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**CONTRIBUTION OF FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE  
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN CULTURE**

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Olatunji John OMOTOSO

Department of History, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education,  
Oyo, Lanlate Campus, Lanlate  
and

Olatunde John OGUNDIRAN

Department of Social Studies, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education,  
Oyo, Lanlate Campus, Lanlate

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**Abstract**

The erroneous belief that Africa is somehow childlike in its cultural development has been denounced as people become more familiar with the cultural traditions of the continent. Arts and culture, no doubt, is a mixture of our history and identity in today's world. Hence, the need for African people to uphold their indigenous culture rather than borrow foreign cultures with their attendant negative consequences on the society. This paper, therefore, examines celebration of festivals of arts and culture as a modest way of projecting the memories of our indigenous religion and culture. The authors also look at festival of arts and culture as a great platform for mobilizing stakeholders in the arts and culture industry in which they interact, showcase talents and project the values of heritage as well as develop the spirit of national identity and peaceful coexistence.

**Keywords:**Civilization; Culture; Festival; Globalization; Heritage; Renaissance.

## Introduction

Western civilization and ideas no doubt dealt a debilitating blow on African cultural values and civilization, but in spite of foreign influence with its attendant negative consequences, African culture still blossoms. Globalization and social transformation though essential, has become a threat to the cultural identity of a people. According to Yero (2013), respect for our heritage is important as a catalyst of cultural diversity and a guarantee for sustainable development.

Festival is said to be institutionalized aspects of peoples culture (Fasehun, 2010). The history of the festival of arts and culture could be traced to the world festival of Negro arts held in Dakar, Senegal in 1966. The second one was the Festac 77 held in Nigeria. It was a great cultural assembly of Africans and African-Americans. It was held for one month between 19<sup>th</sup> January and 12<sup>th</sup> February, 1977. The festival was a class act that brought people of all races and nationalities to Nigeria in celebration of arts and culture that has since not been surpassed. The festival, which was a great departure from the first festival in terms of scope and magnitude, embraced all black and African people from all over the world. (Festac, 77).

Africans are proud of their rich cultural traditions and this culminated in Nigerian, hosting a week-long festival celebrating the best of arts and culture (NAFEST). It was established in 1970, after the Nigeria's civil war, to help promote national unity. The festival coordinates, preserves, promotes, and presents the very best of the country's arts and culture. The festival is hosted in turn by different states of thenation. During the festival, Nigeria's cultural heritage is reflected through various competitive and non-competitive events, including music and dance, traditional wrestling, moonlights games for children and dramas. The national festival of arts and culture, today, remains one of the major cultural festivals that serves as a great platform for mobilizing stakeholders in the arts and culture industry. Duke (2013) also believed that by harnessing the economic potential in the culture and tourism sector, the country can help to reduce unemployment, poverty, youth restlessness and all other societal vices.

This paper therefore is divided into five main parts. The first part introduces the study while the second part examines the concept of

African culture. Part three discusses the features of African culture and its development, the fourth part explains the contribution of festival of arts and culture while the fifth part, concludes the paper. Much emphasis is however, being given to celebration of festival of arts and culture in Nigeria.

### Concept of African culture

Culture is essentially fluid and constantly in motion and this makes it difficult to define any culture in only one way. Adedokun (1990) view culture as a total way of a people. That is, the way people live from day to day, what they do, believe, cherish, desire and how they go about these things. He went further to say that the culture of every society is unique containing a combination of their norms and values which are different from other people.

African culture, therefore, refers to the total way of life of African people. This way of life included arrangements and methods of obtaining food from the environment and adapting to it. African culture includes rules and regulations that govern African people's behavior in the society. This includes beliefs, religion, moral behavior and whatever Africans have produced using their available materials and knowledge. Hence, African culture is shared and is passed on from parents to children. This means that although an individual may die, his society and culture continue (Ogunmodede, 1990).

Culture is also the totality of the individual and the corporate personality of his society. Its importance is further borne out of the fact that human action is determined at least partly by cultural values and socially acceptable means of attaining them. Generally, each ethnic group in African societies has a culture peculiar to it.

Every culture has many aspects to it which can be grouped into material and non-material aspects (Adesanwo, 2012). Material culture, according to him consists mainly, of the products of men's industry or art, for example, bridges, plates, combs, hoes, cutlasses, pots, clothes, baskets etc. Thus, material aspects of culture consist of those objects which man has learned to make use of satisfy certain needs in his society. The other aspects, i.e. non-material, consist of what we cannot see but have learned as part of the way we live. Examples are language; morals, religion, and values and the whole

body of knowledge including technology learned and passed on from generation to generation. Other aspects of non-material culture are people's music, folklore, literature, manner of dancing, art, manner of thinking and way of dressing.

Features of African culture and its development through time

One of the basic features of African culture is traditional education, with its emphasis on learning by doing. Indigenous education in Africa has been said to be as old as man himself whereas Islam and Christianity, two religions which have greatly influenced African indigenous education are recent. The apprenticeship system, whereby young boys and girls were handed over to master crafts men and women to learn specific trades was an integral part of this education. (Biobaku, 1984)

In the African indigenous setting, traditional African education emphasized social responsibilities, job orientation, political participation and appreciation of spiritual and moral values. Children learnt by doing, in other words, children and adolescents were engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitation, recitation and demonstration. They were also involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, drumming, acrobatic display, racing, while intellectual training included the study of local history, legends, the environment (local geography, plants and animals), poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, storytelling etc. Traditional African education, therefore, combined physical training with character building and manual activities with intellectual training. At the end of each stage, demarcated either by age level or years of exposure, the child was given a practical test relevant to his/her experience and level of development and in terms of the job to be done. Ayode (1992) asserts that this was a continuous assessment which eventually culminated in a "passing out" ceremony or initiation into adulthood.

Adeyinka (1991), is of the view that African culture has passed through a stage of development since educated elites in Africa, had gone western with the acceptance of formal education of European type, with its emphasis on literary and academic work, as a model of education for Africa. The logical outcome of this has been the

intensification of the process of acceptance of the literary tradition introduced by the Christian missions, through formal classroom education. Consequently, it led to an almost wholesale acceptance of western culture and ways of life generally. In addition, western culture also permeated other African cultural values, like food and drinking habits, dressing habits and religious and marital life. Thus, today, many Africans take salads, tinned foods, biscuits, coffee and tea and other types of British and other European foods either as a supplement or as an alternative to various African foods. African people now prefer the imported beer, whisky and gin to our age-old palm wine and similar native drinks. Although Africans maintain most of her indigenous foods and drinks, there is no doubt that the western cultural traits have been integrated into their cultural values.

Adeyinka (1991) stressed further that religious aspect of African culture has been influenced by foreign culture. The introduction of Christianity and Islam had influenced African religion. Africans believed in various gods as intermediaries between them and the "Almighty." African people worship different gods before the introduction of Christianity and Islam but now Africans tend to imitate the European men and women by way of going to churches on Sundays, attending mass and partaking of the Holy Communion. On the other hand, many Africans are now versed in Arabic language so deeply soaked in Islamic culture that we tend to be outwardly more Arabic than the Arabs themselves. But we should note that, in spite of the acceptance of foreign religions into African culture, Africans still practiced their traditional religions side by side with these foreign religions.

Furthermore, African marriage culture has also passed through developmental stage. Prior to the introduction of western culture, Africans practised polygamy. But with the introduction of Christianity to Africa, Africans have tended towards British monogamous life, thus accepting monogamous marriage as an integral part of their culture. We should however, note that in African traditional religion, as in the Islamic religion, polygamy is generally recognized as a way of life.

Contribution of Festival of Arts and Culture in the development of African Culture

African culture is rich and comprises all aspects of life vis-à-vis: religion,

music, dressing, mode of eating and all human endeavours. Danmole (2014) noted that there is more to be found in African culture than the western culture. He went further that African culture has deep-rooted values and lessons that could better the lives of the African child, hence, the need for re-orientation. No doubt, African culture needs to be developed, irrespective of western influences on African culture. This development can only be achieved by way of promoting festivals of arts and culture.

In Nigeria, the festival of arts and culture acts as a forum for Nigerians to meet and display their culture. The festival as a whole could be a vital force in the revival of waning tribal cultural activities and in the acquisition of new skills which would enhance the development and healthy growth of the theatre, music, art, sculpture and literature of this country. For instance, during the Eastern Nigerian festival of the arts, various cultural talents were brought to light. It featured dancing, drama, music, photography, arts and crafts and literature. Prizes were awarded to those who distinguished themselves in various events that were contested for. In addition, dance performers were representative of the linguistic groups among whom the institutions performing them were located. All these produced the greatest excitement of the whole festival, both among the spectators and the dancers. The famous Atilogu dancers, Mgbaga and the Egwu-igba featured during the festival.

Celebration of festival of arts and culture has contributed to the preservation of social norms, which is one of the cultural values in African societies. For instance, the Zangbeto masquerade in Lagos, Nigeria is a raffia masquerade cult. This masquerade is held in awe by the community because of its association with the 'Agemo' group of masquerades that has the 'Elegbara' (Devil) as their patron. This masquerade performs annually at the prescribed occasion when there is any emergency in the community, during which those who depart from social norms may be punished. This no doubt has been able to maintain peace among the people and the need for people to live without putting their fellow men in danger through their acts. There is also the annual performance of Igunnuko masquerades. The masquerade is a mysterious personification of 'Soponna' (the god of small pox), capable of causing or averting the dreadful disease. This

attests to why small-pox concoctions are usually sprayed on routes to be taken by the masquerade. The Igunnuko masquerade dance is performed once annually during the Igunnu festival. This, no doubt, attests to the fact that Nigerian culture encompasses the belief in their 'gods' to cure certain diseases.

It is expedient to add the new idea in the celebration of arts and culture which is prominent in the western part of Nigeria. It is an annual event which is often tagged with different names, depending on the belief of the people (for instance, Ojudeoba festival from Ijebu-ode in Nigeria). This festival is a modernized way of promoting traditional cultural values during which various cultural dances and music are often exhibited. Ojude oba festival in Ijebu-ode is usually held on the third day after Ileya festival. It is a festival whose main purpose is for the people of Ijebu to come together as one to honour their king and is regarded as one of the biggest festivals in West Africa (Wikipedia.org). Ojude oba is a cultural masterpiece that equally serves as a distinctive platform to reconnect with the values that sustain the rich history, heritage and industrious uniqueness of the Ijebu people. The festival has become a long-standing yearly tradition that the true sons and daughters of Ijebuland and tourists from other climes look forward to, as it equally serves as a unifying factor and a tourist attraction.

It is common for people to contest in various events in most of the festivals of arts and culture. Prizes are given to the best cultural dancers and best cultural musicians. In addition, there are masquerades' displays where various traditional masquerades would perform and this attests to the belief in the spirit of ancestors. This is in commemoration of the spirit of the departed souls. The masquerade, as should be noted, acts as a check on witchcraft activities because it is believed that masquerades possess the power to drive the witches away from the society.

Celebration of arts and culture has contributed to the unity that permeates the society. It is an occasion where people come home from different walks of life to unite with their people in the spirit of oneness. In addition, it is an avenue where issues for the development of the society are discussed and this has yielded a lot of dividends to the community. For instance, it is through the celebration of festivals of arts and cultures that, town halls, and cultural centers are built in

some towns. Also, the construction of roads and building of schools were attributed to the celebration of arts and culture in many places.

Furthermore, the festival of arts and culture has enabled people from diverse cultural background to appreciate other people's culture. For example, it is a tradition for Agbegijo masquerade dancers to go to other towns in order to dance for other Egungun societies during their festivals. The dancers watch each other jealously and quickly pick up new ideas from other groups. This is evident in various cultural displays that were show-cased during 'Festac 77'. It was an event where various talents were discovered and new ideas were learnt by participants. (Festac 77)

### Conclusion

There is no doubt that foreign influence has affected African cultural values which can be said to be 'trans-continental' cultural integration. Although, culture influences culture and no single culture exists in isolation, yet, respect for our indigenous cultural heritage is important as a catalyst for cultural diversity and a guarantee for sustainable development. In addition, African culture borrowed some ingredients from other cultures but the nucleus of African culture still remains intact. One important thing to note is a careful examination of the various aspects of foreign cultures to further development in African countries, "that is, those aspects of foreign cultures that could be merged with local cultures to produce a refined culture that could lead to more meaningful education, better and more effective social, economic and political organizations and better life for all. In addition, the celebration of arts and culture has contributed an immeasurable value to African cultural renaissance. It has enlivened the peoples' cultural beliefs, in spite of western cultural ideas which disrupted African cultural beliefs (what the western people termed as being 'superstitions').

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