

Critical Issues in the Valuation of Shrines in Southern Nigeria

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Abstract

The valuation of property for different reasons and purposes has existed since time immemorial. The progenitors of this exercise have always had recourse to either the international valuation standard or the varied local and national standards without much emphasis on philosophical, social and cultural circumstances surrounding shrines as property. In the valuation of shrines however, many factors come into play that the application of the international valuation standards will report a value that totally neglects the world view of the people who own the shrine and incidentally will lead to the reporting of a value inconsistent with the principles of valuation. This study examined shrines as property the valuation of which requires articulate and objective analysis of the culture of the community who own, use and worship them. The study adopted the use of questionnaires and interviews in the collection of data as well as the application of relevant statistical tools in the analysis of data collected. The study concluded that though shrines are properties that could be owned, they are special properties that are rarely sold in the market like other properties and may not likely be moved from place to place. They possess some unique characteristics that set them apart from other properties such that special care must be taken in the assessment of the value to reflect the views of the community which own, use and worship in them

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Background to the Study

Every society has its antecedents and roots. These are the things with which the society is identified and respected or otherwise relegated. In the same manner, every society has its own peculiar way of worship and sacrifices to their perceived creator. Africa and indeed sub Sahara Africa is very peculiar in its reverence of the creator by worship through African traditional religion. It is a fact that Christianity and other religions seem to be holding sway in most African countries yet the worship of God in the African traditional way remains the light that shines throughout humanity. No doubt, the church is seen as God's principally ordained agency for social and cultural transformation. It is perhaps the single most important indigenous, sustainable institution in any community, with members in virtually every sphere of society (the arts, business, governance, education, etc). This is particularly true of Africa where statistically almost 50% of the populations (about 400 million people) are Christians and where an estimated four million churches exist. Notwithstanding this obvious fact, the problems of Africa and underdevelopment persist. Ampadu (2011) is of the view that for the church to effectively advance God's intentions, an understanding of African Traditional Religion where shrines serve of tabernacles of the most high must be understood. Traditional African religion is the indigenous religion of the African before the introduction of any other religions on the continent. It is the aggregate of indigenous belief systems and practices which existed in Africa prior to the coming of Christianity and Islam and to which millions of Africans still adhere covertly or overtly. The term "traditional" is used to refer to the technique of cultural transmission, that is, oral tradition— stories, myths and proverbs—that are used in passing this religion from generation to generation. Beliefs are passed on to posterity through songs, folktales, dances, shrines, and festivals. Opoku (1978) explains that the term, "traditional" indicates a fundamentally indigenous value system that it has its own pattern, with its own historical inheritance and tradition from the past.

The Webster dictionary (2014) defines shrine as a holy or sacred place, dedicated to a specific deity, ancestor, hero, martyr, saint, daemon or similar figure of awe and respect, at which they are venerated or worshipped. They may contain idols, relics, or other such objects associated with the figure being venerated. A shrine at which votive offerings are made is called an altar. Shrines are found in many of the world's religions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese folk religion, Shinto, and Asatru as well as in secular and non-religious settings such as a war memorial. They can be found in various settings, such as churches, temples, cemeteries, or in the home, although portable shrines are also found in some cultures.

'Shrine' is a term that fails to describe the range of structures included within its boundaries (Insoll 2004, 105). The reason perhaps being because 'shrine' is derived ultimately from the Latin *scrinium* – meaning 'box' or 'receptacle', as in 'containers of sacred meaning and power' (Courtright 1987, 299). Within sub-Saharan Africa this can encompass the domed Muslim *qubba* of Ethiopia or the Sudan (Foucher 1994) to the single pot *yin* (destiny) shrine of the Talensi (Insoll 2008). Hence 'shrine' has been variously defined in the African context. Van Binsbergen (1979, 47–48) defines a shrine as an 'observable object or part of the natural world, clearly localized and normally immobile', and 'a material focus of religious activities'. Dawson (2009, vii) has referred to shrines as 'vessels'—containers for spirits or entities and as symbolic vessels.

Presently, shrines exist in every home being a means of communication between man and his God irrespective of the existence of Christianity and other religions. It is very unfortunate that Christians regard shrines as fetish objects and practices. They fail to understand that alters in their homes are shrines. In most Christian homes especially Catholics, there exist shrines of the Virgin Mary, Jesus, Joseph and the saints. Other Christian religions also do the same with the crucifix (cross of Jesus Christ). Shrine is central to worship.

The number of people practicing African traditional religion had decreased drastically in the 20th century with the influx of Christian missionaries under the auspices of the Western world. In some cases traditional religion concretized with Christianity, but in many cases indigenous rites were demonized by Christian missionaries who pointed out various cultural practices that were illegal under the colonial government. Earlier missionaries referred to many indigenous religious practices as *juju*. African religion is most present today in harvest ceremonies and masquerading traditions. Yet, community shrines for deities such as Igwe-ka-ala, Ama-di-oha, Ogwu-gwu, and others exist.

The shrines are managed by the “dibias” and chief priests. They are not appointed but selected by the gods to superintend the management of the shrines. The dibias and or chief priests are the mystic mediators between the human world and the spirit world and act as healers, scribes, teachers, diviners and advisors of people in the community. They are usually consulted at the shrine of a community's major deity. They are believed to be destined for spiritual work and have the capacity to see the spiritual world at any time, interpret what messages being sent as well as see the spiritual problems of living people. They are given the power by the spirit world to identify any deity by name and the possible ways of placating and negotiating with them. Dibias are thought to be revealed to possess the power over one of three elements of water, fire and vegetation. Those whose elements are vegetation can go on to become herbalists by their supposed instinctual knowledge of the health benefits of certain plants they are instinctually drawn to, fire element dibias can handle fire unscathed during their initiation, and water element dibias do not drown. They can partially enter the spirit world and communicate this by rubbing chalk on one half of their face.

Shrines are very essential in the transmission of prayers and supplications from human to the spiritual. It is at the shrines that the messengers of the Most High mediate between the living and the dead, the canal and the spiritual, the worldly as well as the heavenly.



Fig. 1. Igbo Ancestral Shrine



Fig. 2. Bini Ancestral Shrine and Alter



Fig. 3. A Chief Priest (messenger of peace)



Fig. 4. Dibia (Diviner) from the early 20th century with tools of his practice including bells and a miniature Ikenga figure.

Source: Eltis, David; Richardson, David (1997).

The Valuation of Shrines

Valuation in its simplest sense is the determination of the worth of a thing especially property. Property itself refers to the possessions of a person which includes all objects and things capable of being owned. Valuation is the process of estimating what something is worth. Items that are usually valued are a land and buildings, plant, machinery and equipment, motor vehicle, furniture and fittings, farms/other holdings, financial assets and liabilities. Valuations can be done on assets whether tangible or intangible, and a whole lot of other things that constitutes property. Shrines are properties and therefore are susceptible to valuation.

Many rural communities depend on nature to varying degrees for their wellbeing. Such dependence may be for food, raw materials for many uses such as building, basket weaving, carvings, and other uses, traditional medicines to satisfy their subsistence needs, and religious and cultural beliefs. Most of the goods gathered from nature being social and cultural are akin to public goods and are freely gathered by members of the communities without any person laying claim to ownership. Shrines have social and cultural values that should be determined by the Estate Surveyor & Valuer in accordance with the relevant law of the Federation (Cap E.13, LFN 2007). This is in line with the assertion by Redford [1995] that the *American Comprehensive Environment Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) 1980* established liability for publicly-owned natural resources whose values are non-market derivatives and need to be determined by novel methods of ascertaining values in the absence of an obvious market. Shrines do not have open market potential but must be assessed professionally to determine the worth.

It is estimated that 85% of land of Nigeria are rural (Okoronkwo, 2014) and falls under the management of the local government since they are outside the designated urban areas in accordance with the Land Use Act Cap L5 2(1)

- a. *“All land in urban areas shall be under the control and management of the governor of each state:*
- b. *All other land shall, subject to this Act, be under the control and management of the local government within the area of jurisdiction of which the land is situated.”*

The major occupation of the rural dwellers is agriculture for subsistence living. Being rural, the inhabitants are the main custodians of the culture of the different ethnic nationalities that inhabit the region. Uchendu (1978) points out that land in Southern Nigeria, had a “folk image” as it is not a mere piece of earth but a piece of earth that produced a sense of pride and attachment that was out of all proportion to the mere two hectares a family might hold, and land embodies the spirit of the Earth deity—a revered mother who blesses land with her bountiful gifts. Land is also the burial place for the ancestors, those invisible father-figures who bequeathed their land to a “vast family” which includes the dead, the living, and the unborn. Rosa *et al.* [2004] opined rural communities have a deep relationship to the lands they occupy not only as the basis for their economic subsistence but also as a central element of their cultural identity, social organization, and belief systems and that these same lands often provide important environmental services that depend on the labour and knowledge of the community members, as in the conservation of agricultural biodiversity. Most rural

communities rely on the natural resources to meet their basic needs. The extent to which these resources are valuable depends on the cultural practices of the community in terms of control and use of the environment. The extent of control and use of natural resources are determined to a large extent by the property rights held by the community (Rosa *et al.* 2004).

Groot *et al.* (2002) observed that value in economics is always associated with trade-offs and is usually measured in monetary terms but in their view, monetary measures fail though to incorporate other types of value which are critical to understanding the relationship between society and nature. They suggested alternative measures such as livelihood assessment, capabilities approaches, and vulnerability assessments for such goods where it is felt that economic valuation may not reflect their true values of which a shrine is part. In their framework, it is suggested that economic valuation methods may be direct market valuation, Indirect market valuation, Contingent valuations, and group valuations. They opine that for all types of ecosystem functions, it is possible in principle to derive a monetary estimation of the human preferences for the continued availability and maintenance of the related ecosystem services and for cultural goods and services; they recommended the contingent valuation method for their valuation.

Contributing to the valuation of non-marketable goods like shrines, Yagha [2000] stated that valuation has focused unduly on physical real estate with its attributes, neglecting the wider realm of value possessed by exotics which have a narrow market band or stock that have a dormant market. He opined that African exotic assets command a special place in the market because the continent was the cradle of civilisation and also because of the luxuriant geography and mysterious societies inhabiting it. Some of the assets are fruits, flowers, and herbs, spices, animals and wildlife, forests, parks, and nature reserve, artefacts like totems, ornaments, shrines, and sacred places.

Need for the Valuation of Shrines

The UNESCO Recommendations of 1962 stated the need to safeguard landscapes, natural environments and those created by man, that are of cultural or aesthetic interest, or which form a natural harmonious whole [Vecco, 2010]. Ogunba and Adegunle [2013] define cultural heritage as legacies of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations, and that they comprise works of nature or works of man which have significant historical, cultural, social values and relevance to the host people. In most rural communities, this may be a sacred forest, tree, shrine, or totem and most families perform rituals in such places before sharing farm portions to their members, believing that, if they do not appease their ancestors there, their farm may not yield a fruitful harvest. Some of such sites have restricted entry either by females or strangers and only the “Chief Priest” enters freely to perform sacrifices therein. Most of such sites have no built structures around them thereby rendering them un-definable as buildings or huts that can be measured for valuation purposes. As Ogunba and Adegunle [2013] opined, the sheer number of such sites excludes them from being listed by government as heritage sites. The value of these sites to the rural people is illustrated by the common practice of many sacred places and shrines being created along the right of way of any proposed pipeline or road route prior to assessment for compensation, once the proposed route has been defined by land surveyors. There is therefore the need to capture these values.

The Valuation of Shrines: Materials and Methods

Many scholars agree that Contingent Valuation model offers the best recipe for the valuation of non market based products such as shrines as artefacts. Contingent valuation is a survey-based approach and a variant of the SPMs that attempts to create a hypothetical market for a good or service by constructing a scenario in which survey respondents indicate the amount they would pay to hypothetically acquire the good or service described in the questionnaire (Mathews, [33]). The method is used for goods or services that are not marketable like recreational fishing on a public river, where the value cannot be observed from the market behavior of buyers and sellers. In a typical Contingent Valuation Model study, a questionnaire is used to ask respondents “How much would you be willing to pay for a change in the quantity and/or quality of a good X?”.

The process entails (i) deciding what change we are going to value; (ii) deciding how we are going to implement the questionnaire and the type of questionnaire to be used; (iii) design and testing the questionnaire; (iv) collecting data; and (v) statistical analysis. Some advantages of Contingent Valuation Model are its flexibility; it is widely accepted as a method for estimating total economic value, including all types of non-use, or “passive use” values; the results are easy to analyse and describe and it is widely used. Some identified disadvantages are (i) the controversy regarding its adequacy in measuring willingness to pay (WTP); (ii) it is very expensive and time-consuming to undertake; (iii) some respondents may be unfamiliar with placing monetary values on environmental goods and services and thus may state unreliable values; (iv) respondents may deliberately express feelings to a different question than those asked; (v) responses may be related to the respondents' association of the cause and effect of the occurrence of the incident; (vi) actual decisions may differ from hypothetical decisions; (vii) suggesting a starting bid may affect the respondents' final WTP; (viii) responses may be given to bias the outcome where the respondents stand to benefit; (ix) non-response bias when those who fail to respond may have different views from those who respond; (x) non-use values are difficult to validate externally; and (xi) responses about WTP may depend on where the question is placed on the list of things being valued.

Notwithstanding these advantages and disadvantages, this study does not accept the Contingent Valuation Model as the most suitable valuation method to value the damages suffered by the natives whose shrines were affected. This method does not and will never assuage losses suffered by the community whose shrines are desecrated, polluted or destroyed through acquisition for development purposes. Though Akujuru et al (2014) argued that it will give a reliable estimate of the cost of re-consecrating a polluted shrine in the Niger Delta as it frequently happens in the wake of any oil spillage, experience has shown that the polluters are willing and ready to adopt this process because it gives them the leeway to get past the communities restiveness fast..

The non-market based valuation technique that is Contingent Valuation Model is applied where there is no established market for trading in cultural beliefs and totems of the people's traditional religion. The valuation approach replaces the market with the opinion of those affected and experts. In as much as this is acceptable for the valuation of artefacts, same could not be said for the valuation of shrines. The aim of the contingent survey is to elicit from the representatives of the community the requirements for performing the necessary

rituals to appease the shrine for the desecration, the assumption being that the appeasement would attract the shrine whose home has been desecrated and re-establish its sacredness. This is not true.

Some shrines are more powerful than others. Some are ascribed with certain functions and powers for which they are worshipped. For example, the Zormuu Shrine is worshipped for its protective powers against enemy attack. It is believed that it affords its worshippers protection in times of trouble. The Zorkpa Shrine is ascribed with powers for the fertility of the soil and the females who farm the soil. These shrines are administered to by certain persons known as “Chief Priests” of the respective shrines. The Chief Priests are the custodians of the people's culture and intercede between the adherents and the gods. They interpret what the shrines need for appeasement and what it requires the adherents to do at what time, and generally serve as the spokespersons of the respective shrines. Some shrines have female “Priestesses” while some have male “Priests”.

A questionnaire should be structured to describe the shrines and sacred places as the good that was to be valued and should elicit information about those that sacrifice to them, the purpose of the shrines and sacred places, frequency of sacrifice, items of sacrifice and consequences of no sacrifice. The identification of knowledgeable persons about each shrine helped identify their respective chief priests, who are the custodians of the tradition and practices of each shrine.

Issues in the Valuation of Shrines

In the Contingent Valuation Model, it is the duty of the chief priests to provide an inventory of the sacrificial items needed and the *Valuer* can then ascertain the cost of these items and incorporate these costs as the lost values working on the axiom that a property cannot have a value in excess of its cost of reproduction new or the price at which an equivalent and equally desirable holding can be acquired [Hyder, 2007]. Eventually, there will be over valuation if the chief priest reels out everything and anything that comes to his mind where he to be avaricious. No doubt there will be undervaluation where he itemizes the needful only without the Estate Surveyor and Valuer doing the needful.

The value of a shrine will never be understood without a proper diagnosis of the worldview of the people who use the shrine or worship them. This world view is central and critical for a proper assessment of the value of a shrine. Worldview can be defined as “a set of assumptions held consciously or unconsciously in faith about the basic makeup of the world and how the world works.” (Miller 2001, 38)

African culture and tradition cannot be understood and appreciated without looking at the worldview reflected in the religious beliefs of the people. The worldview of a people not only informs what they see, but also it determines the type of societies and nations they build. African Traditional Religion is associated with fatalism, rooted in animism and ancestor veneration. According to Mbiti, animism is the system of belief and practices based on the idea that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by spirits or souls. Animists believe in multiple gods which are capricious and unpredictable. For the animist, drought, famine, poverty and hunger are caused by unseen irrational forces. For them the physical world is

overshadowed by spiritual realities. To the animist, problems originate from outside, such as lack of rain for growing crops, and therefore to solve the problems of society, the gods, spirits and ancestors must be consulted and appeased.

The import of the foregoing is the fact that the value of a shrine will never reflect the market value but the value to the owner. This value is special only to the extent that it is understood to mean that value which will significantly recompense the owner or operator or worshipper of a shrine of a loss equivalent to the degree of devaluation suffered physically, spiritually, culturally and socially for the desecration, distortion of the operation and existence of a shrine and for mental and psychological trauma resulting there-from. This no doubt is hard to compute.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

We have attempted thus far to examine the need and existence of shrines in our homes but especially, our rural communities. We agreed that all persons have one form of shrine or the other for the worship of his God. We concluded that the shrines in our rural communities are often desecrated through acquisition of site for development purposes. We reviewed the use of the Contingent Valuation model in the assessment of the value of shrines and concluded that this method results in over valuation or under valuation depending on the whims and caprices of the Chief Priest who is relied upon in most cases to provide information on propitiating items for the shrines.

We argued that owing to the worldview of the people, a proper assessment of the value of a shrine would never be accomplished without recourse to the application of the Value to the owner basis of valuation which should significantly ameliorate the physical, spiritual, cultural, social and psychological losses sustained in the desecration, distortion of the operation and existence of a shrine.

We recommend the following:

- a. Experts (Estate Surveyors & Valuers) who are authorized by law to determine the value of properties should possess adequate skills that will enable them critically assess the worldview of the people who own, use and worship the shrines.
- b. The Estate Surveyor & Valuer should work closely with archaeologists, sociologists, psychologists, historians and other professionals who understand philosophy of world view if he must excel in the assessment of the value of shrines.
- c. The valuation of shrines should explore the application of “Value to the owner” concept instead of “market value” concept. Thus, the value indicated should reflect that loss (physical, spiritual, cultural and social) which was sustained by the owners, operators and worshippers of the shrine.

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