

Cultural Tourism - A Tool for Community Development: Case-Study of "Boabo" Festival in Igbobini Community, Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: - Cultural tourism is the social activity that enables one to experience cultural diversity in its practical manifestation while being the basis of gaining, at first-hand contact, an impressionable understanding of other people's cultures that have endured over time. Also, it is an important contemporary approach in community-development discourse, especially recognized as capable of stabilizing 'tottering' economies and, inherently, integrating members with their communities for sustainable development. As a process promoting socio-economic development, community development allows community-members to plan together, generate necessary solutions, and take concerted action towards ensuring progress and safety for all in their respective communities. This study examines cultural tourism as a vital change-agent, through exploiting the "Boabo" festival in Igbobini's rural community. Twenty five in-depth interviews were conducted with randomly selected residents and some strategic community-elders of Igbobini community. The study's major findings are that: the "Boabo" festival, celebrated annually in December, constitutes a potentially attractive communal activity for cultural tourism in Ondo State and Nigeria; it can be a vital source of economic survival for the community, including creating more jobs; reinforcing community-identity; and, promoting indigenous cultural practices in globalisation. And, the study recommends that any self-help approach to "Boabo" festival for cultural tourism must necessarily be in partnership with external change-agents, such as intervention agencies - e.g., the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and advocacy groups for community development - especially, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for sustainability.

Key Words: Community Development, Cultural Tourism, Indigenous Cultures, Globalization and Sustainable Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) (1995) defines tourism more generally, in terms which go "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only", as "activities of persons travelling 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."

Tourism however has become an extremely popular global activity and is vital for many countries, due to the income

generated by the consumption of goods and services by tourists, the taxes levied on businesses in the tourism industry, and the varying opportunities for job creation, employment and economic advancement by working in the industry. For these reasons, NGOs and government agencies may sometimes promote a specific region as a tourist destination, and support the development of a vibrant tourism industry in such region.

Though tourism has antecedents in ancient times, it has increased in scale and scope due to modern social arrangements, aided by recent developments in technology; transport infrastructure; and hotel, shopping, and entertainment facilities. Today, there are tourists for whom leisure is secondary as they travel primarily for certain specific purposes such as leisure and intensive education about other areas of our global village. Indeed, the list is open-ended, when the focus of tourism is on a specific type of activity. The lists often includes business tourism, medical tourism, sports tourism, ecotourism, agri-tourism, garden tourism, hunting tourism, literary tourism, wine tourism, wildlife tourism, religious tourism, heritage tourism, cultural tourism, etc. (Akinnaso, 2016). In many cases, tourists often save up for their holiday/vacations and spend the bulk of the money on purchasing goods and services from the tourist destinations as momentous or memorabilia, and for immediate or delayed consumption. Today, tourism is big business because of the sheer number of tourists across the globe and the huge amount they spend every year.

According to the WTO (2015), international tourist arrivals at border posts across the globe were over the one billion mark in 2012. In 2014, the 10 most visited countries, measured by the number of international travelers are: France, 84 million; the United States of America(USA), 75 million; Spain, 65 million; China, 56 million; Italy, 49 million; Turkey, 40 million; Germany, 33 million; the United Kingdom(UK), 33 million; Russia, 30 million, and Mexico, 29 million. However, the USA leads the top 10 tourism earners for 2014, by grossing a whopping US177.2bn, representing both domestic and international tourism earnings. Others are Spain, US65.2bn; China, US56.9bn; France, US55.4bn; Italy, US45.5bn; the UK, US45.3bn; Thailand, US38.4bn; Australia, US32bn; and Turkey, US29.5bn. Macau and Hong Kong, both

in Asia, which made US\$50.8bn and US\$38.4bn respectively are not included in the list, because they are not independent/sovereign nations as such (Akinaso, 2016).

The figures above show that tourism brings in huge amounts of income into a local economy by way of payments for the goods and services needed by tourists. The goods typically bought by tourists range from souvenirs and local artwork to food, clothing etc. Similarly, transport, hospitality, and entertainment industries benefit immensely from tourism. Even more importantly, tourism also creates opportunities for employment, especially in related service industries such as health care, photography, etc. Indeed, it is estimated that tourism alone accounts for 30 per cent of the world's trade in services, rendered to tourists.

Many Third World countries especially Africa, because of their numerous local communities with unique indigenous cultures, nature-based attractions, beautiful landscapes, and pleasant weather conditions are increasingly being promoted and marketed in major tourist generating countries, particularly in Europe and North America, as offering immense touristic and recreational opportunities. As a result of this, an increasing number of international tourists are travelling to different tourist destinations in Africa and other less developed regions of the world. In 2001 for instance, over 28 million international tourists, mainly from Europe and North America, travelled to different destinations in Africa. It is further estimated that with the current international growth rate of the tourism industry, over 77 million international tourists will visit Africa by the year 2020 (WTO, 2004).

Brohman (1996) reported that neo-classical economists and development experts contended that unlike factor driven technology based development, local communities in Africa and other parts of the Third World have a comparative advantage in the development of tourism and other non-technology based economic sectors. The development of tourism in local communities is, therefore, perceived as fitting quite well with the 'natural process of development based on comparative advantage.' This argument is based on the premise that local communities, particularly in Africa, should mainly specialize in primary exports, including tourism, where they have comparative advantage rather than depending on technology based economic sectors that do not conform to the principles of comparative advantage in the global market demand. Particularly, local communities in sub-Saharan Africa are usually perceived as having a comparative advantage in the development of tourism. This is due to the fact that they possess unique indigenous cultural and nature-based attractions that the Western tourists lack in their transformed and urbanised environments (Butler and Hinch, 1996; Cohen, 1996). Many Western tourists are craving for these serene forms of touristic attractions in order to escape from the perceived monotony of everyday life in the often over-crowded and congested urban environments in the West.

Further, it is also argued that the development of tourism, particularly the development of community-based tourism in Africa and other Third World countries will, in the long run promote cross-cultural understanding and social harmony amongst local host communities and tourists (Harrison 2000; Nash 1996; Richter 1994). Tourism will, therefore, assist in minimising existing stereotypes and misrepresentations of indigenous cultures.

Cultural tourism has a long history, and with its roots in the Grand Tour it is arguably the original form of tourism. It is also one of the forms of tourism that most policy makers seem to be betting on for the future (OECD, 2009). The WTO, for example, asserted that cultural tourism accounted for 37% of global tourism; and it forecast that cultural tourism would grow at a rate of 15% per year. Such figures are often quoted in studies of the cultural tourism market e.g. Bywater (1993), but are rarely backed up with empirical research.

For developing countries tourism is an increasingly important export and the year on year growth in tourist arrivals has been higher than the world average. According to UNCTAD (2004) if the 49 least developed countries (LDCs) of the world are taken together, tourism is the single most important source of foreign exchange earnings.

A recent study of the cultural consumption habits of Europeans (European Commission, 2002) indicated that the people visited museums and galleries abroad almost as frequently as they did at home. This underlines the growing importance of cultural tourism as a source of cultural consumption. There is no doubt that tourism is a global phenomenon. Few places on the planet have escaped the curiosity of the tourist, or the ability of the tour operator to package even the most remote or dangerous location (Lanfant, 1980). Estimates from the WTO (2005) anticipate that by the year 2020 international arrivals are expected to reach over 1.56 billion. This scenario should be of major concern when realizing that tourism has become a major socio-economic and cultural phenomenon affecting local communities in Africa and other parts of the Third World. Hence there is an urgent need to explore cultural tourism as a necessary tool for community development; and for example the "Boabo" festival in Igbovini community, Ondo State, Nigeria.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical anchor for this work is "cultural diffusion" theory. Diffusion implies the spread of traits or attributes from one culture to another through contact between different societies (Scott and Marshall, 2009). The earliest social scientific use of the term diffusion was by Edward Tylor's (1865) in the 'treatment' of culture change. Tylor's work on culture change first proposed the notion of diffusion as a means of explaining the appearance of similar culture elements in different groups and of understanding the progressive alteration of elements within the same group.

Franz Boas (1896) on the other hand conceived of diffusion as a viable mechanism for culture exchanges among geographically adjacent areas. His view figured prominently in the intellectual move away from the deterministic view of diffusion proposed by early British anthropologists. Alfred Kroeber (1923) and Robert Lowie (1937) subsequently developed a position called “moderate diffusionism”, which currently is widely accepted in Anthropology. This position allowed for the coexistence of a variety of mechanisms of change and transfer of independent invention, acculturation, etc in addition to diffusion in accounting for culture change and differentiation.

These scholars observed that cultural diffusion happens when societies that have different ways of life come into contact with each other and that as they interact more and more, the rate of cultural diffusion between them increases. There are many different theories of cultural diffusion that have been offered by anthropologists and sociologists, but the elements common to them, that can be considered general principles of cultural diffusion, are as follows (Stahl 1994).

1. The society or social group that borrows elements from another will alter or adapt those elements to fit within their own culture.
2. Typically, it is only elements of a foreign culture that fit into the already existing belief system of the host culture that will be borrowed.
3. Those cultural elements that do not fit within the host culture's existing belief system will be rejected by members of the social group.
4. Cultural elements will only be accepted within the host culture if they are useful to it.
5. Social groups that borrow cultural elements are more likely to borrow again in the future.

Boabo festival, as a socio-cultural event reinforcing social integration/cohesion, was a very elaborate ceremony highlighting indigenous cultural beliefs and values. But, due to cultural diffusion, which allows foreign cultures and religions – such as Islam and Christianity - that are ‘borrowed’ to take over the already existing belief-systems, while making them look barbaric, most indigenous cultural practices have become rejected by members of their host-communities. Even, some observers have argued that the process of globalization – i.e., the emergence of a world-system, via an advanced system of communication-technologies - and policies of certain multinational corporations (MNCs) and political organizations are accelerating and intensifying the effects of cultural diffusion. Invariably, the process undermines the possibility of a comparative macro-sociology based on independent national observations, to the extent of the world moving towards a world in which $N=1$ (Francis Galton, cited

in Scott and Marshall, 2009:271). *A fortiori*, this stance reflects in “cultural globalization” wherein those who are neither Christians nor Muslims are often considered ‘antichrist’ or ‘infidel’.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

Research Location and Population

Igbobini is located in the Ese-Odo Local Government Area (LGA) of the Southern Senatorial District of Ondo State. It shares boundaries in the South with the Ilaje, in the South-east with Delta and Edo States.

Ese-Odo LGA has a population of about 154,954 based on the Census of 2006.

The people of Ese-Odo comprise of two major ethnic groups, the Apoi and the Ijaw-Arogbo. The Apoi claimed to have originated from Brass, around Kolokuma in present day Bayelsa State and later migrated to Apaka in Ese-Odo area of Ondo State. Legend has it that after staying for some time in Apaka, they migrated to other places such as Old Igbotu, Ojuala, Shabomi, Inikorogha, Oboro, Ipoke, Igbekebo and Igbobini which is the case study for the of new settlements (An intelligence report of the Apoi-Ijaw Area of Okitipupa Division, Ondo province, unpublished article).

The major economic activities of the people in Ese-Odo LGA include fishing, lumbering, tapping of palm wine, mat weaving, palm oil production, canoe building and ogogoro/alcohol distillation. The LGA has many economic trees such as Iroko (*chlorophora excelsa*), Opepe (*sarcocephalus*), Sida (*lovoakleuneana*), Olofun (*guarea cedrata*), Ogwango (*kaya invorensis*), and Ariyerin (*Afzerlia bipindensia*). The LGA has abundant mineral resources, in exportable/commercial deposits such as bitumen, silica sand, and kaolin.

Methods of Data Collection

The study adopts qualitative data collection methods. Five quarters were randomly selected: Baate, Baka, Ajana, Ade, and Odede. Thereafter, five respondents were randomly selected from each quarter, and the qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs). Some IDIs were conducted with a few strategic community-elders. In all the IDIs enabled the researcher to observe and take records of all the discussions in order to gain insight into the cultural details of the community. In all Twenty (25) community chiefs and elders were duly interviewed in face to face setting. The qualitative data, obtained during IDIs, face to face sessions were transcribed and are reported verbatim, using the content analysis method of analysis.

IV. DISCUSSION FROM THE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW (IDIS)

HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF “BOABO” FESTIVAL

The historical origin of Boabo festival was summarized as follows by one of the High Chiefs, Chief ‘A’ 65 years male who narrated thus: “traveling” as a mechanism of social

contacts brought about what today is being celebrated as “Boabo” festival among Apoi people, in especially Igbobini community.

The ever famous “Boabo” festival coincidentally has its roots in one of the changing dimensions of Anthropology. The festival began when the sons and daughters of Igbobini community were coming home for the Christmas season. While one “Egbekaramon” and his wife “Yoyo” were coming home, they bought some chickens and put them in their boat since they are traveling by sea. On their way and a few distance from home, the wife wanted to excrete; so, they anchored the boat to the edge of the river to enable her excrete. While the husband waited in the boat and “Yoyo” was still in the bush, one of the chickens they were taking home ran into the bush and the husband had to chase after it. “Yoyo” later joined him in the chase; and at a point, she could no longer find her husband. She searched for him thoroughly round the bush, and could not find him. She went home to call the members of the village; but, all efforts to find him were to no avail. They consulted an “Ifa” priest who told them that “Egbekaramon” has been taken away by an invisible spirit called “Babaji”. And he told them to look for a particular animal called “lombo” to use as a sacrifice. He instructed the people further that the animal’s belly should be wide open and that it should be placed on a tent at the center of the bush such that if the invisible spirit, carrying him round, should see the sacrifice it would realize that the people are already looking for “Egbekaramon” and it would release him. The sacrifice was prepared just as the priest had instructed them. When the invisible spirit taking “Egbekaramon” round inside the bush, just like the priest had predicted saw the sacrifice, it immediately made “Egbekaramon” to be visible such that “Egbekaramon” shouted.

When the people saw him, they ran to him and rescued him. But, his clothing was torn and the priest asked them to get some palm fronds i.e., mariwo to wrap round his body. The priest then cut an iron wood i.e., ige eki and gave it to “Yoyo” while others also cut “lapalapa” i.e., *jatrophia curcas* leaves and had them in their hands while dancing home. The wife was in front holding the ‘eki’ stick like a staff along with some women who came with them to the bush, while the men were dancing and rejoicing following the women slowly at the back. When they got home, the priest asked “Yoyo” to go inside with the staff along with some women who were with her, and never to come out for the rest of the day. However, the men along with the priest and “Egbekaramon” went round the village saying prayers at every junction with those things “Egbekaramon” discovered while the invisible spirit was taking him round inside the bush. He saw things like python, snail, wolf and some other horrible things. Here he fervently prayer that such a thing should never reoccur or happen again to anybody in the village.

At every junction “Egbekaramon” would roll himself, nine times on the ground and would say prayers with

alligator pepper i.e., atare in his mouth. They had to continue the prayers back to the river wherein they were to drop both the palm fronds i.e., mariwo and the lapalapa i.e., *jatrophia curcas* leaves that they had in their hands. After all that, they then rejoiced back home.

V. CELRBRATION OF BOABO FESTIVAL

In regard to celebrating the Boabo festival, the High Chief who is the custodian of tradition and customs in Igbobini community plays a very prominent role. The Boabo festival is celebrated annually by every member of the community young and old, home and abroad at the end of each year. The date of the festival is usually measured through the appearance of the moon i.e., Osupa. This practice is just like how Muslims follow the appearance of the moon as the calendar for the “Ramadan” which marks their fasting period annually. In essence the “Boabo” festival does not have a clearly fixed date; but it takes place usually in December. And once the date is fixed no burial whatsoever must take place till after the festival.

A day to the “Boabo” festival, people would have arrived the town to prepare because the festival is usually an all day long celebration. On the scheduled day for the festival, nobody is allowed to go fishing in the river because it is a taboo to kill or shed the blood of any animal on that day. But a very striking self-denial during the festival is that no indigene of the community can eat ‘lombo’ meat because it is the “sacred” animal that had been used as a sacrifice to the visible spirits by the forefathers.

The officially approved food for that day is pounded yam and dry fish since, in all Yoruba communities pounded yam is seen as a princely food and it is highly valued and esteemed culturally, yam represents good harvest while the use of dry-fish portrays the culture and traditional occupation of fishing from living very close to the coast, in the eve of the festival traditional roasting the fishes to be used the next also add glamour to the whole event.

Very early in the morning, on the day of the festival, the youths troop into the bush to get materials that they would use, such as palm fronds i.e., mariwo, lapalapa leaves etc. The men and women would go to the shrine where the chief priest would lead the prayers from the shrine round the town. And, at every junction he would roll himself nine times on the ground while rendering prayers for the whole community. Standing up the priest would say “ho, ho, ho”, and the villagers would bow and reply “owe fini lele kumo”. After praying round the town, the people drop the palm fronds and lapalapa leaves in the river, and they would be rejoicing singing;

Eki ee pon, eki olomi oyoyo

Eki ee pon, eki olomi oyoyo

Ebiri beri o, Ebiri beri o alagba fiye kumoo.

On the day of festival “Yoyo” would be at the fore front of the parade, and she culturally represented by a young “virgin” who must be well dressed in all white regalia and coral beads. And she must be accorded her rightful respect as the wife of “Egbekaramon” and must remain a virgin until she is ready to be married.

While the people return home to celebrate further, the chief priest would not eat anything until evening usually at 7pm. Any visitor/stranger that comes into the community on that day would eat to his or her satisfaction and may even take some food home.

VI. SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BOABO FESTIVAL

During the IDI, on the socio-economic impact of “Boabo” festival, Chief ‘E’ 70 years old male retired teacher, explained that: “Boabo” festival, from the past has been the major cultural activity among the Apoi that attracts dignitaries to the community as villagers show case their cultural artifacts and agricultural produce such as yam, vegetables, cassava, etc. Fishing-nets, hooks and tools used for fishing are, also widely available for sale. The fishing-tools and traditional artifacts are often sold to visitors who buy them at high prices. Therefore many traders use the festival as an avenue of bringing in more goods for sale with higher profits as the people would readily buy modern wares like shirts, cloves etc.

Donations are required during the festival for community development. For example, from the last “Boabo” festival, the community realized over N200 million donated by the indigenes and invited guests, such as businessmen, government officials etc., who came to grace the occasion.

Furthermore, on the socio-economic impact of “Boabo” festival Mrs ‘A’ 75 years old female retired administrator claimed that if “Boabo” festival becomes a standardized annual event, it can be of tremendous assistance to the people of Igbobini community and some of the unemployed youths can have jobs. And that if the festival is well advertised, the community can become a place of relaxation and tourist center for both local and international tourists. And can bring the community into limelight, foreign investors and if will further enhance women’s economic participation by way buying and selling.

Moreover, Mr ‘P’ 65 years old male retired paramilitary personnel concluded that if the festival becomes a standardized annual practice, it can develop the community and help sustainable development and is capable of stabilizing 'tottering' economies and, inherently, integrating members with their communities for sustainable development. And if is in partnership with external change-agents, such as intervention agencies - e.g., the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) & advocacy groups for community development, especially, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) it can enhance sustainability.

VII. CULTURAL BELIEFS ABOUT “BOABO” FESTIVAL

Another Chief ‘Ai’ 72 years old, fisherman, gave some explanations about the cultural beliefs of “Boabo” festival. According to him; “the festival is celebrated annually in Apoi because people believe that the prayers said by “Egbekaramon” should be repeated annually to keep and protect the community from problems and disasters. This has been the major reason why the indigenes, from near and far, converge annually, to celebrate “Boabo” festival. The name “Egbekaramon” that is today accustomed titled of the chief priest of “Boabo” is from the man who was taken by the invisible spirits i.e., Babaji.

The people also believe that there should be no shedding of blood on that day; that is no animal or creature with blood must be killed or eaten. And, that is why only dry fish is eaten during the festival. Meat and other such things that have blood would have been taken care of, or prepared days before the festival, since there must be no bloodshed”.

They also believe that there is no specific day in December to celebrate the festival. The only generally believed fact is that the day is determined through the proper sighting of the moon like the Muslims do. Hence, the setting of the moon in December solely determines the day for the great festival of “Boabo”.

On the socio-cultural effects of “Boabo” festival Mr ‘G’ 55 years male trader claimed that when the festival is well sustained it can increase the population of the town. And it can become a haven for tourists. He argued further that the influx of people to community can defile the land and have corrosive effects on the indigenous culture. And that it can open the community to all sorts of criminal activities with the influx of strangers.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The “Boabo” festival has been a cardinal celebration of Apoi people over the years. The community has benefited a lot through the annual event. One of remarkable changes brought to Apoi through the cultural exposition of “Boabo” is the constructed Igbobini Bridge, worth over two billion Naira contracted by the Ondo State Government six years ago.

No doubt the festival is one of the most culturally endowed festivals in Ondo State, and, if properly managed, it can go beyond the state’s level to be a nationally gazette cultural festival.

The study recommends that any self-help approach to the "Boabo" festival, for cultural tourism, must necessarily be in partnership with external change-agents, such as intervention agencies - e.g., UNESCO and advocacy groups for community development - especially, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and for sustainability

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