

# Cultural Landscape Transaction and Values of Nupe Community in Central Nigeria

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**Vernon Series in Anthropology**



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[www.vernonpress.com](http://www.vernonpress.com)

*In the Americas:*  
Vernon Press  
1000 N West Street,  
Suite 1200, Wilmington,  
Delaware 19801  
United States

*In the rest of the world:*  
Vernon Press  
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,  
Malaga, 29006  
Spain

Vernon Series in Anthropology

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017948020

ISBN: 978-1-62273-230-2

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*To the memories of My Father, Alhaji Muhammad Nda-Isa*



# Foreword

Rural communities in Nigeria offer tremendous opportunities to study their cultural landscape, due to the existence of diverse ethnic groups and cultural settings. This is similar with communities throughout South-East Asia, particularly those of Indonesian settings. Cultural landscape in Nigeria is nurtured by transactions of the people with their surroundings that generate meaning and values. This book relates cultural values of the Nupe people, a minority ethnic group in North-central Nigeria, forming their cultural landscape that governs and sustain the communities' heritage.

Tangible building practices and varieties of crop production are among the functional performances signifying the identity of Nupe people and their communities. Besides, intangible values such as medicinal rituals and significance of the *gozan* (barber) aligned the people with their fellow villagers. These relationships provide insight on the natural and social settings traced to the family, which were revealed through an ethnography conducted by Dr Muhammad Isa Bala. For a period of eight (8) months he observed daily and seasonal practices of the Nupe community. Thereafter, he used illustrations to support assertions which are drawn out from the natives' perception of their cultural landscape in order to form his grounded theory. The grounded theory asserted that three (3) unique factors shaped a typical Nupe community; 1. The landscape— that include farms, greenery, hills and rivers, showcasing people-space and place relationship. 2. The architectural components— that include Katamba and Zhempa as typical domestic space shaped by family structure, and 3. The indigenous professions— that include *gozan* and the performance of *wasu*.

One of the significant achievements of Dr Muhammad's work is the devotion of the book on the intangible values (over the tangibles) of the Nupe cultural landscape and the promotion of the integration of these values in government policies. Indeed, a proposition that significantly aligns with UN's advocacy— on the consideration of mainstream social values in sustainable development goals of spatial implication. Also, Dr Muhammad's work consistently advocated for the preservation of values and identities of cultural landscapes.

Beyond these the greatest benefit derivable from studying Nupe cultural landscape is the unveiling of the socio-spatial interaction and relationships (myth and beliefs) of the Nupe ethnic group with their environment.

Ismail bin Said  
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# Preface

Over time, values are culturally developed by people as they relate to the environment in both tangible and intangible forms. However, limited studies or documentations exist on cultural landscapes of minority ethnic groups, especially in developing nations. As such, there is a global call in which UNESCO is at the forefront advocating the need for the preservation of values and identities of cultural landscapes. The uniqueness of this book is on the empirical evidence based on the documentation of an eight-month ethnographic study of minority ethnic group in central Nigeria, the Nupes. One of the distinguishing characters of the cultural values of the Nupe people is that they have their cultural landscape transactions constituted in both tangible and intangible forms. Even though it relates to an ethnic group in central Nigeria, others from similar cultural landscape can relate to the cultural transactions discussed in different chapters of this book.

Readers can align to how cultural landscapes are expressed in both tangible and intangible forms. Equally important are the people-space and place relationship which results in a sense of place. The cultural values of communities are a product of both natural as well as the social setting which begins with the family. As such the Nupe basic family structure and its relationship with the domestic space are discussed in this book to give the reader an insight and also exemplify how cultural values are constituted within the domestic space.

Additionally, the economic lifestyle of people has an influence on the cultural landscape values of communities. Accordingly, a section of this book demonstrates this assertion as well as how cultural values are exhibited by indigenous professions in their transactions with the landscape. The concluding chapter of this book gives the deductions drawn from the cultural landscape values of Nupe community which resulted in the formulation of Grounded Theory with spatial implications.

It is to be noted that, the book is an edited PhD dissertation of the Author on cultural landscape of Nupe community in central Nigeria (Muhammad, 2015).



# Acknowledgement

First, I would like to thank Professor Dr Ismail Said, for his tremendous effort, motivation, and untiring academic advice, especially on the initial research which formed the foundation for this book. My warmest appreciation goes to my family whose tolerance, support and prayers made it possible, they deserve to be mentioned. They are my wife Hajara, and my children, Fati, Munir, Nabil, Khalil, and Safira. In this category are also my Mother, Inna-Tako and my mother-in-law Mummy- (Habiba). I also appreciate the support my siblings namely; Yalarai, Iaminde, Umar, Bakar, Usman, Suleiman, Yusuf, Halimah and Yakubu. I am obligated to Dr AA Muhammad-Oumar for the valuable support before and also during the research process. The guidance, support and motivation of Mallam Kudu Liman and Dr Muhammad Ndatsu Mahmud are deeply appreciated.

My special appreciation goes to, Professor Ibrahim Kolo, Alhaji Manman Chado, Mallam Kudu Gona, they provided some vital information on the studied community. Similarly, in this class is the village head of Doko community, Alhaji Muhammad Dzhimau Santati as well as several respondents who are too numerous to mention. However, it is worth mentioning the names of some respondents, who passed away before the fruition of this book, they are Yawoba, Mr David Ndalangba, and Yababa Dokochi.

My appreciation goes to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund, Nigeria (TET-FUND) for fellowship granted to me during the PhD program at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

*Alhamdulillah.*





## Biography of the Author

Isa Bala Muhammad obtained his PhD in Architecture from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in 2015. He had his Master's Degree as well as bachelor's degree in architecture in 2000 and 2002 respectively from Federal University of Technology Minna. He joined the services of the Niger State government as an architect in 2003 where he designed and supervised several government projects and rose to the position of Architect I. Later on in 2007, he joined the Federal University of Technology Minna as a lecturer. He has written several articles on related subjects. His research interest is on, Ethnography, Cultural landscapes, Ecosystem Services and Human Behaviour and Environment



# Ethnography Approach to Cultural Landscape Studies

## **Introduction**

Cultural Landscapes are made up of culture, environment, and the people. Each of the three components of the cultural landscape is filled with diverse and complex definitions. However, for this book, cultural landscape is operationalized to mean the social transactions and endless history of social transactions of people living within a community. It is the collective perspective and a way of living of the members of a given community (Palang *et al.*, 2011). As such, cultural landscape includes beliefs and cultural values constituted by people living within a community.

It, therefore, means that cultural landscape is the transactions of people with their landscape and the meaning and values people derive from such interactions (Lemelin *et al.*, 2015; Vejre *et al.*, 2010). These values are expressed in tangible and intangible forms depending on how people transact with their landscapes. Aside from culture, the socio-economic activities of the people contribute to how the landscapes are valued (Torquati *et al.*, 2015). For example, the socioeconomic activity of most rural African communities is farming; as such arable land becomes one of the key cultural value indicators for most communities.

Cultural landscapes are characterised by unique cultural transactions, but few studies exist, especially in the minority ethnic groups, (Nasongkhla, 2010). This is more profound on the African continent despite its richness in cultural heritage. For instance, Nigeria with a population of over 160 million people (NPC, 2006), and with over 250 ethnic groups has most cultural studies focused on the three ethnic groups of Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, (Adegbija, 2004). Each cultural transaction knowledge, as well as concepts, has a contributory role in extending knowledge beyond its geographical boundary. Furthermore, the importance of the Nupe ethnic group has seen it being noted amongst the fourteen communities celebrated by the Muslim reformer Sheik Usman fon-due in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (Musa, 2004; Sarki, 2010).

The importance of studies on minority ethnic group has continued to be in the forefront of intergovernmental organisations. For example, UNESCO's Director-General Bokova (2015) affirmed the importance indigenous values and such values and identities belong to all and must be protected by all.

However, each cultural landscape transactions are constituted differently and by extension expressed both in tangible and intangible forms. It, therefore, means that the understanding of cultural identities, especially those which are devoid of much research requires exploratory study (Glaser and Strauss, 2009). And for an exploratory study on people's perceptions, beliefs, and values, ethnography, therefore, becomes a good medium for the elicitation of information (Biklen, 2010).

Cultural landscape transactions are spatially constituted in different scales. The scale starts from the room, the compound, up to the entire community. However, the primary unit of social transactions in all cultural landscapes is the family unit (Martin, 2015). As such, it is important to include the family structure as well as their basic spatial transactions when cultural landscape values are studied. Furthermore, the boundary of spatial transactions is guided by the extent to which the daily needs of the family members are fulfilled.

Accordingly, it is to be established that the theoretical stance of this book is that, there exist a strong relationship between landscape character and the socio-cultural life of the people who occupy such landscapes (Cieraad, 2006). It also means that the occupation of the people influences how spaces are configured and also how transactions occur. Similarly, the elements of the cultural landscape transactions include both man-made and the natural landscape such as the streams, hills and vegetation. Consequently, the summation of all the foregoing thus leads to the understanding of the cultural landscape values of communities (Cullotta and Barbera, 2011; Stephenson, 2005; Zube and Pitt, 1981). On the whole, three factors constitute the bases for understanding cultural landscape transaction; they are the livelihood, family structure and the character of the domestic space as well as the landscape.

### **Tangible and intangible cultural values**

Cultural landscape transactions are associated with physical and non-physical meaning. The landscape transaction also portrays the idiosyncrasy of a community and thus reflects the values of the people (del Barrio *et al.*, 2012). The concept of cultural values over time got expanded from the initial notion of monuments, historical buildings and archaeological site to also include the recognitions of people's collective identity. As a matter of fact, UNESCO at its various conventions emphasised the need to embrace the tangible and intangible elements of cultural heritage (Gullino and Larcher, 2012; Rössler, 2006; WHC, 1994). The advocacy thus became built up towards the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage, which was ignored for a long time, as a heritage to be protected and safeguarded (Vecco, 2010). Accordingly, UNESCO defined intangible cultural heritage to include people's processes, knowledge, skills, and products created as well social transactions with

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