

Nigerian Festivals: In Search of a New Identity

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Abstract

In the consistent burgeoning realities of a new world characterized by technological advancements and discoveries in science, a unique Nigerian world also exists. Aspects of the Nigerian world are mostly expressed through cultural festivals which constitute a cornerstone in the people's identity. However, the dearth of festivals in Nigeria has depreciated Nigeria's cultural identity. Therefore, scholars and researchers are challenged to rediscover the place of festivals as iconic symbols of Nigeria's cultural identity. Although dimensions of Nigerian culture which include language, literature, music, and sundry idiosyncrasies exist, festivals occupy a pride of place in Nigeria's cultural landscape. These festivals are mostly performed to celebrate the people's heritage or lubricate the continuum between the physical and spiritual realms, most of them mainly expressed through ritual processes. Some Nigerian festivals have either become comatose or abrogated. In this way, Nigeria's cultural identity has diminished in the eyes of the world. Given the loss of cultural identity due to the gradual diminishing of these festivals, their revival has become necessary. This study, using cultural materialism as a critical tool, focuses on why some Nigerian festivals are not observed with the fanfare they deserve. What initiatives are needed to be undertaken to revive them? How can they be reorganized to attract tourism, giving Nigerians a new consciousness in the face of multiple socio-economic infirmities? Through the revival of these festivals, Nigeria's cultural identity can be re-established and transposed to the world.

Keywords: Festival, identity, culture, ritual, celebration

Introduction

All over the world, owing to the multifaceted realities of the human condition, many people are confronted with the need to constantly uphold their identity by asserting themselves in different categories. Identity could be individual or collective depending on circumstantial demands. A man's identity refers to his personal traits like names or characters which are distinguishable from other people. GWF Hegel writes that "identity is the reflection-into-self that is identity only as internal repulsion, and is this repulsion as reflection-into-self, repulsion which immediately takes itself back into itself" (413). Although Hegel's assertion is characteristically couched in convoluted phraseology, it imbricates the location of individual identity strictly within the person. A man's identity is synonymous with all the centripetal impulses that make up his individuality and he must accept responsibilities for his actions whether positive or negative. Collective identity is remarkably differentiated by such considerations as race, gender, culture, religion, occupation, and many factors in varying gradations.

The need for identity is responsible for the proliferation of human groups through which men establish followership, association, and classifications. Interestingly, human activities such as global politics, entertainment, economics, and education are subtly influenced by either of the set of identity categories mentioned earlier. Given its importance, identity has become a vital factor in the daily denomination of human existence across the world. The need to identify people by race, gender, occupation, religion or culture has either diminished their importance or obliterated their relevance. Owing to this, people have embraced social change to alter their personal or collective identity. According to Babacar Camara "social change refers to an initial process of partial modifications that gradually become structural and global. Therefore, social change means de-structuration and restructuration of a determined social totality" (xvii). From Camara's submission above, "partial modifications" can be interpreted to mean slight adjustment of identity to suit a particular purpose. Although these slight adjustments

are gradual, they eventually become global, altering people's original identity. People alter their identities for different reasons, but Africans are most guilty of identity alteration in their bid to be seen differently for diverse purposes.

Over the years, Africans have been victims of identity bias due in part to the inferiority and derogatory appellation unfortunately attached to the black race. In some respect, this accounts for the way black Africans submitted to the imperialist onslaught and were subsequently bludgeoned during the colonial era. The regrettable notion that Africans are inferior has predictably necessitated reactions among Africans to always assert their identity among the comity of nations. This foregrounds the philosophy of Negritude as propagated by the first Senegalese president, Leopold Sedar Senghor. The continued relegation of the African as inferior has forced many Africans to jettison their heritage, embracing Western values, religion, and culture. Also, the need to be recognized and benefit from Western largesse has forced many Africans to repudiate their identity, change their names, change their accents, and renounce their cultural heritage. To divest themselves of the inferiority emblem, many Africans have even undergone risky plastic surgeries to transform their physical appearance with regards to complexion and general physiognomy. This has necessitated identity conflict among Africans who, evidently, are not able to adequately represent the plural world which they created. In the bid for Africans to assert their identity and be recognized as a part of the world order, they have embraced their culture, religion, language, and literature transposing same to other parts of the world.

Among the many aspects of the African worldview, culture, history, language, and literature all maintain a pride of place in the African consciousness. Literature is the most celebrated genre of culture where Africans have carved a unique identity for themselves. African writers and critics have created a pattern which has given Africans a recognizable image. According to Charles Nnolim, “the African literary

critic has, in no small measure, helped determine the shape of African literature in this century” (31). Nnolim's submission points to a literary identity which has come to be known across the world as 'African Literature'. However, we can agree that the greatest and most distinguished aspect of the African identity, by which the African is easily recognized, is his culture.

Essentials of African Culture

In Africa, many cultures exist. Beyond giving Africa a focal identity across the world, culture is arguably the most important denominator of any social identity. It is synonymous with any society. Olawale Ajayi corroborates this view by observing that “culture could have a much more specific aesthetic interpretation highlighting both the artistic and intellectual achievement and development of a given society”(178). Culture varies from country to country and from region to region with different peculiarities. In Africa, they are lumped together as African culture. Many African cultures draw primarily from traditional religion which provides a vista for a link between Africans and their ancestors. The existence of the African man is connected to a constant renewal of the relationship between him and his ancestors which is carried out through the observance of some festivals, most of them compulsorily established in ritual procedures. The traditional African owes his long life, birth, good health, rich harvest, and general wellbeing to the ancestors who inhabit the spiritual realm. In order to continue to be at peace with the ancestors, to appease them and draw their sympathy, Africans offer sacrifices in the forms of propitiations if they must continue to live a life full of possibilities. Anytime such sacrifices are not offered, it attracts severe consequences like death, famine, flood or even drought. Perhaps, it is this necessary mutualism between gods and men that Derek Wright refers to when he remarks that “the gods yearn for reunification with the humans who first conceived them and are tied to humanity by a common fallibility and reciprocal needs: to become complete, they need to re-experience the human in themselves – as man needs to recapture his divine essence – and they need human

endorsement of their creative acts to maintain their spiritual status” (13). In Femi Osofisan's play *No More the Wasted Breed*, the people of Egure community are severely hit by sickness which results in the death of all first male children because they failed to offer sacrifices to Elesu, goddess of the inland waters for twenty years. They failed to close the gulf between humans and the gods through sacrifice. Wole Soyinka refers to that gulf by observing that “this gulf is what must be constantly diminished by the sacrifices, the rituals, the ceremonies of appeasement to those cosmic powers which lie guardian to the gulf” (144). Although Soyinka's observation above relates to the Yoruba South West of Nigeria, it does provide a general view of the African reality which has subliminally, formed a part of their identity.

The relationship between the African and his ancestors is primarily consummated through rituals and celebrated through festivals, all carried out annually and in some cases biannually. African festivals and rituals can be viewed or interpreted as drama in the wider universal context linked to the origin of drama as a Dionysian celebratory spectacle. While some critics conceive festivals as drama, other critics think that festivals are not drama. Olatubosun Taofeek reconciles the two positions by inferring that “festivals can be drama but not all festivals are drama” (44). In dramatic festivals, through the instrumentality of secular or spiritual masquerades, a mask is worn to disguise or transform personality and to create a guttural atmosphere where the gods can presumably be accommodated. Although the incursion of foreign religions has done a lot to diminish the symbolic significations of these festivals, yet many of them have continued to exist with much fanfare and relish. Most times, many Africans who live abroad, far from their villages, are required to return home to either participate in these festivals or at least observe them. It is always a joyous occasion because besides the festivals, it offers a community the opportunity to intermingle and associate with one another after many years of separation. In this way, the social relevance of such festivals is upheld. African festivals, whether dramatic or not, have attracted

foreigners to the African soil both as tourists and as researchers who are interested to investigate the African heritage and culture. These festivals therefore form a very important dimension of the African identity. It provides the African hope. It motivates him and reconnects him to his roots.

In Africa, almost every aspect of existence is controlled by a god who requires propitiation to be regenerated and rehabilitated. These propitiations are mostly carried out through elaborate celebrations where the locals adorn themselves in particular attire or design a program to create a memorable festival. These festivals differ from country to country and from one region to another where they are given different names. Indeed, it is difficult, almost impossible to separate the African from his roots, from his ancestors who must be celebrated through festivals. This study shall examine festivals in Nigeria, West of Africa and show how the people assimilate the spiritual essences of these festivals as a galvanizing force for their identity and general lives.

Nigerian Festivals

In Nigeria's post independence consciousness, cultural nationalism bulked largely and found expressions in festivals which provided an avenue for the people to re-establish a relationship with their traditions, a relationship which was hitherto dislocated due to the vicious pangs of colonialism. Before independence, many Nigerians were alienated from their heritage. They were disconnected from their roots following the inevitable exposure to Western education and foreign religion. However, at independence, festivals provided a synthesizing platform between African tradition and Western modernity. The locals instinctively harnessed the accessories of Western tradition to celebrate their identity through festivals. In this way, aspects of Western modernity were extrapolated and infused into traditional culture where they are renamed, remodelled, and reconfigured. An example is the extrapolation of the mythical Sango, the famed Yoruba god of thunder and lightning. In South-West of Nigeria, Sango is established as the

modern dispenser of electricity. For this reason, Sango's statue imposingly adorns the complex of the National Electricity Corporation of Nigeria in Lagos. According to Harry Garuba, "the life of Sango, its appropriation by traditional elite, and its symbolic deployment by modern elite underscores a form of socio-cultural practice that has become quite pervasive in contemporary Nigeria, if not in all of Africa" (263). This means that aspects of modernity have been deployed into cultural practices which have, in many ways, become necessary materials found in different cultures in Nigeria.

Most festivals are initiation rites for young men by which process, they are ushered into manhood. In such places, their personality witnesses a transformation from boyhood to manhood and those who are not able to pass the initiation tests are not adjudged to be men enough. In Igboland for example, an adult male is not considered man enough if he is not married. Marriage is a part of the transformation from boyhood to manhood. Ndubuisi Nwafor-Ejilinma opines that "in the Igbo traditional society, the concept of chronic bachelorhood or celibacy is regarded as unnatural and an attitude of dangerous irresponsibility. At a certain age, a man is expected to get married and set up his own family" (55). The festival of initiation rites for young men must necessarily precede other activities in the journey to manhood and maturity. There are also festivals to worship gods and goddesses of the river, of farm harvest, of birth, of peace, of thunder and rainfall, of history, and of growth. In the different ethnicities, these festivals are distinct and can take various dimensions but there is a preponderance of rituals and sacrifices, sometimes fetish and gory, in the celebration of these festivals. For the people, it is their heritage. Their existence is inexorably attached to these festivities and their identity is projected more through them. To underscore the importance of these festivals in Nigeria, many of them take place towards the end of the year or at the beginning of the year. When it is observed at the end of the year, it is to give thanks and show appreciation but when it is observed at the beginning of the year, it is for prayers, for supplications, and for a fulfilled life in the New Year.

There are three distinct types of festivals in Nigeria, they are, Religious festivals, Cultural festivals, and Secular festivals. This paper shall however, dwell on three important cultural festivals in Nigeria.

The Argungu Festival

The Argungu fishing festival was originally a religious festival which started in the 16th century before the time of Surame Gungu of Kebbi Kingdom and before the final conquest of Kanta of Kebbi. During this period, there were four distinct festivals which took place within Kebbi and the neighbouring communities. The first two festivals were Gyan Ruwa and Fashin Ruwa which were associated with the water spirit. The Gyan Ruwa was specifically to purify the rivers before the day of the fishing day and it is carried out to appease the Queen Spirit of the water, Doguwa for a successful fishing festival. These rites of appeasement were carried out by the priests and Bori parishioner who on the chosen day, rode across the Kabi River, dropping food items and pouring libations as propitiations to pacify the goddess of the water. The Fashin Ruwa marked the official permission from the Emire of Kabi to declare the waters open for fishing. In doing this, the Emir picked a particular date to flag off the fishing season. The other two festivals were Gyran Gari and Shan Kabewa and Fura which were related to god of land. The Gyran Gari was purposely to purify the whole land while the Kabewa and Fura were primarily carried out to taste the pumpkin porridge. These land rituals were of great importance to the people because through it, the god of the land was appeased, evil spirits were warded off the land, and increased harvest was assured. Because of the spiritual significance of these festivals, they attracted many people from Kebbi Kingdom and beyond. As the popularity grew, people saw in them as a source of spiritual regeneration and rebirth.

In the 19th Century, Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, in his capacity as the Supreme Ruler of the Sokoto Caliphate, during a jihad, invaded Kebbi Empire and conquered it. Following the invasion of Kebbi by Dan Fodio, Islam, which was the predominant religion in Sokoto, was

instituted in the whole of Kebbi. As a religion, the provisions of Islam contradicted most of the rituals associated with the fishing festivals and as a result, three of the festivals were promptly abrogated with only the Fashin Ruwa retaining its place. After the conquest of Kebbi Empire, Dan Fodio founded a small village and named it Argungu, which translated in Hausa language means 'foolish people'. From then on, the hitherto religious festival became a fishing festival associated with the people of Argungu in present day Kebbi State, North West of Nigeria. Although the festival takes place in Argungu, capital of the Emirate Council in Kebbi State, many Hausa/Fulani people have come to identify with it and it is generally associated with them.

The Argungu festival began in 1934 as a historical revival which celebrates the end of hostilities between the Sokoto Caliphate and the Kebbi Kingdom. It is synonymous with peace, friendliness, and love because it reminds the people of the laying down of arms between the two kingdoms after many years of warfare where lives were lost and properties destroyed. Because it is a fish festival, it takes place in the Matan Fada, Mala, and Gamji Rivers between February and March of every year and lasts for four days. It involves a determined competition where over 30,000 fishermen compete to know who will catch the largest fish with their nets. While the men compete, women provide encouragement by cooking, singing, and cheering. The most obvious economic significance of the contest is attached to the prize money of \$7,500 which is won by the fisherman that catches the largest fish. In the last two years, this prize money was increased to \$8,000. In 2005, a record was set in the fishing festival when a fisherman caught a fish that weighed 75kg, the biggest in the history of the festival. Besides the fishing competition, there are other symbolic cultural displays such as wrestling, entertainments through local music and dance accompanied by folkloric components such as drums, gongs and local guitars. There are also agricultural displays where farmers showcase their rich harvests, there is also the Kabanci display which involves diverse water competitions such as swimming, canoe racing, diving competitions and

catching of wild ducks. Due to its increasing popularity within Nigeria and across the world, the festival attracts thousands of people from different countries with journalists from reputed media houses covering the event.

Indeed, the Argungu fishing festival has placed Northern Nigeria and in particular the people of Kebbi on the world map. Their identity has equally been transposed to various parts of the world and even studied by scholars and students alike. In addition to the creation of novel identity for the people of Kebbi, the festival has become a major source of economic haven in the state. Hotels have sprung up and in fact, different hotels in the area are not able to meet the demands of local and international guests who throng to the area to witness the festival. Also fashion houses have also been established in the area where local clothes made with hands are sold. Agricultural products such as yam, tomatoes, pepper, and different kinds of fishes are also sold at a premium during the period of the festival. In the history of the festival, many heads of state and presidents have attended it including Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's former military head of state and Alhaji Diori Hammani of Niger Republic in 1970. Presently, the Argungu fishing festival has been taken over by the government of Kebbi state due to its huge economic and tourist potential.

The New Yam Festival

The New Yam festival, translated as 'Iri ji Ohu' in Igbo land is synonymous with Igbo people in South-Eastern part of Nigeria. M.J.C Echeruo reminds us that "A New Yam Festival is a great ritual and festive event. Behind the ritual activities of the festival is almost certainly a *mythos* of a returning and beneficent god who is both welcomed and propitiated"(139). From the foregoing lines, Echeruo is of the view that the New Yam Festival has a spiritual dimension which provides a ritual opportunity to appease chthonic gods. The festival is as old as the Igbo race with both spiritual and communal cross-currents recognized by every Igbo person within and outside Nigeria. The

festival is celebrated between July and August and marks the beginning of a new farming season. The question to ask is, why is yam accorded such respect in Igbo land amid a variety of other crops such as cassava, maize, coco-yam and different vegetables? Yam is a very symbolic crop in Igbo land right from time immemorial. It formed a major staple menu in every part of Igbo land and in fact, richness in yam is counted as wealth. A man who had a large yam barn was bestowed with the rare and dignified title of Ezeji. Among the many crops in Igbo land, yam is regarded as the king of all crops because it can be made into several delicacies and is easy to prepare. Besides that, yam is rich in carbohydrates, and as a cash crop, it can be used for various purposes. In the days gone by, a man who had lots of yam was regarded as a rich man and those who could not cultivate large yams were regarded as lazy people. Therefore, with such status, it became apparent that the new farming season is heralded with a celebration of yams. In fact, in contemporary times, a lecture popularly known as the Ahiajioku lecture which was instituted as part of the New Yam festival is quite popular in Igbo land. These lectures hold in different Igbo towns and are delivered by eminent academics, most of them university professors.

The New Yam Festival lasts for about 7-8 days. The duration of the festival varies from one community to another depending on traditions and culture. Before the ceremony marking the commencement of the festival, no Igbo person is expected to eat the new yam. On the first day of the festival which takes place at the common village square, the village head 'Igwe', and in some cases Ozo title holders, Chiefs and Ndi Nze all offer prayers to the gods with a portion of a roasted yam. They thank the gods for rich harvest, for protection, for the gift of children, for prosperity, and for good health. After the prayers, the supplicant dips a roasted piece of yam into palm oil and eats it to the cheers and admiration of the crowd. Afterwards, the festival is declared open and people break out in joyous singing and dancing. From that moment, people are free to eat the new yam which is made into various forms of menu like roasted yam eaten with palm-oil, pounded yam eaten with a

variety of sauce, boiled yam eaten with vegetable sauce or with palm oil as well.

The New Yam festival is indeed a very big and symbolic occasion for the Igbo. Different women organize dancing competitions with colourful, new clothes worn as uniforms. Many times, these clothes are quite expensive with marching head tie, coral beads, and other ornaments of beauty. Also, there are wrestling competitions organized by youths with emphasis on perseverance, endurance, and doggedness. In some communities, there are colourful masquerade processions with excited dancing steps, occasional hysteria and sometimes magical performances. There is no uniformity in celebration across Igbo land because every community has its own method for celebrating this cultural festival. Generally, the festival presents a good opportunity for an interaction between the physical and spiritual realms, between the people and their gods who are inseparable from each other. The festival offers an opportunity for the people to offer sacrifices by killing goats or fowls and spilling their blood as a form of propitiation to thank the gods for diverse favours. If someone offends the gods, if a family is found wanting by breaking the ordinances of the land, such a person or family may be punished by the gods with a poor harvest in which case, his/their yams may not produce bountifully. Such devious behaviour like incest, stealing, murder, bestiality, and other forms of criminality are promptly punished by the gods through poor yam harvest. In some villages, those found guilty of indulging in such acts are not allowed to participate in the new yam festival because their open participation will inevitably incur the retributive wrath of the gods.

The period of the New Yam festival in many parts of Igbo land is regarded as a time of peace and happiness. People are prohibited to quarrel or fight, neighbours and kinsmen exchange yams made into different delicacies and the atmosphere of the entire community is quite convivial. In all respect, the New Yam festival represents an epoch moment for all Igbo people due to its spiritual and communal

significations. However, the advent of western religion, in this case Christianity, has to a great extent eroded the festival and diminished its importance. In the same way that the incursion of Islam affected the original Argungu festival, Christianity has also affected the original celebratory outline of the New Yam festival in Igbo land. In the present day, many families and communities in Igbo land view the New Yam festival as fetish because of the sacrifices made to the gods. It is important to stress that more than 80% of Igbo people are committed Christians and since the festival runs at cross-purposes with the provisions of the Bible, the Christian moral manuscript, many adherents of the Christian faith decide to stay away or avoid the festival. As a result of this, the festival is more observed by core traditionalists among them the aged with very few youths participating in it. From the observations above, it is clear that the advent of foreign religion has contributed immensely to dislodging African identity which finds expression in cultural festivals. In fact, many proponents of the Christian faith have openly preached against the New Yam festival condemning it as barbaric and outdated cultural practice. In Igbo land, there were recorded instances of many clergy men warning their church members not to participate in the New Yam festival since some of the practices associated with it were satanic which amounted to idol worship.

The Eyo Festival

Lagos is the most populous city in Nigeria with an estimated population of twenty-five million people. The huge population of Lagos state derives from the influx of many people from other parts of the country due to its commercial potential. Of the twenty-five million estimated population of Lagos, indigenes are only about two-million people while the rest of the people are basically visitors from other parts of the country and the world. Because of the sophistication associated with the city, its modern outlook, the overriding western influence and modernity, fast cars, skyscrapers, fashion, music, churches, mosques, and other forms of modernity, it appears that the original Lagos landmark, in terms of culture and identity has been eroded. However, Lagos is a major hub of

the Yoruba, South West of Nigeria with its distinctive cultural values and emblems. The city is rich in tradition, by which the original indigenes maintain a steady and healthy relationship with their ancestors, gods and deities. There are many forms of cultural practices in Lagos which continue to reaffirm the identity and historical heritage of the indigenes. One of such cultural practice is the Eyo festival, a masquerade/dance procession which takes place in the city in no particular order or season.

The Eyo festival, in other words referred to as the Adamu Orisha Play, is a distinguished form of cultural practice found mainly in the city of Lagos, the former political capital of Nigeria. The festival is peculiar to the indigenes of Lagos who are referred to as Isale Eko indigenes. By this appellation, only original descendants of Lagos are allowed to participate in the festival while Lagosians by association and residency can only admire and watch from afar. The festival involves masquerade procession all attired in white from head to toe. For the one week that the festival will last, the faces of the dancers are not expected to be revealed or seen. The attire consists of agbada for the top robe and aropale, the bottom rope wrapped around the waist. The masquerades also wear an Akete, a hat adorned with different colours signifying the colours of a particular Iga from which the masquerade made appearance. More than fifty Eyo masquerade dancers can come out from a particular Iga and each of them must pay a specified fee for the privilege to participate as one of the Eyo masquerade dancers. While the Eyo dancers can wear different hats adorned with different colours depending on the Iga they came from, the Adimu is identified by a black hat without any colourful embellishments. The masquerade and dancers emerge from the Igala, the Oba palace and then begin to make progress into the major cities. Before the commencement of the festival, the Orisa Oniko embarks on a spiritual exercise to drive away evil spirits within the city where the festival will take place. This is to ensure a hitch-free one week festival and to avoid any tragic occurrence like death in the palace of the Oba, miscarriage, fight resulting in injuries, and any other form of calamity.

The name Eyo, literally translated means 'costume dancers'. Its origin dates back to 20th February, 1854 when it was held in honour of Oba Akintoye, to celebrate his life on the occasion of his final burial. It must be emphasised that the Eyo festival is always held when an Oba dies to give his soul unhindered passage to the great beyond. It can also be held to usher in a new Oba and welcome him to the throne. Before the commencement of the festival, the Adimu, who is the most senior male member of the Eyo group, makes an appearance on a Sunday with a staff around the major city to notify people that the Eyo festival will take place in seven days time which will be on a Saturday. After Adimu, the rest of the Eyo heads make appearances from Monday to Thursday in the following order, Laba (red hat), Oniko (yellow), Ologede (green), and Agere, (purple). By this notice, people are expected to get ready for the great event, and nowadays, the media is informed for expected coverage. This notification by the Adimu has been the traditional and accepted way of informing the people of the coming Eyo festival. In present times, the festival is not only restricted to the death of an Oba or the ushering in of a new Oba. Nowadays, the festival can be requested for by a politician or even the governor of the state to mark an event of certain importance. Every Eyo festival ends with the dancers converging at the palace of the Oba to pay homage to him and his household.

Although the Eyo festival is generally seen by many as a cultural event, its spiritual symbolism is not lost on the people. Due to its sacredness, certain practices or behaviour are forbidden during the festival. It is forbidden to wear sandals or shoes during the Eyo festival. It is also forbidden to ride motorcycles or bicycles, wear the suku, a Yoruba kind of hairstyle, wear the Eyo costume overnight or cross the river with it. The Eyo festival today has become a huge tourist event, attracting thousands of people around the world, therefore serves as a foreign exchange earner for the people. During the festival, distinguished personalities such as the governor of the state, the commissioners and many of the Obas across the state grace the occasion. Sometimes the festival takes place up to four or five times in a year and sometimes, it

does not take place at all throughout the whole year

Conclusion

Although three major festivals as important aspect of Nigeria's culture have been discussed, there are many more festivals in the country which uphold the people's identity. The pattern of celebration and ideology which accommodate the identified festivals in Nigeria may slightly differ from many other festivals not mentioned but the general idiosyncrasies informing their celebration are basically the same. For example, ritual is a very important ingredient of Nigerian festivals and through the ritual process, the gulf between the living and the dead is narrowed. Through the ritual process, humans lubricate the continuum between them and their ancestors. No matter the level of foreign religious incursion into the Nigeria domain, festivals as a part of the Nigerian cultural renaissance have continued to maintain their pride of place as a realistic, genuine hybrid. Also, various classes of people in the country have a different attitude to culture which has affected its promotion and celebration. According to Sandra Richards:

The cultural habits of these classes may be characterized in the following manner: The largest segment of the populace. Rural and urban illiterates, enjoys orature, as exemplified by its support of the primarily Yoruba travelling theatres. A growing semiurban, semiliterate proletariat patronizes either Indian thrillers and Chinese Kung Fu movies or itinerant drama. The literate middle class, which associates serious reading with certification for employment, primarily watches television, much of whose programming consists of Euro-American imports (xxiii).

Politics and the quest for power control seem to be occupying the attention of many Nigerians. In many cases, these contribute in eroding the people's culture. Also there is a loss of sense of belonging within the cultural community due to insecurity across Nigeria in the 21st century. Communities that are not safe will hardly be organized to observe cultural festivals. In this way, there is a remarkable concern that as a part of the people's cultural heritage, festivals in Nigeria will completely be

wiped out of the people's cultural menu. For example, no tourist will be willing to attend the Argungu Festival bearing in mind that kidnapping and banditry are the order of the day in Nigeria. The same applies in the celebration of the New Yam festival and the Eyo festival. If Nigeria's cultural festivals are about the few positive identities the country enjoys outside her shores, then there is a need for the government to rise to its primary responsibility to provide adequate security across the country. If security is provided, then there will be a need to rehabilitate and revive these festivals.

The National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) has a major role to play in reviving festivals across Nigeria. As an agency of the federal government, the institute should constantly educate the government on the importance of promoting Nigeria's culture and festivals. If the National Institute for Cultural Orientation is involved, it means that the government is also involved. If the government is involved, cultural festivals in Nigeria will become state functions and all the apparatus of government will be deployed to ensure that these festivals are successful. The National Institute for Cultural Orientation should identify some festivals in the country within a calendar year and promote them. Also, the institute should solicit sponsorship from corporate bodies and urge them to identify with the celebrations. Tourists and travellers will be willing to identify with Nigeria if they are aware that the government and major corporate organizations are associated with iconic cultural festivals in the country.

Nigerian universities have a major role to play in reviving festivals in the country. Although there is a compulsory general course in all universities known as GST (Nigerian People and Culture) it seems that the course is basically academic and theoretical. Nigerian universities should make the course more practical. Students should be encouraged to participate in different cultural practices of their different communities. These cultural performances should be held within the university environment and government dignitaries should be invited. Also, the National Orientation Agency (NOA) of Nigeria should, through the mass media, educate Nigerians on the importance of

Nigerian culture and festivals as a unifying force and also as a national identity paradigm. Above all, the revival of Nigerian culture through festivals is a collective responsibility. Every person, every sector should play a part so that the Nigeria cultural identity can be revived and sustained.

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