

## THE GODS AS TOURIST ATTRACTIONS: A STUDY OF AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION AS THE MAIN STAY OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN AFRICA

**George I. K. Tasié (Ph.D)**

Dept. of Religious and Cultural Studies,  
University of Port Harcourt,  
Nigeria.

### **Abstract**

*This article addresses the crucial issue of the tourism industry in Africa attempting to show-case the richness of African cultural heritage and spectacular natural resources as potential tourist attractions. The paper argues that Africa can become relevant in the global tourism market by exploring her rich cultural heritage and scenic wonders. The thrust of this paper, therefore, is to portray the close relationship between culture and indigenous African religion; and to show how the latter provides a model for interpreting natural phenomena as well as understanding and appreciating African cultural heritage.*

### **Introduction**

Tourism's new front row seat in African economy may remain an illusion and a day-dream for a very long time to come. This is because Africa's share in the global tourism market is low. In 1996 only about 3.5 percent of the 594 million tourists world-wide chose Africa as a destination. And of the approximately \$425 billion that tourists spent world-wide, tourists in Africa spent only \$5.1 billion, about 1.8 percent (see Appiah and Louis Jr., 1999: 858). This is largely because Africa, as yet, is a rural continent, lacking in basic infrastructures occasioned by mismanaged economies by irresponsible governments; with a population that is largely stricken by poverty. Tourism infrastructures – transportation system, hospitality industry and electricity – are in the main minimally and grossly underdeveloped. So also are tourists attractions in the form of man-made monuments (i.e. architectural master pieces), often preserved by official bodies, minimally visible. The strength of Africa's tourism, therefore, is not in magnificent architectural designs, due to scientific and technological innovations, which are synonymous with Europe and America. However, what technology could not bestow on Africa, nature has abundantly lavished on her. So when European or American tourists choose Africa as one of their target destinations, obviously they are not coming to see tall buildings, but to have a glimpse of the wonders of Egypt, to sight and take photographs of the 'big five' – lions, elephants, rhinoceros, leopards and buffalos – and other scenic wonders and spectacular cultural and natural resources. For Africa to make a statement in global tourism and have enough of its own fair share in the global tourism market, experts must begin to emphasize cultural tourism; for therein lays the strength of African tourism. Cultural tourism is wide and diverse and covers such areas as material culture like monuments and artifacts, handicrafts, natural endowments – mountains and caves, hills and valleys, rivers and lakes, forests and wildlife – and recreational aspects such as festivals, songs, dances, folktales and myths. Cultural tourism, therefore, should focus on the entire way of life and natural resources of a particular community, projecting and promoting those aspects that are peculiar to it, which may attract the attention of outsiders.

In traditional Africa, religion is an important aspect of culture. J.S. Mbiti's acknowledgement that religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it; and, his subsequent remark that a study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the

people themselves in all complexities (J. S. Mbiti, 1969:1), lends credence to the close connection between indigenous African religion and culture. More importantly, the African situation is one in which life is not divided artificially into the sacred and the secular, one in which reality is regarded as one, and in which the things of earth (material things and man's daily doings and involvements) have meaning only in terms of the spiritual reckoning with the material (B. Idowu, 1973:54). So, even though Africans conceptualize a dualistic cosmos – the material and the spiritual – the two realms often overlap; and without one the other will not be fully realized. For this reason, in traditional Africa, beings in this world have their spiritual equivalents, of which their material expression is but a manifestation. Chinua Achebe poetically captures it thus: 'Wherever something stands, something stands besides it' (Achebe in D. Nwoga 1984:33).

Thus, in indigenous Africa, the traditional religion provides a model for interpreting natural phenomena and features of the environment as well as understanding and legitimization of socio-economic and religio-political institutions. In this way, the indigenous religion exercises a moderating influence through taboos and a complex network of rituals, to define man's relationship with nature. So in Africa, the indigenous religion is an inevitable tool and a necessary gate-way into understanding and appreciating the aesthetic values of nature and the work of arts generally.

The aims of this paper, therefore, are two-fold. First, to show-case the richness of African cultural heritage and scenic wonders as potential tourist attractions; and second, to show that in indigenous Africa, this cultural heritage and scenic wonders have meaning only in so far as they are viewed against the background of the indigenous religion.

### **Man-made Monuments**

As I earlier noted, man-made monuments, as tourist attractions in Africa, as yet, are minimal. However, in the context of African tourism, especially with particular reference to man-made monuments, Egypt needs no introduction. Egypt boasts some of the continent's most ancient and spectacular monuments and artifacts and over the years has received a steady stream of tourists, most of who come to the Valley of the Kings, to see the pyramids for which Egypt is famous.

Egypt's architectural innovations became manifest, probably during the Third Dynasty, which could also mark the beginning of Egypt's golden age in cultural reawakening; when its second ruler, Zoser or Djoser, who reigned about 2737-2717 BC, constructed his mortuary buildings at Saqqarah. His architect, Imhotep, used stone blocks instead of the traditional mud bricks in the complex, thus creating the first monumental structure of stone; its central element, the Step Pyramid was Zoser's tomb (Appiah and Louis Jr. 1999: 668). The fourth Dynasty began with King Snefru and his building projects included the first true pyramid at Dahshor (south of Saqqarah). Snefru was succeeded by his son Khufu (or Cheops) who built the Great Pyramid at Giza. Although little else is known of his reign, that monument attests to his power and administrative skills (Appiah and Louis Jr., 1999: 671).

When Zoser and his descendants were constructing the pyramids, certainly, what was uppermost in their minds was to erect mortuary buildings which would provide them a final place of rest. However, little did they know that the splendour of the engineering feat of the pyramids would become one of the wonders of the ancient world; and provide a strong fascination for tourists, and place Egypt in the tourism world map. In spite of the aesthetic splendour of the pyramids, the funerary rituals of the ancient Egyptians which were richly coloured by their religious beliefs were the domineering influence in the development of the pyramids.

One remarkable feature of the pyramids was a body of religious spells, called Pyramid Texts carved on the walls of the pyramid chamber. Also remarkable was the richly furnished pyramids. A good example is the tomb of Tutankhamen which was found almost intact in the Valley of the Kings by the British

archaeologists, Howard Carter and Lord Carnarvon, in 1922. But why these elaborate mortuary buildings called pyramid?

For the ancient Egyptians burying the dead was of religious concern and their mortuary rituals and accoutrements eventually became the most elaborate the world had ever known. The Egyptians believed that the essence of being was made up of several spirit forces of which the most outstanding was the *ka*. The *ka*, a duplicate of the body, co-existed with the body during life time and, after death, left the body to dwell in the abode of the dead. The *ka*, however, could not survive without the material body; every attempt had to be made, therefore, to preserve the corpse. Bodies, according to reports, were embalmed and mummified according to a traditional method supposedly begun by Isis who mummified her husband, Osiris. In addition, wood or stone replicas of the body were put into the tomb in the event that the mummy was destroyed. The greater the number of the statue-duplicates in his or her tomb, the more chances the dead person had of resurrection. As a final protection, exceedingly elaborate tombs were erected to protect the corpse and its equipment (Appiah and Louis Jr., 1999: 671).

After leaving the tomb, the souls of the dead supposedly were confronted by uncountable hazards and the burial chambers were, therefore, equipped with a copy of the *Book of the Dead*. A section of this book, which provided a guide to the abode of the dead, was made up of charms devised to surmount these hazards. After arriving at the abode of the dead the *ka* was judged by Osiris, the king of the dead, and forty-two demon assistants. It was also reported that the *Book of the Dead* also contains instructions for proper conducts before these judges. If the judges decided the deceased had been a sinner, the *ka* was condemned to hunger and thirsty or to be torn to pieces by horrible executioners. If the decision is favourable, the *ka* went to the heavenly realm of the fields of Yaru, where grain grows 3.7m (12ft) high and existence was a glorified version of life on earth (Appiah and Louis Jr., 1999: 671).

All the necessities for the paradisaical existence, from furniture to reading matter were, therefore, put into the tomb. As a payment for the after-life and his benevolent protection, Osiris required the dead to perform tasks for him, such as walking in the grain fields. Even this duty could, however, be obviated by placing small statuettes called *ushabtis*, into the tomb to serve as substitutes for the deceased (Appiah and Louis Jr., 1999: 671).

So in appreciating this monumental architectural feat and the splendour of the pyramids, it would be far more revealing for tourists to understand the domineering influences which inspired such marvelous works of architecture. For, it is only then that the pyramids would be understood in their totality and their aesthetic values better appreciated.

In contrast to the ancient pyramids of Egypt is the modern use to which the *Ikenga* art symbol is put nowadays among the Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. A tourist to Owerri, the Imo state capital, in the 1980s could not help but be attracted to the giant size *Ikenga* figure erected near the governor's office (this beautiful piece of art work was pulled down by a military administrator who ignorantly perceived it as 'idol worship'). As if to reiterate the importance of *Ikenga* as a tourist attraction, the ultra-modern hotels at Awka and Nsukka towns were named after *Ikenga*. So also is the institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, which has *Ikenga* figure as its official logo as well as the name of its journal.

While tourists may be busy admiring and taking photographs of the life-size *Ikenga* art form and perhaps later retire to any of the *Ikenga* hotels; what probably they may not know is that they have been interacting with an important Igbo ritual symbol. For, indeed, as Ejizu has rightly pointed out, "a good grasp of *Ikenga* art and symbolism is central in penetrating the depths of Igbo personality and cosmos" (C. Ejizu 1991:233). For the Igbo generally, in spite of the artistic value of *Ikenga* (for *Ikenga* comes in various motifs), its worth really lies in the belief that it is a symbol of a man's strength and a determinant of his fortune. The Igbo is an achievement oriented people and a man's position among his kith and kin is

validated through personal solid achievements. Thus the Igbo are known for their doggedness and astuteness in business, and generally, for their enterprising attitude. It is against this background, therefore, that we may begin to appreciate the prevalence of the *Ikenga* emblem in both private and communal life of the Igbo. So the tourist, wherever he visits in Igboland, will certainly find loaded in a piece of *Ikenga* art form, “a highly successful integration of aesthetics conception and cosmology’ (Ejizu, 1991:234), all explaining the artistic skill and interpreting the fascinating supersensible world of the Igbo.

In much the same vein, a tourist to the Marina, on Lagos Island, will certainly be attracted to the statue of a man standing on one foot displaying an axe on top of the roof of the tall building of the corporate headquarters of Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). In addition to admiring this beautiful piece of art work and taking photographs of it, tourists would be curious to know the man whose statue stands atop this elegant building. This man is no other than Songo, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning.

Songo himself has an interesting and remarkable history. He is believed to be a historical figure and the fourth *Alafin* (king) of Oyo. There are various legends surrounding his person. One such legend holds that when Songo was king, he could kill by spurting fire from his mouth. His reign was despotic and high-handed. However, his authority was questioned by two of his aides. Growing jealous of them, he sent the two to fight against each other, hoping that both might be slain. However, he was himself deposed by the victor in the fight and he committed suicide by hanging himself on an *ayom* tree. After his death, Songo was deified, and took up the qualities of Jakuta, the original thunder divinity of the Yoruba ( Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:83-4).

Among his emblems is axe which is regarded as his instrument of punishment and which he still holds today as he stands aloof on one foot on the Marina. It is only with knowledge of this legend that tourists would cherish why Songo today stands atop of the electricity company. This, again, will help to account for his choice as the symbol of Power Holding Company of Nigeria, an agency solely responsible for electricity generation in the country. For, as we have seen, Songo is the god of thunder and lightning, and by association, the symbol of light.

### **Natural Phenomena**

In addition to man-made monuments, Africa is endowed with innumerable natural features of scenic beauty and wonders upon which a viable tourist industry can be profitably based. Take for example, the Bosomtwe Lake in central Ashanti, Ghana, which has become a tourist haven. Bosomtwe Lake is circular and it is eight kilometers across in each direction. Although the lake has no outlet, many streams flow into it. From time to time explosion takes place in the lake. This is explained as the outcome of the accumulation of gas. This gas is caused by the accumulation of vegetable matter which has decomposed in the bottom of the lake (G. Parrinder, 1949:47).

But the villagers think differently. They regard the explosion as a super natural occurrence. There is an interesting myth woven around this lake. The myth has it that Twe was a spirit who lived in the lake. One day he came out of the water and found a cast away old woman called Abrerewa at the bank of the lake, and had an amorous relationship with her. The offspring of their union is called Twe Adodo. Twe then promised the old woman that whenever she knocked on the water, he would send her fish. Fishermen must not use hooks or nets on the lake to catch fish; they cannot use canoe on the lake. Logs are used by the village fishermen. They usually balanced on these logs, while they paddle with their hands and catch fish in baskets of reed. Sunday is sacred to Twe. On this day people offer him an elaborate worship. Twe is believed to emerge from the lake and sit beside the lake among his followers (Parrinder: 1947:47).

Here we see how African people take a simple nature occurrence, surround it with myth and place around it a number of taboos to create an atmosphere of awe.

Very similar to Bosomtwe is the Ikongosi spring in Ekiti State in South West Nigeria. Ikongosi constitutes of warm and cold springs. The two derive from the same source. It is believed to be the only singular occurrence in the whole world. It is a tourist delight and attracts large crowds of both local and foreign tourist. Many traditionalists see it as a divine treasure and gift from the gods. Much the same could be said of the Kpambo and Fikyu mysterious rock formations in Taraba State, Northern Nigeria. The two rock formations found at Kpambo in Takun Local Government Area and Fikyu in Wukakiri Local Government Area have the appearance of human being wearing *agbada* (big flowing gown). They are believed to be legendary and offer tourists good viewing (R.K. Udo and A. B. Mamman eds., 1979:457).

In addition is the Marmara pond. This pond found in Wukari is also legendary. There are crocodiles in the pond. It also harbours several white fowls which are sighted on special days – especially Fridays. In the olden days, the crocodiles used to trek a distance of about 1½ kilometers into town unmolested and they are believed to pay homage to the *Aku-aku* (traditional head) (see Udo and Mamman (eds.) 1979:459). Also outstanding and welcoming to tourists is the Birikisu Sungbo shrine which is located at Oke-Eri, a village less than ten minutes drive from Ijebu-Ode – Ibadan road in South Western Nigeria. The major feature is a mysterious shrine, which was the original tomb of a noble woman, Birikusu Sungbo, who legendary stories traced to the Biblical Queen of Sheba. The bare grave (without tomb stone) is never swept but ever clean and weedless (Udo and Mamman (eds.) 1979:459).

The Olumo rock at Abeokuta has for years fascinated tourists. Abeokuta which was a spin-off of the Oyo Empire is tucked away under the protective cover of high rising granite rocks of the pre-Cambrian formation, central of which is the Olumo rock. Abeokuta itself, meaning under the rock, derives its name from the Olumo rock. The rock symbolizes not just unity among the Egba, but an unflinching protection and perseverance. It was around this rock that the early settlers of the Egba camped and found refuge from incessant wars and persecutions (Udo and Mamman (eds.) 1979:357). The Egba believe that the rock is imbued with some spiritual protective powers which provide sanctuary to those who come to it.

Perhaps one of the most outstanding natural features in the world today is *Mosi-oa-lunga* (the smoke that thunders) – the world's greatest waterfall – which was renamed Victoria, after the then reigning Queen of England, by David Livingstone. This spectacular scenery, which today is counted one of the seven natural wonders of the world, has attracted tourists both from within and outside Africa. The 'Smoke that thunders', as Victoria Falls is popularly known among the native residents, has very remarkable features. It is 350 feet deep, and 500,000 cubic metres of water pour over the edge of the fall every day. The cloud of mist and vapour rise 300 feet into the air and can be seen ten miles away. On his expedition along the Zambesi River, toward the Indian Ocean, Livingstone discovered this nature wonder. From a little island in the Zambesi, on the very lip of the falls, Livingstone watched this spectacular scenery and gave thanks to God. The falls had never before been seen by European eyes. Livingstone in excitement wrote:  
Scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight (Ben Alex, 1995:22).

He carved his initials and '1855' in a tree on that little Island.

Much of the awe and mystery surrounding this beautiful work of nature is derived largely from the people's world-view which is enormously coloured by the indigenous religion. In the traditional world-view, Africans often personify the impersonal, by looking upon impersonal phenomena as if they were personalities and ascribing traits of life to them. So people believe that spirits inhabit material objects, manifesting themselves through such objects. Therefore, for the native residents of the Zambesi, this marvelous work of nature is interpreted as the physical manifestation of the activities of spirit forces.

There are countless other natural features with large tourist following such as Mount Kenya and Cameroun, Rivers Nile and Niger, Ogbunike and Ajali caves scattered all over Africa which derive their full meaning and significance from the people's cosmology, myth and religion.

### **Festivals**

Africa, as I earlier noted, is still largely rural. In spite of the influence of Islam and Christianity, many people still hold strongly to the indigenous world-view, using it as a model to interpret events around them. People, by and large, are still rooted to their culture and "festivals are very popular and recurrent events in traditional life" (Chris Ejizu, 2007:82). This is very understandable because "Africans like to celebrate life" (J.S. Mbiti, 1975:19). But one significant aspect of African festivals is their intimate connection with the indigenous religion. They tend to have a lot of religious meanings and they are celebrated to commemorate or re-enact a particular religious experience.

The many cultural festivals in Africa are known to have attracted visitors, including other nationals. Take for example, the *Egungun* festival which has attracted thousands of visitors to Yoruba land. The festival holds annually and lasts for about a week. It is usually heralded by a wake in a place known as the 'Bush of the grove'. On the morning of the festival people converge at the central shrine from where the real festival begins. The *Egungun* themselves dress in masks and speak in esoteric language (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:229). The impression they give by their dressing and manner of speech is that they are from the spirit world.

During the festival the *Egungun* are imbued with the power to change into animals. In spite of its fascination among tourists, *Egungun* is an ancestral cult showing the belief of the Yoruba in life after death. An *Egungun* is believed to be the spirit of a deceased person who has returned from heaven to earth to visit his people. Hence he is called *Ara Orun* – 'The citizen of heaven' (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:230). So in appreciating the awe inspiring looks of the masquerades and their magical displays, the tourist, is at once, inevitably looking at ancestors who have assumed human forms to commune with their living folks.

Similarly, the Osun festival has become a success story of how traditional religious festivals could be promoted to become a tourist delight. Of particular interest is the Osun Osogbo shrine which has become a tourist centre in Nigeria. Tourists from Europe and America not only throng Osogbo to watch but also to participate in the festival. Very remarkable here is Sussane Wenger, a white woman, who is actively involved in the worship of Osun at Osogbo. She has brought much innovation, especially in and around the shrine with her artistic designs (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:86-7).

Osun is the goddess of river Osun which flows through the town of Osogbo. Tradition says she is the wife of Songo, the deified Yoruba god of thunder and lightning. Osun is an extremely benevolent deity bestowing fertility on barren women. Because of this, she is widely known as the "mother of children". She also bestows other material benefits on devotees (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:86). Every year a festival is held in honour of Osun at Osogbo attracting visitors from far and near. It is during this festival that devotees who had earlier in the year received favour from Osun congregate at the shrine to present their thanksgiving sacrifices. One of the main attractions is the procession of devotees to the river where the shrine of Osun is located. This is then followed by much merriments and traditional displays.

Of equal significance is the *Ahanjoku* festival. This festival is held annually in honour of *Ahanjoku*, the deity responsible for bountiful yam yield among the Igbo. Yam, the king of crops, is highly revered among the Igbo. The cultivation is strenuous and exacts much energy. Given the Igbo terrain which is prone to erosion, where flood washes away soil nutrients; holes have to be dug for the yam seedlings which are later covered with mounds of earth. The yam tendrils too require much care and attention as they have to be carefully directed to stakes. This is followed by sacrifices to *Ahajoku*. It is believed that if such care is taken

in the cultivation of yam and *Ahanjoku* sacrificed to, the yam will yield bountifully against all odds. This exacting nature of yam cultivation makes it the exclusive preserve of not just men, but men with outstanding prowess in farming. And this partly explains why the crop is so celebrated.

Nowadays, apart from the traditional festival that is held in nearly every Igbo village and town in honour of *Ahanjoku* and in celebration of yam; Igbo elites and scholars have added a new dimension to the celebration. An annual lecture, known as *Ahanjoku* lecture, is held in the Igbo heartland town of Owerri, where erudite scholars of Igbo origin and extraction and scholars of Igbo Studies gather to listen and discuss well researched papers on various aspects of Igbo life and culture. This annual *Ahanjoku* lecture, which is a harvest of papers, attracts large crowd of visitors to Owerri, making the hitherto sleeping city a beehive of activities.

Today, whether we are talking of the *Egungun*, *Osun Osogbo* or *Ahanjoku* festival, they no doubt, have strong fascination and attraction for tourists both from within and outside Africa. But the fundamental truth about them all is that they are products of the indigenous cosmology of the people.

Turning to safari tourism, another very interesting aspect of cultural tourism, for which countries of East and Southern Africa have become famous. In Kenya, for example, it is reported that a single lion is worth an estimated \$7,000 per year in tourist income, while that of an elephant herd is worth \$610,000 annually (Appiah and Louis Jr. (eds.) 1999:1858). Many restrictions and sanctions have been put in place to check illegal hunting and preserve endangered species. Some wild life management programmes and protection rights have pitched host communities against governments. Some of whom have been displaced from their traditional lands to make way for wild life parks, and many of whom face the chronic threat of crop destruction and even attack by wild animals (these people often claim their governments protect animals at the expense of people) (See Appiah and Louis Jr. (eds.), 1999:1858).

But these governments can earn more and minimize friction between them and their citizens if only they can explore another interesting aspect of Safari tourism which has remained largely unexploited, namely: totemic animals and the services of wildlife charmers.

Totemism is an aspect of the indigenous religion of Africa by which man's relationship with nature is organized. This involves the mystical and ritual relationship between a class or species of animals or birds or plants and a social group. In totemism species of snakes, animals, birds, or plants become an important symbol of identity and solidarity for a social group. This relationship is translated into a harmonious living in which wild beasts become friends of men. So it is not unusual in rural Africa to see colonies of harmless crocodiles, boar constrictors, pythons, etc. right in the middle of a village with unrestricted movement, strolling round with a deep sense of dignity, visiting people in their homes. There is a deep sense of sacred obligation to receive them and offer them the best hospitality affordable. There are also taboos not to kill or eat them. In the event where they are accidentally killed, funeral rites befitting that of a noble are accorded them. A gesture which will excite the envy of animal rights activists. In reciprocity, the totems are completely harmless and there are unconfirmed reports and exceptional cases of communities in Africa where they look after human babies while their mothers attend to domestic chores.

In Ivory Coast, for example, and indeed, some other parts of Africa, they are beginning to harness this important element of African religion for tourism gains. Tourists who are amazed at this brotherhood of beast and man through these communities to have a glimpse of this wonder, thus providing gainful employments for local residents who act as tour guides and pose these animals for photographs with tourists.

Similarly, it is not uncommon to see on the streets of major African cities large crowd of spectators gathered to watch wildlife charmers parading wild beasts in fascinating and breath-taking spectacles. Sometimes the display could involve the wildlife charmer engaged the beast, probably a hyena, buffalo or

rhinoceros in a duel to the admiration of the cheering crowd. At other times the display could just be comic. The charmer will hand over a stick of cigarette to a baboon, who he had ludicrously dressed up in a jacket, a pair of trousers and dark glasses; and the crowd would watch it smoke. Or it could just be the charmer commanding a python or boar constrictor to entertain the crowd by dancing to a piece of music. What is amazing in all this is how man in Africa, has used the power of medicine and the forces of nature to mesmerize and domesticate hitherto wild beasts and use them to eke out a living.

### **African Hospitality**

Another important aspect of African life that needs to be explored to boost tourism in Africa is hospitality. This is a remarkable part of African culture, which derives impetus from the indigenous religion and has remained largely intact in spite of the ravaging forces of modern change. In the context of African hospitality a guest is highly esteemed and specially treated; and considered more or less sacred. For the Ikwere, it is an abomination to kill or maltreat a stranger who has come under your roof to take shelter from rain or sun. So also it is their duty to defend such a stranger if he was fleeing from assailants.

Perhaps, one feature of African hospitality, which marks it out from many around the world, is the ever readiness of Africans to welcome visitors – invited or uninvited, known or unknown. The first encounter of a visitor with his host is characterized with exchange of greetings which often are symbolized with gestures such as kneeling, crouching, prostration, handshake, etc. It is in this process that the host and guest inquire briefly about the welfare of each other. African greetings, generally, are known to be unusually long and time consuming, at least, so they seem, in the eyes of non-Africans.

In African hospitality, greeting is important not just because it is a symbol of bond of friendship and trust but more importantly, it opens the way for the guest to receive favour from the host. For the Igbo in particular, Uchendu notes that strangers who cannot find their way or who need help of some kind have no difficulty among the Igbo provided they remember that among this people greeting comes first before anything else. Strangers who do not remember to greet their Igbo host may be accorded no hospitality (V. C. Uchendu, 1965:73).

Once a guest is received, it is the duty of the host to make him as comfortable as possible. For the Isiokpo-Ikwere, people are admonished to serve drinking water preferably with one's own drinking cup. This act of benevolence and humility is borne out of their religious belief. Among the people, it is generally believed that at the height of the dry season, when the heat of the scorching sun is at its peak, Ojukwu, the god of chicken pox, may manifest himself in the form of a shabby old man begging for drinking water. The old man is a repulsive and disgusting sight. When Ojukwu manifests himself to anybody in this form, begging for drinking water, the person must give him water, preferably with his own drinking cup. If he refuses the old man water or serves him with a cup befitting his appearance (dirty and shabby) he will be infested with chicken pox as soon as the latter leaves (George Tasie, 2000:149).

Among the Tiv the value set upon a visitor is evident when the host customarily permits his most senior wife to pass the night with his guest. In much the same vein, the Sango of the Central African Republic, say that the stranger is a baby and is welcomed and protected.

This deep show of hospitality in Africa is predicted on the indigenous religion. On one hand, people believe that ancestors and other patron deities visit in the person of a stranger and, therefore, a stranger should be given a very kind and warm treatment. On the other hand, Africans like the Hindu believe strongly that if someone does a good turn today, it would someday be reciprocated. That is why the Tohi say: when you go to someone's town and she kills a chicken for you to eat, it is not her fowl you have eaten, but your own chicken which is at home, because she will return the visit (P. Ibekwe, 2001:108). Similarly, this compelling attitude to show hospitality to strangers because someday you too could become a stranger and

need to be welcomed by others is further illustrated in the story of Ellen K. Kuzwayo, fondly called Tsholofelo (Hope) by her mother. She writes:

I remember the occasion when my mother sent me to the main road, about twenty yards away from the homestead, to invite a passing group of seasonal work-seekers home for a meal. She instructed me to take container along and collect dry cow dung for making a fire. I was then to prepare the meal for the group of work-seekers.

The thought of making an open fire outside at midday, cooking in a large three-legged pot in that intense heat, was sufficient to upset even an angel. I did not manage to conceal my feelings from my mother, and after serving the group, she called me to the veranda, where she usually sat to attend to her sewing and knitting.

Looking straight into my eyes, she said, “Tsholofelo, why did you sulk when I requested you to prepare a meal for those destitute people?”

Despite my attempt to deny her allegation, and using the heat of the fire and the sun as an excuse for my alleged behaviour, mother, giving me a firm look, said, *‘Lenao ga lo na nko’* – ‘A foot has no nose’. It means: You cannot detect what trouble may lie ahead for you. Had I denied this group of people a meal, it may have happened that in my travels some time in the future, I found myself at the mercy of some of those very individuals (E.K. Kuzwayo, 1998:14-15).

In all these examples, we see how a people’s world-view shapes their attitude to that of friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests. This is an important African value the tourism industry in Africa needs to explore to its own advantage.

## Conclusion

Let me conclude this paper by looking at another aspect of cultural tourism which Africa can also explore to boost its own tourism industry; that which is borne out of its own distinct historical situation, namely: the event of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which has in its wake created diasporic Africans. Ever since the release of the television series based on Alex Harley’s 1997 book, *Roots*, increasing number of African American tourists are visiting Africa to learn more about the slave trade. Their target destinations are mainly Goree Island, a major slave port off the coast of Senegal as well as sites in Benin, Gambia and Ghana. Harley’s book, in particular, has turned the village of Jufurre in the Gambia into a Mecca of a kind, for thousands of African American tourists. Nowadays the Gambia holds an annual Roots Homecoming festival which highlights the cultural ties between diasporic Africans and Africa. In addition to historic sites related to the slave trade, visitors can attend demonstrations of dance and wrestling, purchase traditional African crafts and arrange to stay with local families (see Appiah and Louis Jr., 1999:1858)

This idea of diasporic African tourists arranging to stay with local families is turning out to be a booming business in Southern Africa. It is reported, for example, that visitors to South Africa spend a night in the home of a Xhosa, Sotho, Pedi or Zulu family in the Lesedi cultural village outside Johannesburg. Residents of the village wear the traditional dress of their own people – cotton wraps for the Xhosa, fur loin cloths for the Zulu – and perform dances and story telling for the visitors. Similarly, in Zimbabwe members of the Shangana ethnic group began construction on a similar model village, where small members of visitors will be able to stay over night and participate in village activities. Its organizers estimated that the

venture had the capacity to generate \$1 million annually, helping fund such social services as schools and hospitals for Shangana communities (see Appiah and Louis Jr. 1999:1858).

A remarkable aspect of this kind of tourism is the cultural reawakening it is creating amongst Africans and persons of African descent. There is an increasing urge to preserve what is authentically African; and in recent time, Africans in the diaspora are beginning to genuinely search for their roots and a place they can truly feel at home. These model villages, for the diasporic Africans, try to recreate a world which has become so distant, bringing alive traditional African values and practices. For it is in these model villages that they watch African dances and listen to African songs, whose lyrics tell stories of the people's past, extol the virtues of the deities and bring to the fore the people's doctrinal and philosophical dispositions. It is equally in these model villages that they can listen to stories of heroes and legends and various African myths explaining the origin of the world, the phenomenon of death, the problem of evil and life in the after-life. While the tourist is relishing this copious oral tradition, he may probably not realize immediately, that he is gradually being led into the complex network of beliefs that characterized African Indigenous Religion.

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