

**THE RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT OF THE  
NIGERIAN CULTURAL LIFE AT HUNDRED**

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**Abstract**

The Nigerian rich cultural life is shaped by Nigeria's multiple ethnic groups. Interestingly, cultural life in Nigeria is to a large extent marked by traditions and adaptation of foreign culture. Cultural heritage/life is an essential aspect of human life and its promotion and preservation remains an asset to a state. Cultural life plays a prominent role in the development of any nation. Moreover, cultural life in Nigeria is not static; it changes from time to time and place to place. It is influenced by a number of factors such as education, civilization, modernization as well as science and technology. However, it is important to note that most of the Nigerian cultural heritage is lost and people do not go back to it again. Instead, they adopt foreign culture which slows down the pace of cultural development in Nigeria. The main purpose of this paper is to look at the past and the present cultural life of the Nigerian people and how this has changed overtime. This paper therefore concludes that the indigenous cultural life in Nigeria is fading away and is giving way to foreign culture. The western ways of life is dominating the traditional Life style of Nigerians. The paper explored the retrospect and prospect of cultural life in Nigeria. Specifically this paper examines some cultural issues and concepts aspects of

life such as family life, food, music, religion, languages, dressing among others, in order to show case the cultural life of the people of Nigeria.

### Introduction

Nigeria is a society with abundant rich cultural heritage that are spread across the diversified ethnic nationalities. These cultural heritages include language, marriage rites, burial rites, birth rites, dressing, greeting, music, folklore, religion and ,other tangible cultural monuments, natural sites and cultural landscapes. The Nigerian culture is shaped by Nigeria's multiple ethnic groups (Ogunbameru, 2006). Culture is the totality of learned, socially, transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects and behaviours. It includes the ideas, values, customs and artefacts of a group of people (Schaefer, 2002). Culture is a pattern of human activities and the symbols that give these activities significance. Culture comprises material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. It is the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing people from their neighbours (FRN, 1988).

### Family Life

Omokwu (2003) emphasizes that family life is very important to Nigerians irrespective of one's tribe. Family is of central importance to Nigerians and children are considered life's richest blessings by most cultures. A family is made up of people who are related by blood, marriage or adoption. There are two major family types; the nuclear family, which is made up of one man, his wife and their unmarried children and the extended family which is usually made up of a series of nuclear families. Culturally, most Nigerian cultural groups practice patrilineal descent, patriarchal authority, patrilocal rule of residence and are generally patricentric in outlook (Omokhodion, 1996).

The majority of Nigerian families are very large by western standards. Many Nigerian men take more than one wife. In some ethnic groups, the greater the number of children, the greater a

man's standing in the eyes of his peers. Family units often or more are not uncommon. In most parts of Nigeria, family linkage, and consanguinity are very important. Thus, people have fourth, fifth, sixth or even seventh cousins. They may refer to people from their villages or towns as brothers or sisters and create associations to perpetuate the linkages. In a polygamous family, each wife is responsible for feeding and caring for her own children, though the wives often help each other when needed (Leech, 2008). The wives also will take turns feeding their husband so that the cost of his food is spread equally between or among the wives. Husbands are the authority figures in the household and many are not used to their ideas or wishes being challenged. However, family life nowadays has experienced some changes. The extended family system is no longer in vogue, nuclear family system is now the order of the day. Also, newly married couples do not live with their extended family members, they prefer to live separately in their rented apartment with husband and wife catering for their children. Moreso, communal living in terms of mode of feeding and sleeping together by the children is no more in practice, as children are served with meals on separate plates and sleep in different rooms.

### Naming

Naming a child is an important aspect of Nigerian life. A child may receive different names from each of their extended relatives. The full name will include all these acquired names followed by a Christian or Muslim name and lastly by the family/surname. The name subsequently used will be determined by the parents. Babies normally undergo the naming ceremony on the 7 or 8 day (Omekwu, 2006). In the past, child naming was usually carried out using some food items such as sugar cane, honey, salt, palm oil to pray for the new born baby. The trend nowadays is that Pastor and Imam are involved using the holy books (Bible and Quran) to pray for the new born child while the names of the new child are printed on the paper for the people to read, the trend which was not in practice in the olden days.

### Evolving Parental Roles

Akande (2002) affirms that in the past, the father was undisputable, the

head of the family and the mother a homemakers. Women had rigid traditional role in the home and that is to keep the home, undertake domestic chores, take care of the husband by cooking delicious meals and train the children. The change in this traditional role has a great impact on lives of men and children to' Nowadays, there is a general call for men to share in domestic responsibilities to allow women that are desirous to achieve their careers, family goals and avoid stress overload (William, 2005).

#### Debasement of Family Values

It is a well-known fact according to Otite (1971) that family values have been debased. Parents no longer seen to play their traditional roles and children are disobedient and act flagrantly against social norms and duties. The attributes of old family values which include honesty, respect, purity, caring and commitment have largely eroded away. In the present, families have been shattered by divorce (Clude, 2004). Children are more criminally prone than being obedient. Children are at home alone while parents are at work, sex outside of marriage is accepted, truth is relative and the focus is more on self-interest than family interest.

In Nigeria, due to the impact of globalization on cultural norms, socialization processes and values are affected (Kroeber, 2002). For instance, some parents are no longer frowning at what the youths put on. The traditional pattern of subordinating when greeting an elder has changed to "hi". As a result of urbanization and migration and associated economic factors, however, the nuclear family is gradually becoming the dominant family type. It functions slightly differently from the typical nuclear family in western countries. This may be the result of traces of the extended family system of being "our brothers' keepers" (Carden, 2008).

In modern times, patriarchical authority has declined because of the twin-processes of modernization and industrialization. Decisions within families have gradually turned into joint decision in which both the husband and the wife (wives) make contributions (Oyeneye, 1996). There is another recent development in the family system owing to the expansion of commercial activities in the country, some women have become very wealthy, built houses and have in some cases assumed

the headship of their families. This recent phenomenon is to be found in large Nigerian cities where commercial activities have become well-developed and women are at the forefront. Thus, there is a tendency towards an egalitarian family system. Within such system, power and authority are nearly equally divided between the husband and the wife.

### Feeding in Daily Life

In the opinion of Conway (2000), Nigeria food embellishes a rich blend of traditionally African carbohydrates such as yam and cassava as well as vegetable soups made from green leaves. Garri is a powdered cassava grain that can be readily eaten as a meal and is quite cheap. Yam is either fried in oil or pounded to make a mashed potato like yam pottage. Nigerian beans, quite different from green peas, is widely popular. Meat is also popular and Nigerian suya, a barbecue like method of roasting meat; is a well known delicacy. Fermented palm products are used to make traditional liquor, palm wine as is fermented cassava. Some more examples of traditional dishes are eba, pounded yam (Iyan), fufu etc with soups like okra, ogbono, egusi and so on.

Western influences, especially in urban centres have transformed Nigerian eating habits in many ways (Amadi, 1982). City dwellers are familiar with the canned, frozen and pre-packaged foods found in most western - style super markets. Foreign restaurants also are common in larger cities. Rural Nigerian dwellers tend to stick more with traditional foods and preparation techniques. Food in Nigeria is traditionally eaten by hand. However, with the growing influence of western culture, forks and spoons are becoming more common even in remote villages. Establishments serving alcoholic beverages are found everywhere except where Islamic laws prohibit them.

### Music

The music of Nigeria includes many kinds of folks and popular music. Some of which are known worldwide. Traditional musicians use a number of diverse instruments such as the Gongon drums, other traditional cultural expressions are found in the various masquerades of Nigeria, such as the Eyo masquerades, the Ekpe and Ekpo masquerades of the Efik/Ibibio/Annang/Igbo peoples of coastal south-eastern Nigeria and the Northern Edo masquerades. The most

popular Yoruba wooden masks are the Gelede masquerades. Hotels and night clubs are part of the landscape of the larger cities. Movie, theatres, showing mostly Indian and American films are popular among the urban middle and low-income groups. Radio, television and other forms of home entertainment e.g. recorded music and movies are also grown in popularity though their use is dependent on the availability of electricity (Croucher, 2004).

### Marriage

In the view of Hock-Tong (2001), there are three types of marriage in Nigeria today. Religious marriage, civil marriage and traditional marriage. Religious marriages, usually Christian or Muslim are conducted according to the norms of the respective religious teachings and take place in a church or mosque. Christian males are allowed only one wife, while Muslim men- can take up to four wives. Civil official weddings take place in a government registry office. Men are allowed only one wife under a civil wedding regardless on religion. Traditional marriages are usually held at the wife's house and are performed according to the custom of the ethnic group involved. However, divorce is quite common in Nigeria. Marriage is more of a social contract made to ensure the continuation of family lines rather than a union based on love and emotional connections. In most ethnic groups, either the man or the woman can end the marriage.

### Burial Rites

According to Lechner (2002), Nigerian funeral ceremonies still retain their traditional flair. Nigerian traditional religions believe that a person has to be buried with appropriate ceremonies and rites to prevent him from coming back to haunt the living. Nigerian Muslims bury their dead with the heads facing the holy city of Mecca. Traditionally for most tribes a man is buried with his head facing the east so that he can witness the sunrise. Women are buried facing west so that they will be able to prepare dinner for their husbands in the afterlife after sunset (Andarh, 1992).

The appropriate attire during a burial depends on the age of the deceased. When the deceased has lived to a significantly ripe age, family members of the deceased pick specific colours to be worn by

all family members (Nwuzor, 2002). When a young person is being buried, dark and full clothing colours are worn to signify that it is indeed a occasion. A typical burial service is characterized by a lot of singing, prayers, praising the family through poetry and eulogizing the departed. After the initial burial of the deceased, relatives can perform a second burial according to the culture of most Nigerian tribes. Second burial involves organizing elaborates celebrations for the dead, accompanied by merrymaking and partying (Clifford, 2013).

### Dressing

In general, dress in Nigeria is conservative (Griffin, 1978). Women wear clothing that covers their arms and legs and some cover their heads. Trousers on women are being seen more and more. Men also dress casually, conservative, meaning that trouser and short or long sleeved shirts are the norm. Nigerian clothing styles depicts the Nigerian culture and traditions. There are different clothings for different places and events, unlike the western world where people dress in suits and long sleeve. Clothing in Nigeria symbolizes religious affiliation, wealth and social standing. Northern Muslim wear long, loose-fitting garments such as the caftan, together with colourful embroidered hats or (among traditional officials) turbans. Most Yoruba men also wear elaborate gowns and hats, somewhat different in style. Many Nigerians in the south wear casual western - style dress. Women wear wrap round garments or dresses (Cluckhohn, 2014).

### Religion

It is estimated that 50percent of Nigerians are Muslim, 40 percent are Christian and that the remaining 10percent practice various indigenous religions (Lanski, 1995). While Muslims can be found in all parts of Nigeria, their strongest footholds are among the Hausa and the Yoruba. Islam in Nigeria is similar to Islam throughout the world. It is based on the teachings of the Prophet Muhammed, which are outlined in the Quran. Christianity is most prevalent in the southern states of Nigeria. The vast majority of Igbo are Christians, as are many Yorubas. The most popular forms of Christianity in Nigeria include Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, Spiritual and Pentecostal Churches (Lucas, 2004), Awolalu (1979) is of the opinion that the adherents of the new religions find it difficult to dissociate themselves from traditional religious practices.

Despite a century of intensive Christian evangelization and about two centuries of Mohammedan penetration into the country, belief in Ifa still finds expression among many civilized Yorubas.

### Languages

English is the official language of Nigeria, used in all government interactions and in state-run schools. In northern Nigeria many people who are not Hausas by ethnic speak both Hausa and their own tribal language. The dominant indigenous languages of the south are Yoruba and Igbo. Prior to colonization, these languages were the unifying languages of the southwest and southeast. Pidgin, a mix of African languages and English is also common throughout southern Nigeria. It basically uses English words mixed in Yoruba or Igbo foreign language (Gbatokuma, 1992).

Today, the use of foreign language, English has always been an important aspect of official language in Nigeria. Though, there is high rate of illiteracy in the rural population, the use of local languages has its limitations. Many elite families would like their children to learn English language better than their local language (McGraw, 1998). Today, Nigerians use and read books written in foreign language faster and more fluently than those written in local languages. In Nigeria cultural globalization has impacted on the number of movies produced in English are much more than those performed and produced in Igbo and other Nigerian languages (Mitchell, 2009).

In order to gather more information about changes in cultural patterns in Nigeria, a mini study was conducted among forty (40) inhabitants in four communities – Akeesan, Ajagba, Agunpopo and Ajegunle of Oyo town. The outcome of the min-study conducted on the perceived changes in cultural patterns revealed the following: On the perception of people about changes in cultural life patterns findings indicated that cultural life patterns in Nigeria is not static but dynamic and changes over the years. Better still, all aspects of cultural life patterns have experienced one change or the other. Again, the face to face interview conducted on the perception of the people about changes in cultural patterns showed that cultural life patterns of Nigerians involve both traditional and modern practices. There were also convergent and divergent views about changes in cultural life in



Nigeria. The convergent views believed that cultural life in Nigeria is moving back to the olden days of doing things; while the divergent views felt that cultural life patterns of Nigerians is embracing new life styles in terms of mode of dressing, greetings and languages among others.

Among the identified factors responsible for changes in cultural life patterns in Nigeria are: education, civilization (modernization), globalization (science and technology). However, opinions differ with regard to these factors. Based on the people's perception, education tops the list of these factors and was ranked highest, followed by the effect of civilization while globalization was ranked lowest among the factors responsible for changes in cultural life patterns of Nigerians.

The result of the interview conducted on the perception of the people about changes in some aspects of the Nigerian cultural life patterns such as mode of dressing, feeding (eating) language and music revealed that the cultural life patterns mostly affected by these changes is mode of dressing followed by language, music and mode of feeding.

### Conclusion

It is a known fact that cultural life patterns of Nigerians are dynamic in nature and it changes from time to time and place to place. This change is influenced by the impact of education, civilization and globalization. The Nigerian cultural heritage is lost while the western cultures have impacted greatly on Nigerian traditional cultural lifestyle which has slowed down the rate of cultural development in Nigeria.

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