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Cover Page Footnote

We wish to acknowledge our respondents and research assistants for their understanding and diligence during fieldwork, as well as the authors whose works were used to enrich the study.

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Faith-based activities are dynamic rituals that can bring about spiritual satisfaction. The perceived efficacy of these activities greatly influences the number of faith participants visiting religious centres. Although these activities are primarily practiced as religious obligations, they have helped to precipitate travel and the rise of tourism service industries. These include accommodation, transportation, food, drinks, souvenirs, spiritual objects (anointing oil, ritual mantels, handkerchief, cross emblem, rosary *tesbihi* (prayer beads), praying mat, and candles) and the likes, which enhance tourism expenditure and income. This study examines the contribution to tourism development of faith-based activities, in two religious centres in south-western Nigeria. Ethnographic methodologies were adopted for the study, supplemented by focus group discussions, direct observation, and in-depth interviews. The data collected were analysed thematically using descriptive analysis. Research results show that economic, social and spiritual benefits can be derived from faith-based activities. These have strong implications on religious tourism development in the study area and the country at large. The study recommends that concerted effort by relevant stakeholders should be made to harness the potential of these faith-based tourism activities and utilise them optimally to boost tourism development in the region and the country. The outcomes of this study can be replicated in other growing economies across the globe where faith-based activities promote increasing interest and visitation.

Key Words: faith-based activities, Holy Ghost Festival, Osun Osogbo Festival, South-western Nigeria, tourism

Introduction

The words religion and faith are often used interchangeably as synonyms (Hick, 1993). Faith as used in this study refers to a belief in spiritual or supernatural being(s). This belief is enshrined in numerous practices known as faith-based activities. These activities (rituals, rites of passage, religious crusades, religious festivals, vigils etc.) are channels through which individuals or groups seek spiritual satisfaction. Travelling to faith centres to participate in faith activities is probably one of the earliest and most widespread forms of travel (Kaelber, 2006; Rinschede, 1992; FCCI, 2019). Such travel gave rise to faith-based tourism otherwise known as pilgrimage tourism, religious tourism, spiritual tourism and or faith tourism. Santos (2011 in Silva & Marques, 2016)

argues that the practice of religious tourism entails the realisation of activities such as pilgrimages, processions, visits to places considered 'holy' (shrines, temples, churches, etc.), participation in festivals of patron saints, spiritual retreats, religious or spiritually based seminars and other events that emphasise religiosity in tourism destinations. The spiritual potency of these activities has made faith-based activities a popular type of tourism, and therefore ripe for tourism commodification. Emphasising the relevance of this faith product, Pratiwi *et al* (2017) asserted that religious tourism contains religious value which is important in its blending of tourism and the numerous religious activities. The demands for religious and spiritual tourism products has led to the global proliferation of religious centres (examples in Nigeria include Redeemed Christian Church of God, Winners

Chapel, Synagogue Church of All Nations etc.) and related tourism service industries around the globe.

Thus, travel to participate in faith activities has significant social and economic impacts on many countries around the world (UNIVEN Research Report, 2015). Buttressing this assertion, Cohen (1984) stated that tourism encourages new economic activities in ancillary and complementary services and thus indirectly creates new opportunities for economic mobility among the locals. Silva & Marques (2016) affirmed that tourism, considered as an economic and social activity that promotes and involves the contact of tourist-community, can benefit the places wherein it develops including generation of employment and income, improvements in basic tourism, and support infrastructures, among others. Terzidou *et al.* (2008) are of the opinion that religious tourism can have similar economic impact as other forms of tourism such as job creation, population growth and infrastructure development. This implies that faith activities, as special interest events, have a highly complex impact on local communities (Gil & Curiel, 2008). Sanchez *et al* (2016) agreed that cultural events generate economic activity, income and employment wherever they are held, thereby promoting industrial and economic development in an area.

The economic potential of faith tourism leads to new commercial activities (Huang, 2011) as large numbers of visitors participating in faith activities can stimulate local economic development. Idris (2019) argued that with the increase in traveller numbers, many sacred sites and locations have had to further develop their infrastructure to keep pace with the huge demands of those making such trips. Sharman (2013) asserted that despite all its spiritual association and personal searching, faith travel has never been far removed from money-making and worldly considerations. This is because:

while conserving [their] spiritual meaning ... sites of religious interest have adapted to the new visitors' needs by acquiring infrastructure and structures for providing transport (car parks, low-cost flights, coach lines), catering and accommodation for the pilgrims / tourists. The latter also generate demand for tourist goods (religious souvenirs, local food and craft products) and services (travel

agencies, specialized tour operators). There is a proliferation of promotional activities and complementary initiatives of a cultural nature (concerts, festivals, shows). These changes, which partly reflect the parallel socio-cultural transformation of the average visitor, have led to a profound reorganisation of the places involved, with consequent socio-economic and environmental impacts (Trono, 2017:113).

Thus, faith-based activities are an important element of growth in the tourism industry. Indeed globally, religious cities such as Mecca, Jerusalem and the Vatican City attract millions of visitors every year (FCCI, 2019:29), and no theologians or other theorists could deny the economic impacts of religious travel (Vukonic, 2002:65) which begins and ends with tourist expenditure. This expenditure has the capacity to stimulate local and regional development. The use of festivals, a prominent sociocultural activity, as an instrument for tourism development has gained worldwide acceptability over the years (Felsenstein & Fleischer, 2003; Nair & Babu, 2022). Writing about such events in a religious context, Hughes *et al* (2013) rightly observed that by providing services and products to attract and satisfy different types of visitors, local communities can improve their living standards and overall quality of life.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the influence of faith-based activities on tourism development in Nigeria with a focus on Christian (more specifically Pentecostalism) and African traditional religions. As Bello & Bello (2017) note, Pentecostalism is heavily promoting religious events and tourism in Nigeria through the upsurge of evangelical activities including conferences, seminars and festivals held in various parts of the country. This paper argues that this type of faith-based activity can be exploited for tourism development purposes.

Literature Review

Faith-based activities originated out of human desire to commune with transcendental Beings or a single Being to answer unknown questions. They comprise mainly ceremonies, conferences, festivals, retreats, missions, evangelism activities, revivals, among other activities created by various religious groups. Presently, for a

faith activity to be successful, particularly one that requires a minimum of an overnight stay, participants and event organisers need to rely on the services of the tourism industry and ancillary services to meet their varying travelling needs. Indeed, the needs of the faith participants require the presence of tourism service industries, including accommodation, transportation, food, drink, sale of spiritual objects and the likes. These types of expenditure, Felsenstein & Fleischer (2003:389) stated

are a necessary first step toward assessing local economic change attributable to the [event]. Local product growth is reflected foremost in the change in local private and public income that can be attributed to hosting [an event].

This change will be induced through either visitor-related spending or local expenditure arising from the production of the [event]. Expenditure is converted to income by taking the wages component from output in four subsectors in which tourism-related services occur: lodging and accommodation, food services, personal services, and retail trade (Fleischer, 2003).

The discussion above shows some of the possible benefits that can accrue to a nation's economy (specifically Nigeria, the case study) through the commodification of its religious products. Many authors have argued that religion is a driving force of tourism development (Hyde & Harman, 2011; Kaelber, 2006; Dora, 2012; Okonkwo & Eyisi, 2020; Nair & Babu, 2022). For Pourtaheri *et al.* (2012) and Sharpely & Sundaram (2005), religion has played an important role in the development of human activities, including tourism. Park (1994) and Pourtaheri *et al.* (2012) have stressed that religious events such as pilgrimages play a significant role in religious centres such as Mecca (Saudi Arabia), Jerusalem (Israel), Loreto (Italy), Lourdes (France), and Sabarimala Ayodhya (India). Indeed, religious sites all over the globe are patronised by an increasing number of faith tourists (UNWTO, 2011). Islamic faith-based activities, such as Hajj and Umrah attract millions of faith tourists to Saudi Arabia each year. For instance, Saudi Arabia received more than 19 million pilgrims for Umrah and 2.5 million pilgrims for Hajj in 2019. Combined, these pilgrimage events contributed approximately \$12 billion or 7 percent of Saudi Arabia's total GDP and 20 percent of its

non-oil GDP (TRT World, 2020). There is little wonder then, that in Mecca there is a saying 'we do not need any agriculture – God has given us the pilgrims as our annual crop' (Reader, 2014:86). Illustrating the major economic impact of the Hajj, Orukpe (2017) notes that Med-View Airline Public Liability Company (Plc), disclosed that its highest revenue is from its hajj operations. Orukpe goes on to note that the revenue the airline made from its Hajj operations from Nigerians as of December 31, 2016 stood at NGN 5,619,552, (Nigerian Naira / NGN - \$1=NGN360) operating cost NGN 2,964,139 and gross profit NGN 2,655,413. It is therefore apparent that religious / pilgrimage tourism is one of the main growth drivers of Saudi economy.

Apart from Saudi Arabia, in most parts of the globe, specifically Europe and Asia, pilgrimages are vital faith-based activities that have revolutionised the economy of many destinations. Park (1994; 2004) noted that there are more than 5,000 pilgrimage sites within Europe that are visited by an estimated 70 to 100 million people per year. Using the small town of Lourdes in France as an example, Park (2004) observed that the small town, by the mid-1980s had the infrastructure to provide 90,000 places for pilgrims (a third of them in hotels and guesthouses, almost half in dormitories and youth camps, and the rest in private quarters, flats, 'religious' houses, hospitals and camp sites). The growth of this pilgrim traffic has been accompanied by changes in the townscape, including the widening of streets, and the renovation and demolition of old buildings as well as the construction of new hotels. Higgins & Hamilton (2016) affirmed that Lourdes' religious activity expanded the town to 208 hotels, 100 restaurants and 220 souvenir shops providing for over 30,000 pilgrims. Hence, the local economy of this small town is highly dependent on the annual income made from pilgrim and tourist expenditure (Zola, 2014).

Similarly, Karar (2010), focusing specifically on religious tourism in rural Iran, noted that rural communities can enhance their regional economy through religious tourism. Pourtaheri *et al.* (2012) also argued that religious tourism is one form of social and economic relationship that could strengthen local economies through developing linkages between rural households and tourists. In their study of Dengfeng City of China (a rural community), Mu *et al.* (2007) noted that the city receives about 3.2

million tourists every year, 81% of whom come to either the Shaolin Temple or the Zhongyue Temple a sacred Taoist site. At its peak, such activity highly influences the socio-economic fabric of the community. According to Collins-Kreiner (2010) approximately twenty-eight million Hindu pilgrims and religious tourists travel to participate in religious rituals in the famous Ganges River annually. Supporting this, Vijayanand (2013) in his study of faith-based travel in India postulated that faith is the greatest stimulant for economic activities, which could generate revenue on a sustainable basis without putting pressure on the environment. This implies that India requires virtually nothing except faith to woo religious tourists yet stands to gain much from tourist expenditure, which according to Aurangabadkar (2012), can be a strong point for India in the area of economic development. Similarly, Baby (2003) from his study of Sabari pilgrimage to the famous Ayyappa temple observed that it had enormous effect on the rural town of Erumely. Erumely is the major transit point of the Sabari Pilgrimage which is customary for all devotees to visit on their first Kanni Ayyappan pilgrimage. The impact of this visit has been one of the major factors that sustains the town. Therefore, the availability of religious centres is of immense importance to the growth of faith activities. In his study of visits to sacred sites in UK, Rotherham (2007) revealed that around 12 million people annually visit nearly 17,000 churches and chapels across the United Kingdom. These visitors are the cornerstone of an emerging tourist economy in an era of severe economic and social decline (Smith, 2004) and this is replicated in many other religious destinations around the globe. Rome was probably the first world shrine which not only felt the economic impacts of pilgrimage but undertook certain activities to increase that impact (Vukonic, 1998) through the development of numerous religious sites scattered all over the city. Similarly, Israel enjoys such tourist patronage on account of its numerous religious sites scattered all over the country which transcend Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The aftermath of these religious journeys includes economic development and other benefits for local areas.

Value of Faith Tourism in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the festival of the Holy Ghost Congress held at the Redeemed Christian Church of God attracts

over 3 million visitors per year, from 34 countries (14 African and 20 Non-African countries) (Mbanefo, 2016). Over \$10 million is spent on accommodation and food during the seven day Congress by foreign delegates, and approximately \$200 million (Nigerian Naira / NGN 22 billion) by domestic delegates on accommodation, transportation, food, and souvenirs.

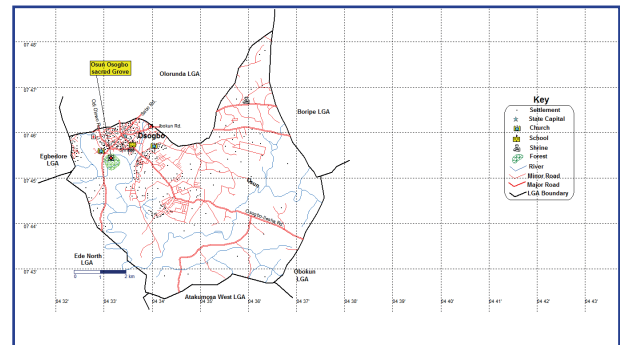
Another annual gathering (popularly known as Shiloh) by the Winners' Chapel in Otta, southwestern Nigeria, attracts approximately 4.5 million visitors. The 2007 'Shiloh' gathering attracted delegates from many different countries of the world, with foreign delegates spending an estimated \$1.5 million, while Nigerian delegates spent approximately \$630 million during the course of the eight-day festival (NTDC, 2008; Uko, 2008).

Mbanefo (2016) has calculated that 4,037,808 tourists visited Nigeria in 2013, spending NGN 649.47 million out of which religious tourism alone generated over a million domestic tourists. The Osun Osogbo festival recorded 21,713 domestic tourists including 123 international tourists with a total expenditure of NGN 58.23 million in the same year. Based on these numbers, Mbanefo suggests that religious centres are veritable tourism gold mines for Nigeria. To make this argument further, Mbanefo notes that in the same year the Abuja Carnival recorded 19,015 domestic tourists, including 113 international tourists earning NGN 147,385,250.

The World Travel and Tourism Council, WTTC (2015) recorded that the direct contribution of Tourism to GDP in 2014 was NGN 1,560.2bn (1.7% of GDP) with 883,500 jobs generated. The statistics from the work of Mbanefo (2016) provides an economic indication of the value that faith based tourism can have in an economy where the government and the private corporate sector support it. Thus, faith-based activities are tourism products that yield major benefits to regions around religious centres in Nigeria. These ritual activities attract faith tourists whose needs create opportunity for regional development through the establishment of faith tourism related industries.

Apart from economic wellbeing, faith tourism also contributes to social and cultural wellbeing and solidarity of communities. As such, tourism, including the faith

Figure 1: Maps of Nigeria (left), Redemption Camp (top right) and Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove (bottom right)



Map of Nigeria - https://www.cia.gov/static/a8ddf98ed64d09d058edc13b2037ebaa/Nigeria_Transportation.jpg

Map of Redemption Camp - Source: www.domedialtd.com

Map of Osun Osogbo sacred grove - Source: Department of Geography, UNN, 2012

tourism niche market has become the priority tool for rural planning and a lever for social development (Pourtaheri *et al*, 2012). As Sanchez *et al* (2016) stated, the social and cultural dimensions of traditional celebrations benefit host communities in the form of communal identity promotion, social cohesion, preservation and revitalisation of traditions, educational development, conservation of art, improved lifestyles and social capital.

Study Area

This study was undertaken at two religious centres in south western Nigeria: the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) in Ogun State and the Osun sacred Grove in Osun State (Figure 1). The Redeemed Christian Church of God is one of the most renowned Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Its new headquarters are located on the Lagos-Ibadan expressway, Ogun State. The Church

was founded by the Late Mr. Akindayomi Josiah Olufemi as an independent prayer fellowship – *Egbe Ogo Oluwa* – or the Glory of God fellowship – in 1952 in Ebute-Metta, Lagos State. At the death of the founder in 1979, the leadership of the church passed to the present General Overseer, Pastor Adeboye Adejare Enoch.

Osogbo town is known for its rich cultural heritage and as the location of Osun Sacred Grove, which has been recognised as a World Heritage Site since 2005. The Grove is a 75 hectares area of undisturbed primary forest along the banks of Osun River, one of the few vestiges of primary rainforests left in Nigeria (NCMM, 2004). The longevity of the Grove is attributed to its cultural relevance to the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria. The Grove is the cultural centre of the Osogbo people, where the annual Osun goddess festival narrates the immigration story of the people to Osogbo. The entirety

of the sacred grove is proliferated with artistic expression of many sculptures depicting the Yoruba pantheon of gods and goddesses. Thus, the sacred Grove is the physical abode of many Yoruba gods and goddesses. The revival of the site is in no small way due to the artistic skill and achievements of Suzanne Wenger and other artists involved in the New Art Movement of Osogbo. Through her sculptures, Wenger has shaped Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and thus helped to revive Yoruba cultural heritage. Numerous sculptures depicting gods and goddesses are alive through worship. The Grove was declared a National monument in 1965 by the Federal Department of Antiquity, now National Commission for Museums and Monuments –NCMM and in 2005 was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Methodology

As noted above, this study focuses on two religious groups and centres. This was intentional. First, the sites represent the religions which are being explored; The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) - a Christian site, and Osun Sacred Grove - a site of African traditional religion.

Secondly, both sites are locations where well established and recognised religious events take place. RCCG is a large Pentecostal Christian organisation with regular monthly and yearly faith-based activities. The Holy Ghost Service, the Holy Ghost Congress and the Holy Ghost Convention have all been hosted physically for over three decades. During the pandemic they continued, but were virtually transmitted. The Osun Sacred Grove was selected due to the continuity of Osun Festival, an African traditional faith-based activity which has earned the grove its World Heritage status. The Osogbo festival is the largest event in Nigeria dedicated to a traditional deity and has become an international tourist attraction drawing thousands to witness the grandeur of the festival and give praise to Osun (Murphy & Sanford, 2001). The festival has earned international prestige, especially among the Yorubas Diaspora. In addition, the Osun goddess is known across the globe, as Murphy & Sanford (2001) pointed out in their book *Osun Across the Waters*. The Osun goddess has crossed the waters of Africa to other nations and is now known by different names (Ochun – Afro-Cuban, Oxum – Brazil, Oshun etc)

yet remains the goddess of the River Osun. As a result, the Osun Osogbo Festival which is celebrated in Osogbo town, Nigeria, is duplicated in other nations of world (Brazil, Latin America, Caribbean, England, USA, Cuba, Spain, Argentina, etc) where the river goddess is known and worshipped.

Data were elicited from respondents using the techniques of direct observation, in-depth interview and focus group discussion. A total of 60 respondents were selected for the study. The respondents were selected at both religious centres on the basis of their insight and demonstrable understanding of the subject matter. In Osun sacred grove, the respondents included:

- 9 Osun devotees,
- 4 *Iworo* (Osun priests and priestesses),
- 1 *Arugba* (Osun sacrifice bearer),
- 2 staff of NTDC (Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation) Osogbo,
- 2 staff of Osun Museum,
- 2 staff of NIHOTOURS (Nigeria Institute for Hospitality and Tourism) and
- 5 tourism service providers (hoteliers, food vendors and business retailers).

At RCCG, the respondents were

- 4 Redeemed pastors,
- 3 ushers,
- 17 faith participants,
- 3 Hotel professionals,
- 3 Food vendors, and
- 5 business retailers.

The faith participants and officials at both religious centres were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. Direct observation was employed at both religious centres to gather information on the processes of the faith-based activities. Two focus group sessions were held in the study locations to elicit information from business retailers on the impact of faith activities on businesses in the area. Also faith participants were interviewed to document their experience.

Figure 2: Flow of Participants in Arena Auditorium Redemption Camp

Source: Authors 2017

The data elicited were analysed thematically using descriptive analysis to provide detailed descriptions of the findings - to make them meaningful (Dey, 1993). All the data collected were classified into two different categories in line with the two faith-based activities studied (Christianity and African traditional religions).

Faith-based activities of the Study Area

Holy Ghost Festival

The Holy Ghost Festival is the umbrella name for a series of three activities that take place in the Redeem Christian Church of God (monthly Holy Ghost Services, the annual Holy Ghost Convention, and the Holy Ghost Congress). These events, according to Pastor Tunde (RCCG pastor, Delta State province), were the inspiration of its leader, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye fondly called Daddy GO (General Overseer). The Holy Ghost Festival is a very popular religious festival, as attested by an estimated 3 million faith participants who attended the Festival in 2015 (Figure 4).

The Holy Ghost Service is an all-night miracle service, which is held on the first Friday of every month at the Redemption Camp (RCCG headquarters along the Lagos-Ibadan expressway) except in March where the event commemorates Daddy GO's birthday and instead, lasts three days. According to Mrs. Okunlola (faith participant),

the unique features of this event are the many miracles, signs and wonders, words of prophecies, healing of chronic diseases, most especially deliverance prayers and blessing of ritual objects that take place (Okunlola 2016, personal communication).

These activities regularly attract participants to Redemption Camp (See Figure 2).

The Holy Ghost Convention is used to mark the end of the church's calendar year and the beginning of the next. The event is held annually in the month of August (August was divinely marked as the end of RCCG calendar year). The major activities of the Convention include: inventory of church annual activities (progress report of all branches of RCCG in the church), a graduation

ceremony of students from Redeemed Christian Church of God's Bible College, the ordination of clerics, the appointment of new leaders into ecclesiastical offices, deliverance services (special prayer rituals), seminars, bible teachings (Christian admonishment), preaching, and Holy Ghost baptism, among others. According to Mr. Henry (a respondent),

it is an important spiritual activity which, tells the story of the founder of the church (Henry 2016, personal communication).

The Holy Ghost Congress, as described by Pastor Tunde, is an exciting Holy Spirit-charged festival that was divinely revealed to Pastor Adeboye in 1998 as a night vigil. The Congress eventually turned into a six-day event in 2002 (Tunde 2017, personal communication). The major activities of this event include a wide variety of Christian musical ministrations and gospel songs by different choirs of the church, seminars, workshops, preaching and biblical teachings (Christian admonishment), the blessing of mantles (ritual objects), anointing, healing, communion services and more importantly the prophetic ministrations of RCCG Daddy GO.

The Osun Osogbo Festival

The Osun Osogbo festival occurs within a fourteen day span in August and attracts visitors from across the globe. An estimated 137,000 people participated in the Osun Osogbo festival of 2015 (NCMM, Osogbo 2016).

The activities of the festival commence with *Iwode Osun*, which is the public announcement by Osun priests, priestesses and devotees at market places. This event ushers in the Osun Osogbo festival. Once awareness of Osun Festival has been established, the next is the ritual washing of the paraphernalia (objects) of Osun worship known as *Ikunle Osun*, using the sacred leaves (*ewe orisa*). Afterwards, the event is officially declared open with *Ìwópópó* – a public procession of the King – *Ataoja*, and his entourage to the city centre to welcome participants. The procession is led by Osun drummers, followed by the *Ataoja*, his wives, chiefs (*Baales*), *Yeye Osun* (Osun chief-priestess), *Iworo* (Osun priests and priestesses), devotees, worshippers of other deities, and visitors. Attendees pay the king – *Ataoja* homage, and in return, the *Ataoja* prays for them and gives them monetary gifts.

Figure 3: Flow of Participants Inside the Sacred Grove



Source: Authors 2017

The next activity is the ritual dance by the King and entire Osogbo community around the sixteen-point sacred lamp (*atupa Olojumerindinlogun*). This is the legendary magical lamp which one of the founding ancestors of Osogbo land (Olutimehin) was said to have seized from spirit beings. After the ritual dance, the *Ataoja* organises a royal banquet for members of his cabinet, members of the royal families, Osun Osogbo Festival stakeholders and visitors. According to Mr. Odeyemi (an Osun devotee), this day is reserved for royal entertainment. The next ritual is *Ibori iboade* as Osunkolabi said, it is a form of sacrifice performed for the destiny of the ruling *Ataoja*, using the crowns and other royal paraphernalia of deceased *Ataojas* of Osogbo land (Osunkolabi, 2016, pers. comm). This sacrifice is performed to maintain communion between the living and deceased *Ataojas*. On this very day the *Ataoja* is not dressed in his royal apparel rather he is dressed like an ordinary native of Osogbo land. Prayers and incantations are made to all the assembled crowns of the departed souls of Osogbo rulers by *Iya Osun* (Osun chief-priestess) beseeching and soliciting their spiritual support. This activity is followed by *Ijo Arugba*, *Arugba's* day. This is the day that all living *Arugas* – Osun goddess sacrifice bearers are celebrated in appreciation for their religious services to the community.

The next ritual is the *Ayaba Isale* - a ritual ceremony used to appease the deceased wives of past *Ataojas*. *Iya* or *Yeye* Osun (Osun goddess chief-priestess) performs the ritual, after which comes *Idafa Arugba* – the spiritual fortification of *Arugba* on the eve of the festival procession. The grand finale is *Ojo-Osun*, a ritual procession during which, the current *Arugba* carries the people's offerings to Osun goddess at *Ojubo* (Osun shrine) to appease her. The faith tourists who have come to watch the procession follow the *Arugba* carrying *igba* (a gourd from the calabash tree) Osun on her head from the palace of the *Ataoja* through the sacred Grove to *Ojubo*, offering prayers and snapping their fingers and making circular signs around their heads to reject evil omens (unforeseeable unpleasant situations) (See Figure 3).

Thereafter, *Iya Osun* (the Osun goddess chief-priestess) gathers food gifts in a bowl which the *Iworo* (priest) carries to the river bank. The *Iworo* then eulogizes

the Osun deity with words of gratitude and pours the sacrificial items into the river. As an Osun priestess at the River bank said,

water taken from the river from this moment is no longer ordinary, but filled with healing powers (anonymous Osun priestess, 2017, personal communication).

As the sacrificial items float down the river, the people remove their hats and shoes and wash themselves in the river and pray. This marks the official end of the festival. However, a concluding ritual *ikoenserodo* takes place five days after the ritual procession, to appreciate the goodness of the goddess at the River bank.

Economic Benefits of Faith-based Activities

Tourism-related industries

The economic benefit accruing to religious centres from faith-based activities, as earlier noted, arises from the large number of people who visit these centres and participate in the offered rituals. The more people there are, the more opportunities various businesses such as manufacturing companies, eateries, sale of religious souvenir shops and others are able to grow and make money. This follows Marques *et al* (2019), who observed that during the festival in the shrine of our Lady of the Abadia in the city of Romaria, Brazil, hundreds of informal traders arrive to the city and hawk their wares. Streets in the vicinity of the church are the busiest locations where they sell their religious items, food, clothing, household items, electronics, and souvenirs to pilgrims and faith tourists. Apart from these mobile traders, residents of faith centres also engage in trading activities to benefit from faith tourism.

In the Redemption Camp, one of the unique businesses established by residents is a 'restroom' (toilet) business because of insufficient infrastructural facilities at the faith camp. According to one of the restroom proprietors, he opened his restroom for two reasons: to make profit and to keep the environment clean. As he noted to the authors:

I observed that small business vendors and faith participants (who sleep in the Auditoriums)

deface the entire environment with human waste. In order to put an end to such mess, I established the restroom business in 2012 and made between NGN120, 000 – NGN150, 000 - in 7days. By 2014, many landlords in the area joined the business' (Anonymous Rest room proprietor 2017, personal communication).

Affirming this, Marques *et al* (2019) asserted that many of the residents in Brazil have the practice of renting out spaces in their own homes, such as bathrooms and garages or even the whole house, to groups of pilgrims during the our Lady of Abadia festival in the city of Romaria. In their opinion, the residents do this to make extra income. They added that sometimes the residents get some extra income by working in the event as small informal traders, usually selling food or any other easy-to-handle products.

In addition to the establishment of service industries, the sale of religious objects and souvenirs is another thriving economic activity in our study area. Field observation revealed that traders come from neighbouring areas to sell all sorts of religious souvenirs to visitors during the events. Discussants at the focus group session revealed that local youths at the Redemption Camp noted that rather than being involved in unruly activities, they engage in repair of personal items like telephones, and footwear during the events to make money.

Employment

As stated earlier, the demands of faith participants has given rise to the establishment of tourism businesses around faith centres, creating employment opportunities and extra income for residents. As Trono (2017:123) asserted:

around the holy places, a trade in all kinds of religious souvenirs and local products develops. This is driven and sustained not only by the pilgrim's awareness that he or she may not get another chance in the future to repeat the journey to the holy place, but also by the 'gifting culture', which induces travellers to purchase souvenirs for relatives and friends, who often have special requests to fulfil, which significantly amplifies the economic impact of each individual pilgrim.

This need to buy religious souvenirs has created seasonal employment opportunities for people, especially members of the community who market products and services. The seasonal business opportunities of various kinds (such as sales of religious souvenirs, clothing and footwear, food items and accommodation) are only open during the faith-based activities, after which such opportunity closes. Nevertheless, many unemployed youths within the area of the religious centres seize such opportunity to procure *ad hoc* jobs. Attesting to the above fact, a staff member of Deli Foods Company Lagos stated

Whenever our company is preparing to participate in any religious events, they employ sales persons for the purpose. As you can see all over the camp ground, we positioned them to advertise our products and we pay them commission (Deli Foods employee, 2017, personal communication).

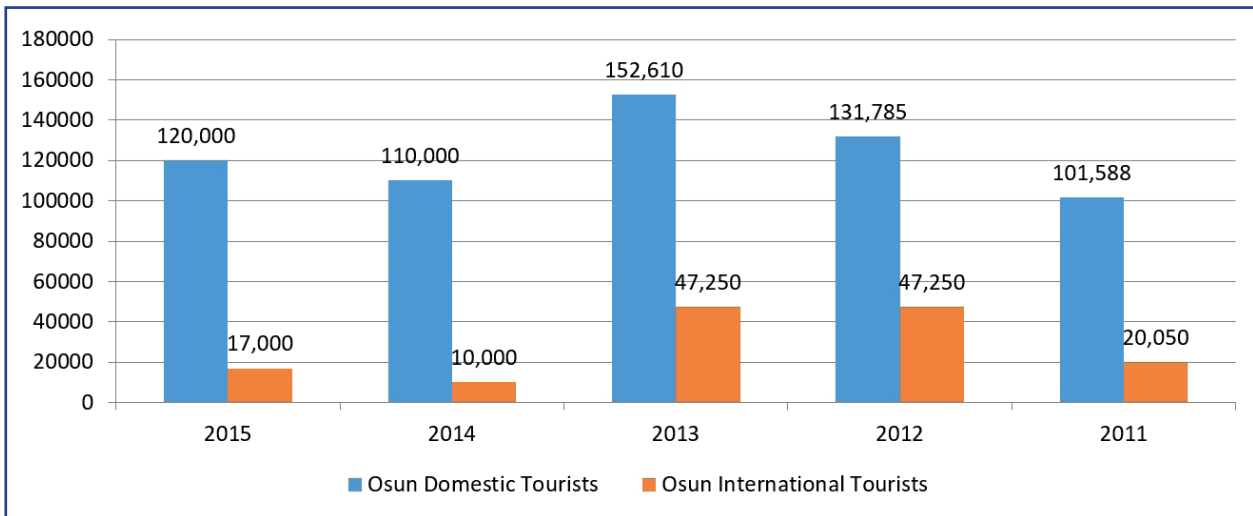
One of the sales persons said:

I always look forward to doing this job every time during Holy Ghost Convention and Congress since I am not formally employed elsewhere (2017, personal communication).

Many of the businesses in the religious centres often pay for business space. In the Redemption Camp, the rent of such spaces falls under the Christ Redeemer's Ministry (the business arm of RCCG) while land owners or locals rent spaces to businesses during the Osun Osogbo. Through the renting of these spaces many locals are able to augment their yearly income. Similar development is recorded in Romaria as attested to by Marques *et al* (2019:141) when hundreds of informal traders arrive in the city for our Lady of Abadia festival. As they put it:

Traders install themselves on the pavements of Romaria's residents and pay fees to 'rent' the space. They also pay a fee to the city council authorizing their temporary establishment in the public space. The amount they pay varies according to the pavement's location relative to the shrine and also the size of the plot taken: the closer to the temple and the greater the size of the plot, the higher the municipal and rental fees.

Figure 4: Statistics of visitors to Osun Osogbo Festival from 2011 – 2015



Source: National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) records (2016)

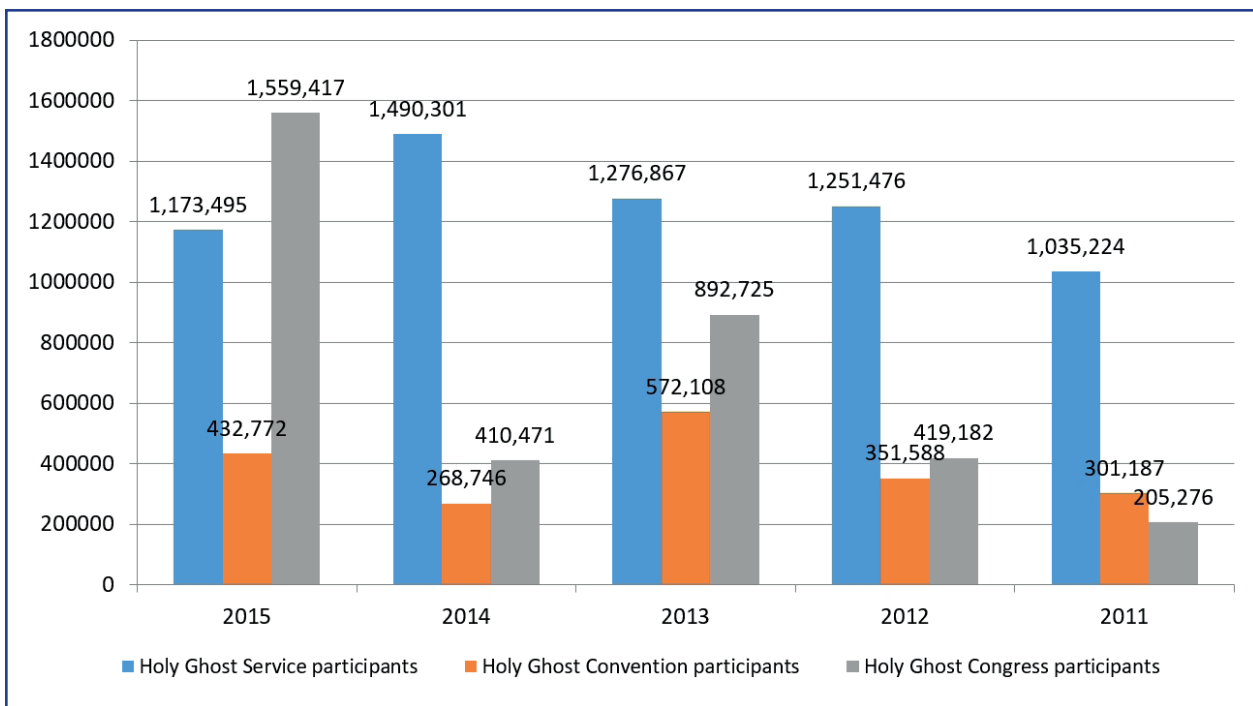
In other words, religious centres are not just spaces for staging spiritual activities but they also provide income yielding opportunities.

Sponsorship and Economic Empowerment

Various companies sponsor many of the aforementioned events and use them as avenues to advertise and promote their products and as well fulfil their social

responsibility. Such companies as Mobile Telephone Network, Nigeria – MTN (A South African based multinational telecommunications company operating in Nigeria), Nigeria Brewery PLC and Grand Oak Limited Nigeria (these companies deal with marketing and sales of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages) sponsor these events. These sponsors regularly boost the event with free distribution of their products and gift items (money, electric generators, gas cooking stoves and cooking

Figure 5: Visitors to Holy Ghost Festival 2011- 2015



Source: National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) records (2016)

utensils) to faith participants. A beneficiary of a Grand Oak gift item attested that:

These companies usually give us many gifts although sometimes you must buy their products before you can be given anything or participate in any raffle draw. These gifts make many of us happy and eager to look forward to the event the next year (Anonymous Grand Oak gift item beneficiary, 2017, personal communication).

In 2015, MTN gave 20 residents of Osogbo NGN 100,000 each to launch their own small businesses, while the Nigeria Brewery PLC gives out gifts annually to festival participants who patronise Goldberg beer, using a raffle draw. Grand Oak Limited used Seaman's Schnapps to sponsor and promote *Opon-ayo*, a traditional indoor game. They give various monetary rewards to winners, which also contributes to the community's quality of life.

Infrastructural facilities and Intra-regional Development

The increasing visitor numbers (from 1.5 million in 2011 to 3.1 million for RCCG and 121,000 in 2011 to 137,000 in 2015, for Osun Osogbo Festival - see Figure 4 & Figure 5 respectively) associated with these activities has culminated in the construction of new infrastructures within and around study centres. According to Trono (2017:116),

religious tourism has enabled the creation of large-scale infrastructure while encouraging the use of commercial means of transport and accommodation structures. The billions of dollars' worth of business generated by the hundreds of millions of people who travel each year for religious motives, benefit first and foremost hotels, which have shown great interest in a sector that is able to generate not only wealth but tourist flows even in the low season. Their number has grown significantly.

The Osun Osogbo Festival has attracted numerous hotel investors, making the hotel business highly competitive in the town. According to the manager of Balinga Guest House in Osogbo,

our annual research shows that virtually every year a new hotel springs up in the town

to provide services to the numerous national and international tourists and researchers that troop to the sacred grove (2017, personal communication).

As one of our informants (an Osun devotee) puts it

Osun sacred grove has attracted fame and development to our community. The name of our state is Osun and Osogbo where our mother stays, is the capital. ... Even the government is trying to expand the road leading to the grove to reduce traffic jam during Osun festival (2017, personal communication).

A similar pattern exists at the Redemption Camp due to the increasing numbers of visitors to the religious centre. For instance, the first auditorium that was built in 1990 was expanded three times before a new one was built in 1996, and a third auditorium called The Arena was built in 2005 to accommodate approximately 1.5 million worshippers. A new auditorium is under construction in the Shimawa area of the camp measuring 3KM by 3KM and is estimated to be able to seat approximately 12 million people when it is completed.

Many other businesses, including transportation terminals have been attracted to Mowe-Ibafo community where the camp is located. Facilities (hotels of various standards, banks, hospitals, Amusement parks and eateries) are springing up rapidly while many old structures are regularly undergoing reconstruction and expansion so as to cater for the growing population. Direct observation and reports from locals and business owners at both religious centres reveal that the increased activities (expenditure) emanating from faith tourism have been one of the major economic boosts in the study areas.

Social and Spiritual Benefits of Faith-based Activities

Community Solidarity

Faith tourism as described above requires the coming together of participants during rituals associated with the site and its events. This coming together can lead to social and community solidarity. Faith tourism can promote social union among people irrespective of their

religious inclinations. Woosnam *et al*, (2015) in their study on ‘Solidarity at the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove’ note that residents and tourists indicated experiencing a high degree of emotional solidarity with each other. The solidarity associated with Osun festival is so explicit that it cuts across the religious differences of participants and residents.

Osogbo town consists mainly of Christians and Muslims, but when asked about the impact of Osun Osogbo Festival many people, particularly indigenes, responded much like one informant (A Muslim participant) who said:

it brings all Osogbo people together including Ataoja and our people abroad to appreciate our ancestral mother and guardian deity (2017, personal communication).

During the Osun Osogbo Festival, diasporic sons and daughters of Osogbo return to celebrate with their kinsmen and other visitors. The coming together of the local and diasporic peoples strengthens their social and kinship ties. This is often demonstrated by the *Ataoja* on *Iwopopo* day who, on his way back to the palace, enters different royal family homes with his entourage to greet and bless his people. This solidarity encourages repeat visitation to Osun Osogbo by indigenous Osogbo diaspora. As Woosnam *et al* (2015) observed, visitors to the Osun Osogbo cultural festival are most likely to revisit in future due to the cordial relationship and close interactions with the residents who welcomed and provided them a safe haven.

Security

Different categories of Nigeria’s security agents (Nigerian Police force, Nigerian Army, Nigerian Civil Defence Corps, and Vigilante Group of Nigeria, Osun State Command) patrol the grounds during festive activities. The presence of these security agents creates the image of a safe destination. Increased security is one of the factors that sustain faith-based activities in the country. At these events, tourist safety is a major concern for organisers because any acts of violence or harm against faith tourists could jeopardise the success of the event and diminish the attractiveness of the destination (Woosnam *et al*, 2015).

However, apart from the protection offered by security agents, many of the participants at Osun Osogbo Festival believe that the goddess Osun also protects them in line with her promise to their ancestors. According to an Osun devotee:

the goddess protected our ancestors from Fulani invasion by turning into a food vendor that sold poisoned porridge to them. And so, we believe that our great mother Osun until now still guards the entire Osogbo land (2017, personal communication).

This sense of security has continuously attracted people to Osun festival. As Woosnam *et al*, (2015) observed, personal safety in tourist destinations, especially at community festivals where many congregate at the same time, plays a prominent role in the continued success of such events.

A participant at the Redemption Camp commented,

the God of Adeboye protects all of us from danger of attack during and after the event (2017, personal communication).

This sense of security has contributed to tourism development in the region, as tourism will flourish in an atmosphere of peace, safety and stability.

Spiritual ties

Participation in the ritual activities at the centres is geared towards spiritual transformation, and revival. As one participant at the Redemption Camp noted,

The Holy Ghost Congress gives me the opportunity to draw closer to my God. For this reason, I schedule my annual vacation to enable me to participate in the annual Holy Ghost Convention and Congress (2016, personal communication).

During the Congress people spend much of their time praying at the altar in the auditorium at Redemption camp. The perceived efficacies of the events are recorded in the testimonies of participants. Many discussants at the focus group session in Redemption Camp remarked in summary that the different testimonies we hear give us

confidence that the problems we presented to God would be solved. Indeed, numerous testimonies presented to the authors affirm the spiritual efficacy of faith-based tourism products. Of particular note is the testimony of a woman who testified that the Lord blessed her with a baby boy after thirty-five years of barrenness in marriage (RCCG Faith tourist, 2018, personal communication).

Similarly, focus group discussions in Osogbo revealed that devotees came to the Festival to communicate with their mother goddess through the *Arugba* who carries their prayer requests to her. As one of the devotees said:

By coming here regularly, we renew our spiritual bonds with her through the Arugba (Osun devotee, 2017, personal communication).

Many of the participants who desire spiritual fulfilment are actively involved in the many rituals. Also, reports from in-depth interviews revealed that the water taken from Osun River is believed to have medicinal and curative powers. Some visitors and locals shared their belief with the authors that the water possesses the power to cure infertility in women, heal diseases, offer prosperity and ward off evil spirits. As an Osun drummer said:

the potency of the water is activated with prayers offered by the priest or priestess to the goddess during Osun festival; the river is spiritually charged with sacrificial items that have been poured into it (2017, personal communication).

Many focus group participants noted that they participate in Osun ritual activities specifically because of the potency of the goddess and her healing water.

Development of Religious Tourism Destination

Due to the presence of special faith-based activities, the two sites discussed in this paper started as mere sites of localised worship, have subsequently developed into renowned faith tourism destinations. The Osun Osogbo World Heritage Site is proliferated with awe-inspiring spiritual sculptures. Talking about these religious structures, one of the staff of Osun Osogbo Natural History Museum stated,

the spiritual sculptures in the sacred Grove depict Yoruba gods and goddesses originally erected by Osogbo ancestors which were destroyed by the practitioners of foreign religions (Christianity and Islam), but later recreated by Susan Wenger, an Austrian Artist (2017, personal communication).

The religious activities associated with the sculptures intensifies the spiritual essence of the grove as each sculpture is believed to be alive through its function. The entirety of the sacred grove is proliferated with artistic expressions via the many sculptures depicting the Yoruba pantheon of gods and goddesses. This is the achievement of Wenger's artistic skill and the New Art movement of Osogbo. The numerous sculptures depicting gods and goddesses come alive through worship. Traditional adherents worship many of the sculptures and offer sacrifices to them regularly in the Grove.

Some of the sacred grove sculptures represent the following gods, *Ogun* (god of iron), *Esu* (god of natural justice), *Osun* (goddess of fertility), and *Sopoona* (the governor of the world and manager of open space who can inflict diseases when taboos are violated), among others. One of the unique sculptures is a chameleon spirit which possesses the ability to stop rain. At certain reoccurring events in the community like the case of the flood it was told that the people should go to the Grove to offer sacrifice to the chameleon spirit after which the rain would stop. In this perspective, the sculptures serve dual purposes as religious points of worship and also as heritage attractions. Many tourists visit the grove to appreciate these spiritual statues as the wonders of African traditional religion and culture.

The perceived efficacy of these events in helping relieve spiritual and physical problems beyond the abilities of humans, continually draws people to the site. This is similar to faith activities which have prompted the establishment of other faith tourism destinations in Nigeria, including the Winner Chapel Faith Tabernacle, the Synagogue of All Nations, the Deeper life Camp, and the Mountain of Fire and Miracle Camp among others. Many of these religious centres, at their inception, were in isolated thick forests, but faith-based activities have brought tourism infrastructure development projects to these areas. Talking about this, Eyoboka & Latona

(2016) note that regular activities by Redeem Christian Church of God have turned the one-time Lagos-Ibadan expressway forest area into a city with its own facilities. Ojo (2016:1) noted that:

Before the advent of Redemption Camp, the Ibafo, Mowe, Magboro and even Ogere areas of the state were sparsely populated and travelling through those areas was a nightmare. Today, many housing estates have sprung up in those areas largely due to the influence of the Redemption Camp.

Faith-based activities attract a great number of people, ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions. These crowds can be a major boost to local economies when considering infrastructure such as commercial transport owners, gas stations, food, photo and media vendors, soft drinks / bottled water companies, beggars / poor / needy, security-related agencies, and entrepreneurs all seeking to benefit from the visiting faithful (Adogame, 2011). In other words, it can be seen that faith-based activities generate the necessary conditions to stimulate the economy of the region.

Conclusion

Religion, as practiced by different cultures across the globe is firmly rooted in the belief of spiritual worlds and entities. These beliefs gave birth to different forms of religious belief and practice. These different practices are the means of expressing belief in the powers and influence of spiritual beings or a higher power. Participation in the faith-based activities of different religions is practiced in Nigeria to a large extent, and has contributed immensely to the development and promotion of tourism in Nigeria. As a result, faith-based activities have become a veritable religious tourism or as discussed in this work, have led to the development of faith based tourism products. Due to the popularity of these activities in offering spiritual succour to those in need, the number of participants has continuously increased, leading to religious sites such as the ones mentioned in this paper, becoming more established religious tourism destinations.

Faith activities have become an economic platform for the development of local economies and their contribution to the GDP of the nation is considerable. From the literature review of this work, evidence from Saudi Arabia, Israel, Italy and other faith tourism destinations shows that these activities are viable sources of economic empowerment for many regions. According to Terzidou (2008:114),

religious tourism has both an immediate impact on the hosts' environment due to the direct contact of the visitors with the religious institutions, and also an indirect impact on the local economy and the society. The first and most obvious impact of religious tourism is through the visits to the religious sites and the visitors' contact with the religious institutions. However, apart from the religious institutions, holy sites are often surrounded by religiously orientated businesses and facilities.

In south western Nigeria, faith activities stimulate both local and regional development. The demand of faith participants for amenities contributes to the improvement of basic infrastructure in the country. For instance, increasing numbers of users of the Lagos-Ibadan expressway has led to a need for the expansion of the road, allowing locals to drive with less congestion. Such demand also creates job opportunities and many business endeavours have sprung up around religious tourism sites. Participation in ritual activities by participants from different ethnic backgrounds also helps to break cultural barriers in a multi-cultural nation like Nigeria; thus, faith tourism builds cultural understanding within the country. From the foregoing, it is clear that faith activities contribute immensely to religious / faith tourism development in south-western Nigeria.

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