

Impacts of Religious Tourism in Southeastern Nigeria

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Abstract:

Beyond economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism usually stressed by many authors, religious tourism offers in addition (especially to the tourists/pilgrims) psycho-spiritual satisfaction. This study examines the impacts of religious tourism in Southeastern Nigeria, using *Okunerere* Catholic Adoration Ministry (OCAM) in Enugu State as a case study. It is essentially a qualitative research work that adopted descriptive approach in the presentation and interpretation of finds. Such religious activities as prayers/adoration, family reconciliatory covenant ("*Igbandu*" in Igbo language) and other programmes/activities provided to tourists/pilgrims at this centre were fully explored and their psycho-spiritual impacts analyzed. The results revealed that there are socio-economic, environmental as well as psycho-spiritual impacts of the religious activities. However, we emphasized the spiritual benefits, including healing, deliverance from all forms of satanic oppressions and bondages, spiritual upliftment, conception by women confirmed barren, among others.

Keywords: Religion, Tourism, Resources, Impact, Psycho-spiritual, Human Resources.

Introduction

Religion and tourism are related in the sense that both are as old as man himself. Over the years, individuals as well as groups travel both locally within their home countries, and internationally for "faith-based" or religiously inspired activities/programmes. Religious tourism, which is also commonly referred to as faith-based tourism, is a form of tourism whereby people of the same faith travel individually or as a group for pilgrimages, missionary or leisure (fellowship) purposes (Wikipedia, 2011). It offers tourist destination options for mental and spiritual revival/re-invigoration, as well as transformation which helps to enhance the quality of life for those category of tourists seeking physical, mental and spiritual refreshment (Ukpokolo & Okoye, 2013).

Religious practices under the auspices of Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion have in no small way contributed to the development of tourism in the world as well as in Nigeria (Umejei, 2011). Throughout history, man has always traveled away from his permanent place of abode for specific

purposes. However, man's reasons for movement overtime expanded as a result of religious activities, among others. During the Middle Ages, religion became a dominant factor in people's lives and gradually, Christianity, which had spread during the Roman Empire, leading to religious travels to cities like Jerusalem and Bethlehem, acquired considerable wealth, and this gave rise to the construction of magnificent cathedrals, churches, monasteries, etc. (Okonkwo & Nzeh, 2009). When Jesus Christ was on earth, Bible records show that people equally traveled to centres of religious worship/rituals. A group of people who embark on this kind of journey are known as "religious tourists", but are technically referred to as "pilgrims". Nigeria is home to varieties of religious groups which tend to vary regionally. The World Religious Survey (2009) revealed that 50.4% of Nigerians are Muslims, 48.2% are Christians, and the followers of other religions are 1.4% (Wikipedia, 2011). The core north is largely Muslim; there are large numbers of both Muslims and Christians in the Middle Belt including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). In the West, especially in Yoruba land, the population is said to be evenly distributed between Muslims and Christians, while the Southeastern region (the study area) is predominated by Christians with limited traditional beliefs. Here, Catholics, Anglicans, and Methodists are the majority with few traditional beliefs, while the Niger Delta region is mainly Christians (Wikipedia/religion in Nigeria, 2011). In other words, many religions coexist in Nigeria, all of which attract their adherents and admirers at different centres and in various periods of the year.

Although many Nigerians profess either Christianity or Islam, they have continued to practice some of the older religious traditions like "ancestor worship" and the belief in deities. However, most tourists in Nigeria embark on religious travel for the primary purpose of sharing faith and fellowship together as they explore the various religious centres within and outside the country. The growth of religious tourism in Nigeria has been piloted by Christians, Muslims and traditional believers through various festivals and programmes that have become tourist attraction for many, both within and outside Nigeria (Umejei, 2011). However, the Christian folds appear to be taking the lead in contributing to tourism (especially domestic tourism) development in Nigeria. This is as a result of the upsurge in evangelical activities in the Pentecostal folds. The many Christian crusades, seminars and festivals that are held in every nook and cranny of Nigeria have become avenues for the development of tourism, especially with the crowd that normally throng these venues. Furthermore, the numerous festivals held by adherents to traditional religion have also added to make religious tourism, a beautiful bride that may become a platform for the explosion of tourism in Nigeria (Umejei, 2011). The Oshun Oshogbo Festival is regarded as one of the prime cultural festivals that most foreigners look forward to, while the Argungu fishing festival is no doubt one of Nigeria's greatest cultural festivals, attracting over one million participants each year and it has held since 1934.

Tourism and its associated practices interact with religious life and the institutions of religion in virtually every corner of the world. From Amish Communities of rural Pennsylvania to the snowy summit of Mount Fuji in Japan; from the mysterious ruins of Macchu Picchu in the Peruvian Andes to the monumental pyramids of Giza in Egypt; from Chartes in France to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, millions of tourists seek out places of religion every year (Wikipedia, 2011).

The main purpose of this research is to examine the psycho-spiritual impacts of religious activities in Southeastern Nigeria using *Okunerere* Catholic Adoration Ministry (OCAM) in Enugu State as a case study. It is argued that beyond economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts, religious tourism offers in addition, spiritual impacts. Specifically, the work highlights the religious activities of OCAM that attracts visitors, the impacts of these activities, and how they contribute to human resource promotion in the area. The emphasis on the Christian religion is pertinent given the fact that it is pivotal to the growth of domestic religious tourism in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Religion has been variously defined by authors, the reason being that religion deals with invisible and spiritual beings that cannot be studied through empirical observations (Ugwu & Ugwueye, 2004). A simple definition sees it as “man’s relationship with or belief in a spiritual or supernatural being that has power; the creator and controller of the universe” (Okeke, 2002). For Kanu (2004), it is an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, practices and worship that centres on one supreme God or deity. Religion is the belief in the existence of a supernatural God who, although invisible, is capable of solving all human problems and can easily be reached or approached through certain intermediaries especially in certain designated places known as holy grounds. It is also seen as a set of beliefs, practices and moral claims often codified as prayers, rituals and religious laws, all of which are shared within groups (Yvette 2009, p.92). To this study, religion is simply seen as a means through which man relates with God. It teaches people to search for the eternal God. This becomes plausible, since “man is so constituted and conditioned that he must be dependent upon the Supreme Being if his life is to be real, full and harmonious” (Kanu & Okwueze, 2003, p.4)

Tourism has also been variously defined, but the basic factor shown in all the definitions is that it involves an overnight stay of people either as individuals or as groups outside their normal place of abode or residence for purposes which may include sports, health, business, leisure/recreation, culture, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and religion, etc. “Each year, over 600 million people travel internationally while hundreds of millions more journey within their home country, doing so for both work and pleasure. As a result, the tourism industry is described as the world’s number one employer” (Awake 2005, p.3). Tourism is one of the world’s largest multinational economic activities (Friedman, 1995) and

ranks among the top five export industries for 83% of countries (Fayed & Fletcher, 2002 in Yvette, 2009, p.8). "Religious tourism is the movement of people to sacred sites or shrines to witness or participate in one or more religious activities" (Okpoko, Okonkwo & Diminyi, 2008, p.20). While writing on travel motivations, Bhatia (2006:23) identified "spiritual and religious" motives as some of the factors that create a person's desire to travel. The act of traveling for spiritual or religious purposes has been taking place for ages; it has been a key motivator for travel thereby leading to mass travel or pilgrimages to such holy or sacred religious places in the world as Jerusalem or the Vatican for Christians, Mecca for the Arab-Muslims, etc. Religious pilgrimages and travels have a distinctive edge over other kinds of tourism due to the huge crowd which it usually pulls (Karar, 2012). It is believed that the most visible connection between tourism and religion is the thousands of sacred buildings and places which tourists visit.

Resources on the other hand, are those things that people, a nation or an organization have which are provided either by nature or artificially by man, that help them to solve human problems. Tourism resources, often referred to as "tourism products" are those things, tangible or intangible, that attract a tourist to a given destination. It was described by Doswell *et al* (1997 in Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002, p.23) as "a total experience encountered by a tourist from the moment of leaving his habitat to the moment of return", while from the tourist's point of view, as noted by Medlik (2003, p.168), the total product covers the complete experience from leaving home to return. Tourism resources can be classified into natural, cultural and man-made, but for religious tourism; one can say that the resources are mainly intangible or a combination of tangible and intangible things. Tangible resources are those ones that can be touched or felt such as mountains, waterfalls, caves, the sacramental used for prayers, Bible (or other holy books), grottos or statues, buildings and/or graves of saints among others; while the intangible religious tourist resources are those experiences that exist are difficult to describe, understand or measure through empirical studies or something that does not exist as a physical thing, but are valuable to individuals, people, organizations or nations. These intangible resources come in the form of healing, blessings and spiritual upliftment received from God through prayers.

Psycho-Spiritual Impacts of Religious Tourism

Tourism impact in general terms is the resultant effect of tourism activities on the individuals, the environment and economy of the host community/society. The impact can be either on the providers of the services, the environment/area or community or on the tourists themselves. These impacts, primarily positive or negative in nature are determined by the carrying capacity of the area, defined as "that level of tourist presence which creates impacts on the host community, environment and economy that are acceptable to both tourists and hosts, and sustainable over future time periods" (Cooper *et al*, 1993, p.95)

The word “psycho-spiritual” is derived from a combination of psychology (which deals with behavior and mental process or how the mind or cognitive processes influence behaviour in a particular area of life); and spiritual (which has to do or is connected with human spirit rather than the body or physical things). Psycho-spiritual as used here refers to how people react to things that transcend their knowledge, and which cannot be explained physically or ordinarily. Consequently, psycho-spiritual impacts of religious tourism refers to the effects of religious activities or programmes, or centres on the pilgrim’s mental template and spiritual beings as they relate to their faith or belief. It is important to state clearly here that it is the positive state of mind of these tourists as well as what they believe to be true (in respect to the destinations) that bring about the resultant changes or physical manifestations of healings and other miracles that they claim to have received from these centres.

Religious tourism is spiritually purposive and many religious tourists receive healings, some are delivered or liberated from all forms of bondage while some gets spiritual upliftment, etc, as a result, its impact is more psycho-spiritual in nature, especially to tourists than physical. Tourism activities associated with religion, sacred sites and pilgrimages are recognized as ever more important because they offer both religious and economic benefits (Rotherham, 2007). This type of travel is one of the best ways to develop close bonds among members. The main aim of this type of travel is to build the moral and spiritual life of the pilgrims. It also helps tourists to gain more understanding of their faith, while shaping their character/perception. Religious tourism also creates avenue for peaceful co-existence among religious groups, helps in improving the standard of living of the local population as many Christian churches have evangelical mobile medical team, schools, etc. while increasing the social status of the pilgrims as many of them now add such titles as JP (meaning Jerusalem Pilgrim) to their names after some of such visits or travels.

However, Boris (1998) noted, and rightly too, that religious tourism has also brought with it some negative psycho-spiritual impacts. This is because many of the religious centres now engage in “false miracles” in order to draw more pilgrims to their centres. For instance, “there have been cases in Catholicism where the official church has attempted to distance itself from the various ‘miracles’ and even pronounced them tricks; such judgements have also been made by catholic churches in former Yugoslavia” (Boris, 1998, p.88-89). Even in Nigeria, there are countless fake prayer houses using strange powers whose motives have been to extort money from people. Their activities have resulted in many Nigerians being spiritually enslaved, bankrupt, divorced, and barren.

Method of Research

The qualitative/descriptive (which is a method of data analysis that is based on direct observation, communication with participants or analysis of texts) and documentary research designs were employed in the collection and analysis of data. Interview and direct observation were used to collect information on the

activities and impacts of the religious centre, while documentary research was used for the collection of information specifically for literature review and background information. In other words, the research adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection.

Study Area

This study focuses on Okunerere Catholic Adoration Ministry (OCAM). OCAM is located in Enugu State, Southeast Nigeria. At the time of this research, OCAM was at St. Theresa's Catholic Church, Umushene, Enugu-Ezike in Igbo-Eze North L.G.A, but it is presently in Ede-Oballa, Nsukka Local Government Area.

Southeast Nigeria is home to Igbo people of Nigeria, administratively made up of the Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo states as well as parts of Delta and Rivers states (Ofomata, 2002). It is primarily situated in the lowland forest region of Nigeria (Wikipedia, 2016). The land surface lies between latitudes $4^{\circ} 15^{11}$ and $7^{\circ} 05^{11}$ North and Longitudes $6^{\circ} 00^{11}$ and $8^{\circ} 30^{11}$ East. It covers a total surface area of approximately 41,000 square kilometers. Currently, it has a total population of 21,460,065 (2006 census figures population projection by 2.5%) and a population density of 215 persons per square kilometers.

On the other hand, Enugu State is one of the 36 states in Nigeria. Its capital, Enugu, owes its existence to the discovery of coal east of Ngwo village in Udi division in 1909. The state was carved out of Anambra State on August 27, 1991. It has a population of 4,267,060 (2006 census figures population projection by 2.5%). The state covers an area of approximately 12,727 square kilometers (Ugwuanyi *et al*, 2005, p.6) and is situated within the tropical rainforest belt to the south and in the northern boundary; its physical features and vegetation have changed gradually to open woodland and savannah land. To the east, it is mostly swampy and to the west, it is riverine. The mean temperature in the hottest months of February to April is about 33°C or 30.64°C , while the lowest temperature occurs in the month of November, reaching 15.86°C (Onunkwo, 2012). The lowest rainfall of about 0.16 cubic centimeters (0.0098 cubic) is normal in February while the highest is about 35.7 cubic centimeters (2.18 cubic) in July. It has a very good soil and climatic condition. The state shares borders with Abia and Imo states to the South, Ebonyi to the East, Benue to the Northeast, Kogi to the Northwest and Anambra to the West. The people of Enugu State are ethnically Igbo. Traditionally, they believed in the existence of one creator called "*Chineke/EzechitokeAbiama* or *Chukwu*", who can be approached through numerous gods, deities/spirits. But through western influences, Christianity has taken a more dominant place in the state. There are a large number of churches nowadays. Presently, the state/town is predominantly Christians (Madubunyi, 2008, p.35). The people are very resourceful and hardworking, warm and peace-loving; the environment is friendly and their culture is a conspicuous reflection of the environment and the wealth therein.

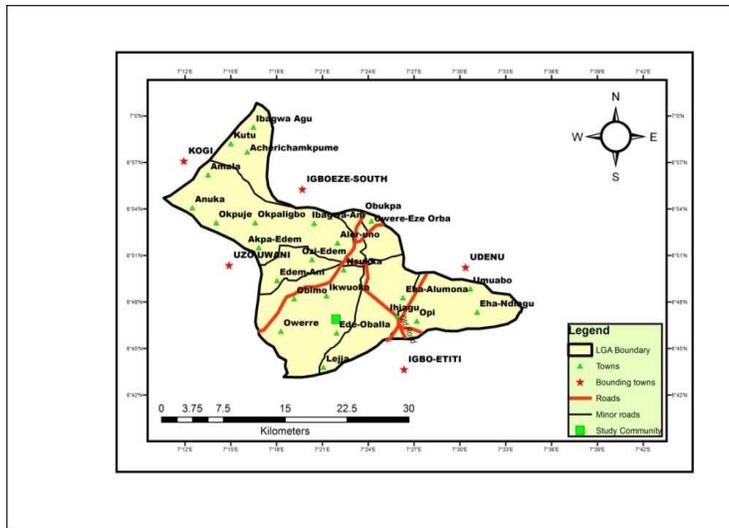


Figure I: Map of Nsukka LGA showing the study Area.

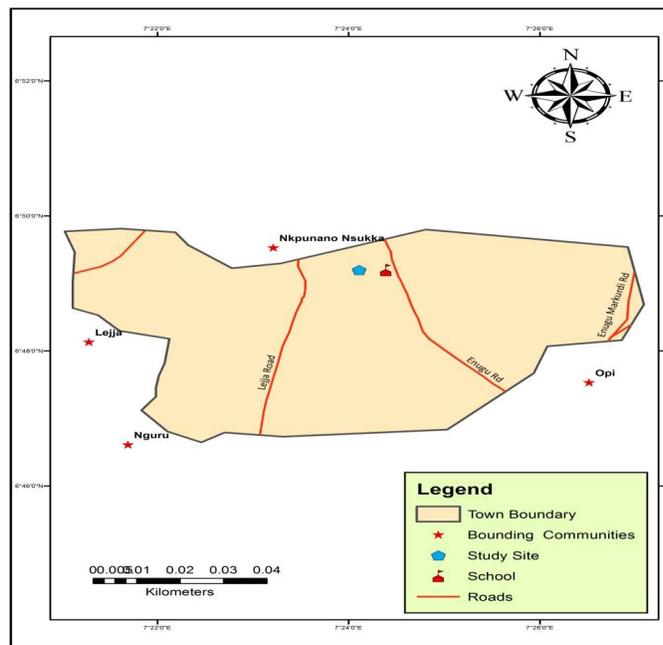


Figure II: Map of Ede-Oballa showing the study location.

Findings and Discussion

OCAM is a praying ministry founded by a Catholic priest and an ex-karate coach, Rev. Fr. Obayi, Paul Martin Obinna, in October 2000. The word “Oku N’erere” from which the ministry derived its name is an Igbo phrase literally meaning the “consuming fire”. The name of the ministry is derived from a biblical verse which recognizes Jesus Christ (God) as a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29 and Deuteronomy 4:24). This implies that Almighty God is able to consume all our enemies or everything that is threatening the lives and peace of the children of God. Therefore, it is on this faith/belief that the Adoration Ministry is founded. From its inception till now, the ministry has moved from one place to another. First it started with just an office in St. Theresa’s Cathedral Parish, Nsukka where the Rev. Fr. attended to people and prayed for them, but as people started testifying to what God was doing in their lives and families through his prayers, more people started coming, and this is how the ministry started expanding (*Okunerere* Global Foundation, 2011).

The ministry is guided by the following objectives:

- To fight evil/oppressive traditions that discriminate against the weak such as orphans, the widows, ethnic discrepancies.
- To wage war against all social and spiritual ills that hinder human progress, namely poverty, illiteracy, sickness and spiritual bondage.
- To lead all souls to God through the message of the gospel and teachings of the church.
- To demolish wicked strongholds of diabolic altars and deities.
- To guide the youths and people to attain the divine blessings and destiny designed for them by God.

Programmes of Ocam And Associated Impacts

The activities of OCAM can broadly be classified into two, namely adoration prayers and reconciliation covenant. The adoration for the sick and oppressed are usually conducted at night. People from all walks of life come to the adoration ground. The programme is usually a power-packed one in which a lot of people are spiritually liberated, healed, delivered, released from captivity and bondage while so many receive blessings from God. This adoration/prayer takes place every Fridays of the month.

The reconciliation covenant, also called “*igbandu*” in the local dialect or language, is usually done during the day, and on the last Wednesday of every month. The purpose of this programme is to reconcile people with God and with their fellow human beings, families, communities, friends, neighbours, villages, clans, etc. People who want to be part of the reconciliatory covenant are expected to arrive and register their presence on the same day before the programme starts.

The main tourism resources which attract visitors to OCAM are both tangible and intangible. The tangible resources are in the form of anointing oil, powder, holy water, stickers, incense, chaplets, holy and prayer books, messages and musicals of the programme recorded in CDs among others. These can simply be

grouped as books, sacramental and music (**see plates**). On the other hand, the intangible resources include spiritual upliftment, healing, release from bondage and captivity, and blessings through the prayer ministrations.



PLATE 1: Sacramentals on display in one of the shops at OCAM.

Impacts of this religious centre are social, economic, environmental and psycho-spiritual in manifestation, but the concern here is on the last. OCAM has positively contributed and is still contributing immensely through its programmes to the spiritual wellbeing of countless visitors that throng the venue. For instance, through the prayers, there have been testimonies of conception from women confirmed barren; safe delivery during childbirth; healing of both spiritual and physical sicknesses like madness, drug/alcohol addictions, diabolic poisons and spiritual attacks. Also, through its prayer of deliverance, many under the influence of demonic oppressions, bondage or captivity have been delivered or released while many idolaters have become converts, thereby giving up their old ways of worship and handing over their charms, idols and images to Rev. Fr. Obayi's museum (**see plates**)



PLATE 2: Materials in OCAM mini-museum.

The ministry at the time of this research has a house for sick and mad people. They are kept there and prayed for until they receive their healing. This helps to lift the burden caused by sickness off the victims.



PLATE 3: Sick people waiting for healing at OCAM

In other words, these psychological and spiritual healings result in the physical manifestation of healings observed in the sick. Through its reconciliatory covenant programme, OCAM has helped to foster peace and unity among many families, relatives, communities, etc. as people under the fear of being killed diabolically have psychologically been assured of safety of their lives, numerous community land and other disputes have been settled, marriage/family issues between husbands, wives and siblings resolved, madness cured, deliverance from mermaid/*ogbanje* spirits, premature/untimely deaths believed to be aborted, to mention but a few.

These positive impacts notwithstanding, through the activities of this and other religious centres in Nigeria, the people have been so brainwashed that most people now believe that all sicknesses or illnesses are caused by wicked people (i.e. through witchcraft or poison, etc.). As a result, sicknesses that require medical treatment are left for the so-called 'prophets' or priests to pray for and with time the health of the individual continues to deteriorate, and eventually leads to death. This implies that people are no longer conscious of natural causes of illness and what one needs to do in order to remain healthy. Also, because they are assured of being prayed for, majority no longer believe that God answers prayers anytime and everywhere, and this informs why they troop to these religious/prayer houses. In addition, many ignorant tourists have been deceived, enslaved and extorted by some false prophets. There is decline in the prayer life of some of these pilgrims, i.e. they only pray when they are at the centre or when they are being prayed for by priests, and therefore do not engage in personal prayers. The adoration arena is an open space without shelter (**see plates**), seats and other facilities that will keep visitors comfortable. Thus, the visitors are usually exposed to severe cold during rainy period and may contract cold/pneumonia, which is a serious health issue.



PLATE 4: OCAM Adoration ground.

The government or private agencies or both can help OCAM to provide comfortable seats and roofed Adoration camp for tourists/pilgrims. They can both encourage foreigners to participate well by reducing their cost of transportation, and by making provision for pilgrims' travel allowances, etc. Safety and security are of paramount importance to tourism development and promotion; as such the government should help in developing the infrastructures at these religious centres to acceptable standard, provide adequate security and conducive or peaceful environment. Rotherham (2007) is of the opinion that large scale mass tourism should be made less socially and

environmentally damaging, therefore, in line with this, the management of religious centres should adopt and promote environmentally friendly practices and encourage visitors to behave accordingly. There should be a clear environmental policy and environmental management system in these centres. Close collaboration with government and private agencies is essential in achieving this, while enhancing the attractiveness of these centres.

Conclusion

Religious tourism has an edge over other forms of tourism development in terms of impact, number of visitors/participants and resources needed for its establishment and promotion. Therefore, it has to be well-planned and controlled; else, it will result in adverse negative impacts. It is a known fact that religious tourism pulls a large crowd to the centres, and in most cases, their number goes far beyond what the centre can control leading to some negative implications such as stampede, damage, unguarded littering, etc. This agrees with the words of Rotherham (2007) that the difficulty in religious tourism is managing the potential conflicts. He stressed that the pressure of tourists/visitors can damage an important heritage, site, and even spirituality whilst sometimes, enhanced by sheer numbers in case of mass pilgrimage, one can be lost in the crowd.

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