her properties to him.

5.4 Ugwu Omalla Shrine

Ugwu Omalla shrine is located in Ezeagu Local Government area of Enugu State. The shrine is a very powerful shrine and the largest in Oghe. It is situated in the big hilly forest in Oghe, Ezeagu and people are forbidden to enter the forest except on special occasions. The hilly forest where the Ugwu Omalla shrine is located is regarded as a sacred forest. The shrine is the fieriest in Ezeagu and deals mercilessly with the offender. Anybody who gives false witness against anyone will be destroyed and sometimes together with the household. The shrine, therefore, helps to restore peace and tranquillity among the adherents and the community as a whole.

6. Features of a shrine

The uniqueness of the shrine as a cultural institution is its collection of ritualistic objects. Regardless of its religious function, these objects are mere creative works of art upon which African civilization thrived. Notable are the great artworks of Ife, Benin and Igbo-Ukwu. The concept created in these artworks dumbfounded the early Europeans to Africans. This is because the Africans recreated their world through arts such that their work expresses values, attitudes, and thoughts. These objects are thus the features of the shrine. In Van

Binsbergen's (1979) opinion these observable features of a shrine are defined within the participants' local religious system, which entails a limited selection of material objects (manmade or not) that possibly qualify for a shrine. The material object determines the divinity inhabiting the shrine. In other words, the emblems of the divinities, ancestors or any spiritual beings are the main collections of the shrine. In addition to the emblems of divinities, there are, in the shrine, paraphernalia for worship for example gongs or bells, rattles, old swords, large pots, calabashes and old bottles. The equipment varies according to the nature of the divinities to which the shrines are dedicated (Awolalu, 1979). The objects of worship are coated with myths of great historical significance and are believed to possess some powers.

Therefore, among the important shrine objects is: the emblem of the god usually placed in a very quiet corner inside the shrine an example is the emblem of the *Imoka* deity kept inside the shrine and only displayed during the festival. *Oku* are small calabash used for ritual or sacrifice in the shrine. *Opu* is a sacred horse. The type found in *Imoka* shrine now is of ivory which is only used during annual worship by the priest. *Ogene* is an iron gong that the chief priest uses to invite or invoke the presence of the deity. *Ofo* is a small wooden structure representing the symbol of truth and authority used in oath-taking and covenant.

All the above are observable features but not necessarily found in every shrine, unlike the altar upon which the divinity is worshipped. Awolalu (1979) expressed this importance that "at every shrine there is an altar...considered necessary because of the need to have something visible and tangible on which to place a gift made to the invisible and intangible deity", the altar he described as circular mound about 4 feet high with about four to six earthen vessels (*Oku*) half buried in the ground. It is here that blood is poured and feathers are stuck in the ground (Atinze, 1970: 108). But the altar can also be a heap of stone in place of the unroofed shrine, the altar could be situated at the foot of a big tree such as the *Iroko*. It is important to note that the emblem of the gods is kept on the altar of the shrine.

However, considering the possession of cultural objects the shrine could be best described as a traditional museum where objects are displayed for ritual purposes, unlike the Western museum its

objects are functional and through them the sanctity of the place is maintained.

7. Repositioning Shrines and Sacred Places for Tourist Promotion in Nigeria

Traditional shrines and sacred places act as a hook to attract tourists. In other words, it is a great anchor for attracting tourism. Thus, exploring the traditional shrines and sacred places as a path for tourism promotion in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. This can be envisaged by analyzing its impact in various areas of life. Notably is its influence on the economic well-being of the community. Traditional shrines and sacred places if well preserved can attract visitors to a destination who spend money within the community, enhancing the local economy and supporting the local economy through restaurants, hotels, and other tourism-selected businesses.

The high Inflow of tourists and day Visitors into the community during such occasions contributes immensely to the economic empowerment of people through the Injection of tourist expenditure into the community. Tourist expenditure is felt in the community from the boarding of taxis to lounging in hotels to visiting tourist sites.

Tourism is an industry that relies heavily on the environment both physical and social. In other words, tourism activities cannot do without the environment, aids the development of the physical environment by attracting the expansion of infrastructural facilities in the community. Though it does deface the community with pollution and dirt if not adequately managed yet its ability to protect the flora and fauna adds glamour to the community. Thus, it is not surprising that traditional heritages provide the stimulus for additional infrastructural development in the local area which will go a long way in promoting tourism.

In its religious capacity traditional shrines serve as locations for traditional festivals which attract both adherents and visitors from all across the nation and beyond. Participation in these events is not restricted to traditional adherents only as non-adherents also share in certain momentary occasions of ritual. The rituals are occasions in the season when a community commemorates certain events which enhances their identity as an entity including a traditional festival, the coronation of rulers and elder, initiation rites, myths of migration and so on. These events illuminate the touristic attributes of the shrines. As Nolan and Nolan (1992) rightly observed religious festivals are the principal attractions for non-followers and secular tourists. At present, these

activities invariably portray the shrine as a tourist centre where religion is the nucleus of the attraction. Given this, Awolalu (1979) stated that the Osun shrine in Osogbo is rapidly becoming a tourist centre. Therefore, shrines are always considered a source of recreation not only for the followers but also for those who casually visit there. Studying Sufi shrines Khan and Sajid (2011) noted that Sufi shrines also attract secular tourists and others for the sake of enjoying social gatherings and recreation.

However, the opening of sacred ground to tourists or people with no feel for the religious essence of these sites, without observance of the traditional respects, is often criticized (Ceesay and Ceesay, 2009). The Argument was that the commercialization of religion would lead to the loss of its essence. Nonetheless, this commercialization of religious activities further strengthens its survival as a location both for cultural and religious activities. The Imoka shrine with its sacred grove and festival is a source of tourism attraction as long as the visitors do not infringe on the norms of the shrine. Therefore, it's imperative to note that without these shrines traditional festivals and rituals will have no place in the cultural life of the people. Thus, the relevance of shrines in the study of tourism in Nigeria has aided the development of shrines as tourist sites.

To this end, the government should involve the private sector with the requisite competence in enhanced tourism development and maintenance as is the case in South Africa. This was the strategy adopted in the rehabilitation and preservation of the Obudu Cattle Ranch, as a tourist destination, by Protea Hotel, a South African Consortium. In addition, modern environmental initiatives were also put in place to ensure the flora and fauna, which add to the beauty and tranquility of the ranch, are well-preserved and protected.

Secondly, members of communities where these shrines and sacred places are located should be involved in the heritage management process. When the people are enjoined to make an input in the guarding and protection of their heritage, this in turn might evoke in them a sense of pride and place as well as enable them to promote an appropriate tourist strategy.

Thirdly, while we acknowledge the importance of modern practices in the preservation of heritage sites, we espouse that such practices be combined with the traditional methods of the people for their conservation. Most of the ancient sites go back some centuries and are still steeped in tradition; hence,

some preservation methods might be prohibited under the locality's custom or might incur the wrath of the deities existing within these sites. Moreso, there are usually traditional methods handed down from generation to generation for their conservation. Therefore to ensure sustainable conservation and tourism development there is a need to integrate both the traditional and modern methods.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

As seen in the work, Nigeria's tourism assets are widespread encompassing natural features such as government and privately-owned parks, waterfalls, the beautiful outcrop of rocks in different shapes, plateaus, forest resources and wildlife, and beaches, among others. On the other hand, shrines and sacred places are the domain where the ingenuity, creativity and originality of the people are on display. There is a need to diversify the economy and escape the negative consequences of a mono-economy that depends on petroleum as the major foreign exchange earner. This research has outlined Nigeria's great tourism potential in shrines and sacred places.

It is in line with this that the researcher recommends that:

- There is a need for government to start exploiting the tourism potential of shrines and sacred places.
- The government has the responsibility to identify and demarcate shrines and sacred places with potential tourism zones for other uses. There is a need to sensitize destination communities to maintain friendly interactions with the local and foreign visitors to their communities.
- The Nigerian Tourism Board should be charged with the responsibility of providing tourist facilities for local and international tourists. In this regard, basic facilities like electricity, potable water, good roads as well as mass transit buses should be provided in and around tourism potentials. In addition, museums, sites of historical significance, shrines and sacred places, places of outstanding beauty, as well as holiday resorts should be assisted in the development of their potential.

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