

Cultural Tourism in Nigeria: Towards a National Identity

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Abstract

This study is a discourse on cultural tourism in Nigeria, and its projection of the identity of a people to the outside world. Culture is not only the way of life of a people, but also the most important medium of identifying the uniqueness of one people from another people of varied cultural orientations. Nigeria has one of the most diverse cultural identities in the world, with more than 500 ethnic nationalities; the nation can, and should take advantage of cultural tourism to amplify her identity as a diverse and inclusive nation. Adopting the analytical methodology, the study emphasizes the fact that Nigeria as a country is blessed with so much cultural endowments that reflect the true identity of who we are as a people. It is of paramount importance to put this identity forward for the world to see and appreciate us as a cultural tourism destination. It is a platform to leverage on, to change the negative narrative about Nigeria that the world has hitherto held. The study concludes and recommends that there is the need for platforms to showcase Nigeria, in all her beauty and splendour, to the world through carnivals like the Nigeria National Carnival. It further recommends that the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), Nigeria's foremost tourism agency, should partner with the State governments, through different states' tourism boards, to develop more cultural tourism products that showcase the Nigerian identity, in more sustainable ways.

Keywords: Culture, Cultural Tourism, Cultural products, Development, National Identity.

Introduction

Identity is the very essence of differentiation. Everybody, society, nation have an identity that is unique and very special to each one in their own right. These identities are manifested at different levels of human interactions. While the basic tenets of human existence is purely based on survival and growth, societal continuity is based on a shared identity that permeates through everyone that makes up the society. This shared identity is passed down from one generation to another, mostly through oral means or ritual indoctrination, as it was done in primitive Africa. Some of these practices are still sharing social space with the more civilized practice like written education in specialize and defined fora.

The most potent shared identity that have endured through all ages is the cultural affinity that is shared among people with similar cultural backgrounds. P. Okumagba, R. Arisi and C. Nwaezeapa cite Ralph Linton to have stated that "the culture of a society is the way of life of its members, the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation" (35). Cultural roots are a symbol of identity and most of the African Americans or Europeans or where ever blacks are found in the world trace their cultural roots to Africa. This creates an affinity to Africa for blacks all over the world. This has made some notable black icons to trace their heritage and find out where they come from in Africa, thereby identifying their African-ness and with African culture. Culture, therefore, is not only termed as the way of life of a people, it is the central point that brings a people together and makes them who they are.

Their shared language, cuisines, apparels, festivals, dance, songs, rituals and every of the manifestations that is common amongst them, accentuates their cultural tropes which unite and make the one people. Culture is life, and a reflection of the life of a people. It is their identity and projection. Life without culture is none existence. Even when people have associated cultural practice to primitive tendencies, especially in reference to traditional African practice, they must understand that the evolution of culture and its practice takes time and there are some cultural practices in Africa that western civilization cannot erode, and it is these practices that are being packaged today as cultural tourism products for tourists.

The cultural experience of every civilization is different, and as civilization evolves with the passage of time, so also does culture. Jason Csapo asserts that "culture is part of the lifestyle which a multitude of people are sharing. The similarities in spoken and written language, behaviour, lifestyle, customs, heritage, ideology and even technology connect the individuals to groups of people in a certain culture" (32). Culture is a very important

part of societal interactions. Every culture is a reflection of a people. They take advantage of every opportunity to showcase their culture to the world, revealing their distinctions and what make them who they are as a people. Culture is what makes a nation what they are, whether they are a conflagrate of different distinct cultural leanings, or they are one single cultural unit, a nation's culture is very important to it as it shows its identity as a people to the world. When there is a conglomeration of different nations, it is their cultural identities that put them apart. They are what emphasize their uniqueness and distinction, and reinforce who they are. A nation is simply identified with its cultural pieces.

Identity is key to every nation and people. If you take a people's identity from them, you have simply stripped them off their dignity, pride and the values they hold sacred. This is why nations world over do all they can to retain the pillars of what make them who they are. Eroding their identity will leave them not only vulnerable psychologically and socially, but also economically and politically, they will be open to easy domination by a nation or people who have a grip of who they are and understand the fundamentals of their heritage. This is why a nation's cultural identity must be preserved and also promoted, passing it from one generation to another.

One of the key tools the colonialists used in subjugating Africa is the labelling of their cultural practices as primitive, barbaric and unacceptable (just trying to put it mildly). They set out to gradually eliminate the cultural practice of Africans through a subtle introduction and indoctrination of their own culture, which was readily bought by the Africans. This led to what is termed *cultural colonialization*. Africans started viewing their cultural practices through the prism of colonial inclinations. Till date, even after the exit of the colonialists from Africa, we are still using the standard of the Europeans and Americans to determine our standard and culture. We have embraced their culture and identity, thereby losing our own and with this our value before the world. Ever wonder why blacks are still seen as less people and Africa as downright classless and ultimately backward? There goes your answer; African's willingness to subjugate her own cultural practices and embrace western culture. This situation has pervaded our socio-cultural space, as the younger generation have embraced everything western while condemning and disassociating themselves from their indigenous cultural practice. Hence, Chukwuma Anyanwu warns that if any people ignore paying attention to their culture in this age of globalisation such culture will be swept away by those who pay attention to theirs, and such neglected cultures would go extinct because the youths of today appear to be drifting, without a base (92).

However, the good news is that this trend can be changed by reinforcing our culture, and establishing our identity. This can be achieved through the display of our culture. Even though the home and school would have been a very good platform to do this, we could create a platform outside them that will be filled with fanfare, reverie and education. This is where festival like the Nigeria National Carnival These festivals, creation of the Federal Government of Nigeria, to serves as cultural tourism products that can enforce our cultural identity and bring pride to us; as our young ones, who are engaged in the enactment of these festivals, embrace our culture, identify with it, and also propagate it to enforce our identity.

Basically, government needs to see the display of our cultural pieces through cultural tourism products as a veritable medium to enforce our identity in our minds, and showcasing this to the world. One thing is certain, the display of our varied culture will tell our stories and make the world know our diversity and heritage. It will make the world know that we are not the negative things that is being reported in the media, but that we are a country rich in culture, that our young adults are energetic and dedicated, that we are a people united by the things that are different about us, and that we are one strong and a happy nation.

An Overview of Cultural Tourism

Cultural tourism is the experience of the arts, festivals, rituals and dance performances of a people that transforms the participants; both the people performing and the tourists. These festivals, rituals and dance performances are, first performed by the people and for the people as part of their way of life, and they, to a very large extent, determine the prosperity of the people and their ability to surmount the challenges that they would face. It is these same festivals, rituals and dance performances that endears tourists, and motivate them to be part of the process. It is a medium where the cultural identities of a people interface with the tourists, leading to shared culture and acknowledgement of the people are. This might change a prejudice of some foreign tourists, and also lead to an education of who a people is. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, cultural tourism is defined as:

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage,

culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and tradition (18).

Cultural tourism is one unique aspect of the tourism landscape in Africa. Different from what holds on the western world, African cultural tourism showcases the depth of what life is to an African. It showcases the not oft seen aspects of what life is to the African, especially in a civilization that is more Eurocentric than ever. The dance, rituals, festivals, music, food, marriage rites, burial rites, special performances for special occasions, like the durbar procession which is performed for events like Salah celebration, installation of chiefs and emirs, visiting dignitaries, burial ceremony, etc. Cultural tourism, if we are going to make who we are as a nation known to the world, is probably the best window to do that. While our cultural statements are made, our identity is embraced by all and sundry.

One of the key issues we are grappling with as a nation is unity. It is only a nation that is united that will be able to forge an identity. While the unification tendencies of cultural tourism is highly acknowledged, we must as a nation use this to our advantage by appreciating our cultural diversity, embracing it, and also appreciate the difference and similarities in our cultural pieces. The tip of the iceberg will be to put all these cultural diversities on a platform to showcase as cultural tourism products, thereby enforcing our identity to the world, and especially to us.

Culture is the bedrock upon which a society thrive. A society without culture will soon loose itself. This is what is happening to Africa right now. Religion has become the most important factor in determining who we are as a people instead of our culture. Yes, culture and religion are interrelated, but for us in Africa, where our religious practices engaged in by our forefathers have been usurped by the religion of our colonial masters, it cuts us away from who we are as a people, and distorts our identity. This is the main reason for the infiltration and usurping of our way of life by foreign cultures. It is this anomaly that we should aim at eliminating through cultural tourism.

With the foregoing, the need to promote cultural tourism in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. It is not just a means to generate foreign exchange, but like we have seen through the discourse so far, it is a veritable means of enforcing our identity. Festivals like the Nigeria National Carnival and the National Festival of Arts and Culture come to mind as they represent two of the festivals that the full complement of the culture pieces of Nigeria converge.

Nigerian National Carnival as Means of Enforcing National Identity

The Nigeria National Carnival, formally known as the Abuja Carnival, is one of the foremost tourism products of the fourth republic. It was established by the President Olusegun Obasanjo's led administration in 2004 but was first performed in November 2005, as one of the key components to harness the tourism potentials embedded in Nigeria's cultural space. The Nigeria National Carnival brings together all the thirty-six (36) states in the country to the nation's capital city, where there is on a sizeable repertoire of the cultural displays that populate the country. The concept of the Nigeria National Carnival is about presenting a rich display of Nigeria's cultural heritage. It aims at forging a cultural tourism product, and also to enhance the capital city as a tourism destination of choice in the West Africa sub-region, taking advantage of the festival as an event based tourism product to drive traffic into Abuja.

The festival was a recreation of the carnival style of the Rio de Janeiro carnival of Brazil, but essentially cultural and geared towards the promotion of the cultural heritage of Nigeria. The 36 States and the Federal Capital Territory send their cultural troupes to the street parade with a full complement of all their cultural pieces: dance, music, costume, acrobatics, etc., to the carnival.

The festival comprises cultural displays which include dance procession, boat regatta, the durbar performance, masquerade displays, acrobatic displays, music and art. It is a full complement of the rich cultural diversity of Nigeria. Every State takes turn in showcasing their rich culture during the four days festival which holds in November of every year. The various costumes of the cultural troupes on display are not only colourful but also elaborate and beautiful. These add to the whole spectacle on display, and makes the festival really enjoyable for tourists that have come from within and outside the country to witness the festival. It is a festival of culture, tradition and heritage. It is a festival of identity as Nigerians from all works of life are able to identify with their cultural heritage. The festival has been a veritable ground to accentuate and foster the unity in Nigeria, unity in our diversity. Abutu and Managwu assert that

the Abuja Carnival (now Nigerian National Carnival) has developed significantly over the years to reflect and demonstrate Nigeria's unity in diversity as all the states of the federation display their unique heritages competitively through a carnival platform. The carnival since inception has remained a means for building bridges, enhancing Inter-cultural and cross-ethnic friendships among the 36 states of the federation and beyond (320).

The festival speaks of our uniqueness among the comity of nations. It amplifies our identity as a happy heterogeneous state. The elaborate and dexterous display of culture show our Nigerian-ness, and how different we are from others. The wild dancing and acrobatics, loud singing and colourful costumes give us out as a gay and happy people. The atmosphere of the festival also buttresses the friendliness and hospitality of the average Nigerian. People are all smiles and welcoming as they take in the colourful display of culture on show. They meet, greet and make me friends. People connect, business partnerships are forged, and even families spring up from these meetings. The sense of unity and oneness dispels the often spoken narrative of a fraught and tensed relationship among the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

The perception of foreign tourists and the age long view of a disunited nation changes. This is actually one of the reasons the Nigeria National Carnival was created by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2004, with his first edition holding in 2005, with an objective of presenting to the world Nigeria's unity in diversity, as represented by the presentation of the divers castle displays, ranging from masquerade performances, durbar performances, dramatic performances, boat regatta, dance and other cultural displays. It is also an opportunity to showcase the different and rich Nigerian cuisines at the food fair organized during the carnival. Put together, all these points towards one thing, and that is using cultural tourism to enforce and reiterate our identity, showing the watching world who we are as a nation, that though we are divers in nearly all culture expressions, but we are unified as a nation; that we are all Nigerians, and that we can coexist peacefully and serenely. Cultural tourism then becomes a double edged sword, or a stone killing two birds, that is, it acts as a tool for socio-economic development, and as a means for reinforcing who we are as a people.

This is one of the reasons the change in the nomenclature of the festival from 'Abuja Carnival' to 'Nigerian National Carnival' in 2016 is a welcome development, as it gives it a national outlook. Yes, we might argue that big cultural tourism brands like Rio de Janeiro Carnival, Sao Paulo Carnival, Notting Hill Carnivals retain the city names where they are held, and they are still celebrated as national carnivals. It is instructive to note that the Trinidad and Tobago Carnival still uses its country's name, and it is a big brand when it comes to cultural tourism brands, and a reference point in cultural tourism products.

When the identity of a people is clearly accentuated and magnificently promoted through cultural tourism, it uniquely sets the people apart from other destinations. Cultural tourists are always looking for new experience and cultures different from theirs. When they are able to identify one, they are always voracious in their quest to consume these new

cultures. Marketing a people's cultural identity through cultural tourism positions such people and their culture to receive these tourists. This can only translate to socio-economic advancement of the destination and impact positively on their people. Natasha Urusevic affirms this fact when she posited that cultural tourism "represents the best model for local tourism development in the turbulent global context, because it optimally uses the authentic characteristics of destinations and the unique elements of their cultural identity to differentiate them from competitors and to position themselves better in the global market" (68-69). This will protect and strengthen the cultural heritage of the people and help sustain their cultural identities, values and economy, she affirms. This is what the policy makers in the Nigeria should aim at in the development of cultural tourism products. We are at a time in our history that this important task of cultural and identity sustainability in the face of globalization must be carried out with all seriousness and doggedness we are capable of mustering, in order to make our identity visible and poignant.

Conclusion

As a people, we cannot wish away our cultural practices. While being Eurocentric is now the new cool thing, we must understand that our own cultural practices and values are at risk. This therefore means that our identity is also at risk of being eroded and replaced by western identity, as their culture takes hold on us. We're already witnessing the gradual extermination of our language, with those classified as millennials completely non-responsive when it comes to speaking their local dialect, but versed in the art of speaking English language. They are also not conversant with our cultural practices and will proudly identify with foreign culture rather than their own culture, which is being classified as primitive. They have not only embraced western identity, but sometimes loathe to be associated with their own identity. We dare to say that they are not the only one in this bracket, as some older Nigerians are found wanting in this practice.

This is why we need to celebrate our culture and elevate it as something to be associated with. As we've found out, cultural tourism is a veritable platform to do this. While it sustains the narrative of our cultural discourse, it showcases our identity as a people. We need to celebrate who we are as Nigerians, our rich culture, heritage, our diversity and our unity. We need to show the world that we are proud of who we are as a people. This can only sell our acceptability, and for all the world to see us for who we really are.

Recommendations

1. In recent years, the Nigeria National Carnival has dwindled in content and participation. This can be attributed to the increasing insecurity in the country.

Government must do more than they are doing to ensure a sense of safety in all parts of the country, especially in Abuja, the host city and surrounding states.

2. There has also been a lack of interest in the Nigeria National Carnival, especially from participating states and invited countries. The Carnival Management Committee must do its utmost best to change this trend, because the more participants the more content, and the more attraction as well. There is the need to sensitize the state government and convince them about the importance of sending their state representatives to the carnival, as this will help in boosting the content of the festival
3. The Nigeria National Carnival Management Committee which is now headed by the Minister of Information and Culture, must put in more efforts in publicizing the festival within and outside the country. Nigerians from all walks of life need to be aware of this festival, and they need to know on time so that they can make adequate preparations to attend. This also goes for foreign tourists. The management team must publicize the festival to them, using all available advertising means to reach out to them, and encourage them to come experience our cultural diversity.
4. The festival needs to be packaged to enforce our national identity and reinforce who we really are to the world.
5. The National Tourism Development Corporation should partner with state government to develop more cultural tourism products that accentuates the Nigerian identity. This should be done with the objective of reinforcing our identity and asserting who we are as a people.

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