

**AESTHETICS OF COLOURS, SYMBOLS AND SPECTACLES IN THE 2021
NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE, (NAFEST) EKITI STATE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Nigeria as a multi-cultural nation boasts of many festivals, many of which are found in the six geo-political zones of the country. One of the major festivals that bring together the Nigerian citizens as one entity is the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) organized by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC). The festival is celebrated yearly in ways that are unique to Nigerians and culture enthusiasts locally and abroad. The festival has equally boosted the Nigerian economy through tourism promotion and culture preservation. This study shall adopt Cultural identity theory. The theory will be used to examine the festival as a platform that showcases culture which represents the totality of the ways and lives of the Nigerian people. To achieve this, the researcher shall gather data as a participant observer during the festival which featured elements such as costume, make-up, dance, drama, children theatre, fashion parade, local cuisines, local games, music, props, acrobatic displays, trade fair among others. These elements are the cultural aesthetics of the festival thereby creating spectacles and colours in unique styles by each of the 36 states of the federation and the FCT Abuja. The study particularly examines the 2021 edition of NAFEST hosted by Ekiti State Government. The study reveals that the festival is a unique multi-ethnic event that brings together Nigerians and their kinsmen in the diaspora. NAFEST has equally provided a good opportunity to showcase the rich cultural heritage of Ekiti people and the economic values of their products and materials. The paper, therefore, concludes that, the National Festival of Arts and Culture has over the years promoted national unity and social integration among Nigerians.

Keywords: Colours, Culture, Spectacle, NAFEST, Ekiti State

Introduction

It has been observed that, one of the attention seekers presently in Nigeria is festival events, be it traditional one or a contemporary one. People engaged in these festival events as a way of coming together as one and sometimes as

an avenue to welcome the new year. To be more realistic on this, festival event is associated with culture, because culture is the way of life of the people in a given society which form some kind of social understanding on social rights, behaviors, duties, language, taboos and acts of their heroes.

Many of these festivals have existed for many years and have been passed from one generation to another. The only difference now is that, the world is more civilized thereby changing a lot of things to make things acceptable to the whole world. One major thing that festival has done to Nigeria as a country is that, it has turn to economy booster and tourism enlargement, it has also made many states to start to researching into what seems to be treasure in their local environment, thereby promoting tourism sector of the state. There are many festivals and carnivals in Nigeria, some of these are: Abuja Carnival, Lagos Carnival, Argungu festival, Calabar Carnival and Ekiti State Carnival (EKIFEST) to mention few. The most important festival that unites the 36 states of the Federation is the National Festival of Arts and Culture organized by the National Council for Arts and culture. The 2021 edition which was the 34th event, held in conjunction with The Ekiti State Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism.

There has been a clear observation that, the lackadaisical attitude of youths in this generation towards culture is alarming. The Youths no longer carry out research into important factors that make them members of a particular ethnic group and may wrongfully represent an ideal celebration. Therefore, festivals are meant to be done regularly to keep the cultural heritage of the country to stand still rather than allowing it to go into extinction.

The study is set to bring out the aesthetics, colours, symbols and spectacles as it is used in the National Festival of Arts and Culture during the Ekiti 2021 version of the event.

The main objectives of this study are to examine:

- Festival as an important instrument in the promotion of national unity
- The originality in our cultures before we allow influences from the western world to destroy it.

Theoretical Framework

The study theoretical framework for this study is foregrounded on cultural identity theory. This shall be used to appraise this study. The theory deals with

people identifying themselves with a particular community. Lustig (133) states that Cultural identity theory refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. This process involves learning about and accepting traditions, heritage, language religion, ancestry, aesthetics, thinking patterns and social structures of a culture. The above listed are what we could verify from the participation of contingents of each state ranging from their costumes, and languages. Cultural identity deals with the following features:

- Rituals
- Holiday celebrations
- Communal activities
- Language

Brief History of NAFEST

The National Festival of Arts and Culture was established in 1970, after the end of Nigeria's civil war, to help promote national unity. The event is organized annually by the national Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC). NAFEST has developed into a major veritable celebration in Nigeria. The week-long festival is usually hosted by one of the 36 states of the federation. During the festival, Nigeria's cultural heritage is reflected through various competitive and non-competitive events including music, dance, traditional wrestling, and moonlight game for children, local exhibitions like cuisines, herbs, Arts and craft. Participants at NAFEST are traditionally drawn from the 36 states of the federation and the FCT; culture Parastatals, Government agencies and the academia.

Brief History of Ekiti State

Ekiti State was one of the states created on 1st October, 1996 alongside other five states by the late General Sanni Abacha who was the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The name Ekiti was originally coined from the Yoruba word "Ile Olokiti" the land of hills. The "Okiti" was later renamed Ekiti. Ekiti state constitutes one of the largest Yoruba sub-groups in Nigeria. Their ancestor migrated from Ile-Ife, the ancient town which is believed by many as the spiritual home of the entire Yoruba race. Ekiti people are culturally homogenous in nature and they speak a unique dialect of Yoruba language known as Ekiti. Ekiti state has 16 local Government Areas and the people are rich in culture with their unique traditions of dressing, dancing and singing. Ekiti major food is pounded yam with Isapa

soup, vegetable or Ila asepo (okro) soup which are all complimented with bush meat and palmwine. Ekiti people are very hardworking and intelligent; the state has produced the highest number of professors in Nigeria, which is why the state is called "LAND OF HONOUR" "ILE IYI, ILE EYE". The state is equally blessed with fantastic sites for tourism, this makes it one of the reasons why NAFEST 2021 was hosted in the state by the National Council of Arts and Culture. This will invariably expose the hidden treasures of Ekiti to the world thereby improving the internally generated revenue sector. Prominent sites in Ekiti are:

- Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort, Ikogosi Ekiti.
- Arinta Water Falls, Ikole Iloro.
- Fajuyi Memorial Park, Ado Ekiti.
- Oke Abanijorin, Iyin Ekiti.
- Motif Funland, Are Ekiti
- Orole/Olosunta Hills, Ikere Ekiti
- Agbonna Hills, Okemesi Ekiti.
- Ogun Onire Groove, Ire Ekiti.
- Ero Dam, Ikun Ekiti.
- Erin Ayonigba Sacred Fish River, Erinjiyan Ekiti.
- Oroke Ewo War Center, Ilupeju Ekiti.
- Esa cave, Iyin Ekiti.
- Joseph Ayo Babalola's Tomb, Efon Alaaye Ekiti
- ABUAD Planetarium, Ado Ekiti.
- Osun Osogbo Source, Igede Ekiti.
- First Catholic Mass Centre, Usi Ekiti
- Kiriji War Field Resort/ Museum, Okemesi Ekiti.

NAFEST Ekiti 2021 at a Glance

The National Festival for Arts and Culture (NAFEST EKITI 2021) was a long week event which opened on the 13th November 2021 with a command performance by Ekiti State Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism. The performance was a combination of the dance, drama and local circus.

The opening ceremony commenced at Ekiti Parapo Pavillion with one thousand dancers on tarmac led by the wife of the Executive Governor of Ekiti State, Her Excellency Erelu Bisi Fayemi. The first lady led the performance by reading lines about the biography of Ekiti people and how they rose to fame in all they do. The reading was titled THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF THE ROLLING HILLS a

script written by Prof. Bakare Ojo Rasaki, the Hon. Commissioner for Ekiti State Ministry of Arts, Culture and Tourism. The dancers blended their choreography with the lines read by her Excellency. The performance was colourful and spectacular in nature showing the uniqueness of the traditional and contemporary lives of the Ekiti people. Other spectacular events during the festival include:

- Traditional board game competition
- Drama competition
- Drum ensemble
- Indigenous fashion competition
- Children essay writing competition
- Children storytelling and puppetry competition
- Children hand craft competition
- Nigeria fabrics interior decoration competition
- Traditional cuisine competition.

Cultural Aesthetics, Symbols and Spectacles in NAFEST Ekiti 2021

One of the major areas that create symbols and spectacles in the festival is costumes. There is no festival and carnival that is complete without the use of costume. Costume stands as a major instrument when it comes to the display of culture from different parts of the six Geo-political zones in Nigeria. Asigbo (6) asserts that: "Carnival is a costumed street party with spectacle, elegance, gaiety, pageant and dancing." The above statement has revealed in this study that the festival is graced with costumes showing aesthetics, colors, symbols and spectacles. This is not far-fetched from costumes displayed by each of the 36 states during the Ekiti 2021 National Festival of Arts and Culture. Costume is a big factor that brings out the aesthetics of any kind of performance, be it dance or musical show. Atane-igbinovia (229) views costumes as a style of dressing including accessories that are peculiar to a person, people or nation. The costumes reveal the cultural identity embedded in costumes used by contingents from each of the States. The display of these costumes has made us see costumes beyond mere fashion. Costume should be seen as a tool for cultural representation thereby showing its transformation from the angle of what it communicates.

Furthermore, costumes are symbolic in nature, wearing it is not just for fun, it connotes a meaning and sending out a message as a means of communication.

Akpoveta and Ogbemi in Atane-Igbinovia (174) assert that: communication is a social process that uses symbols and other means to bring about interchange of thought and meanings between individual and groups for better understanding and relationships.

An example of costume standing as communication can be seen from the costume used by the Ekiti contingent in the indigenous fashion parade competition, a theme was given that dress should symbolize one Nigeria in all costumes to be showcased during the parade and the costume can be adopted as a national dress or attire.



Figure 1: Costumes made from local fabrics indigenous costumes by Ekiti State contingents designed with FESTAC head, a symbol of unity.



Figure 2: Special

In analyzing the above costume, it is seen that the attire showcased is a blend of materials from Yoruba Fabric (Adire), Epira Fabric (Ita Inochi), Igbo Fabric (Akwete) and Hausa Fabric (Guinea Brocade). Looking at the picture, one can observe that the costumes are aesthetically indigenous with a national outlook when we talk of the Nigerian GREEN WHITE GREEN national colour.

Also, the symbols on the clothes which are AREWA and the FESTAC HEAD symbolize the national unity among the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The patterns on the clothes are mixture of all the fabrics from each of the six zones.

The hand beads is coated with the colour of Tiv and Idoma people of Benue State, the hand fan (Akupe) is the Igbo traditional hand fan most common to the chiefs from the eastern part of Nigeria or someone with high status. It is usually made from the native material called "Ute" and sometimes from animal skin. The Igbo cap (Okpundie Nze) is not left out as well, very catching to the eye with creative effects which give the wearer a smart look. It fits any ceremony and also stands as a symbol of authority, tradition and culture.

Adire, also known as Kampala fabric is not left out in what is combined to design the complete costume for the National dress. The material is popularly used by the Yoruba people of South Western part of Nigeria. The production of the fabric is derived through the creation of patterns and sucked into dye to bring out the aesthetics. The fabrics were also used to design the following:

- 1) Sport Vest
- 2) Track Suit
- 3) Socks
- 4) Shoes and handbag for women outfit

Another set of costume that is pleasing to the eye is the River State traditional costume. The men are adorned with the long sequin/velvet robe or long wrappers of fantastic colours. On their neck is the coral beads and a blend of hat and walking stick, while the women are on three quarter George wrapper, a beaded head cap, neck accessories and a beaded walking stick which symbolizes a traditional dress for a new bride.



Figure 3: Ornamental male costumes from Rivers State



Figure 4: Bridal State from Rivers State

Moreover, the other 16 Local Governments who were represented by the Ekiti State contingents were not left out, they were all adorned in their regional tradition costumes. Aesthetics of costumes used by the masquerades displaying in their acrobatic dances was pleasant to the eye. The dry raffia and fresh palm fronds were indeed colourful. Feathers from different birds were used in designing the head wears of the masquerades.



Figure 5: Traditional dance costumes from Ikere-Ekiti masquerade from Ekiti -State



Figure 6: Ede masquerade from Ekiti State



Figure 7: A group of traditional masquerade from Ekiti -State



Figure 8: Some participants displaying their traditional costumes.

Figure 9: Isiagwu costume from Eastern part of Nigeria





Figure 10: Group of Ogun and Ondo State contingents

Set Design

The set design during the NAFEST event was a spectacular one. The set design is a motif of the rocks in Ekiti, which reveal the Ekiti people, is natural habitat and the nature that surround the he state. The rocks served as safety zones for the Ekiti people during wars like KIRIJI and EKITI PARAPO. Ekiti people hide in these rocks to capture their enemies and also to get safety during the war period. Therefore, the rocks were built into set designs which served as scenery for the one thousand dancers who performed at the opening ceremony. Some of the rocks painted on the set are:

- Okutagbokutalori, Ado-Ekiti(The Rock that lifted and another rock)

- Olosunta Rock, Ikere -Ekiti. Popularly known as Orun Ikere (Ikere's Heaven)
- Orole, Ikere -Ekiti. Popularly known as Baba Oke (King of Rocks)
- Abanijorin cave, Ado-Ekiti



Figure 11: Set design indicating rocks in Ekiti State

Figure 12: The 1000 dancers performing at the opening ceremony



Figure 13: The researcher pose for shoot with one of the famous rock drawings

Figure 14: The first lady rendering her lines from a set designed like a groove

The set design did not stop with the opening ceremony alone, there were also set constructions for the palace of a traditional King of each state that participated. This was a competitive event, because of this; each state had to put good efforts in creating originality of their King's palace in a traditional form. The Ekiti King's palace was constructed with woods; while the entrances were designed with local mats and the exterior in brick motifs. The interior also has a mat, a curtain, a

seat for the King and figurines as part of beautification for the King's abode.



Figure 15: The exterior and interior of Ekiti State contingents indigenous palace





Figure 15: The exterior of Abuja(FCT), Ondo and Rivers State contingents indigenous palace

Dance

There were different spectacular dances showcased by each state during the festival. The Ekiti people who were the host for NAFEST performed the Erukulele dance, professional dance and unity dance, Iwure Dance (invocation of blessing). There was Apepe dance from Ogun state, Shadi dance from the North, Obitun dance from Ondo State, Royal dance from Kano State,



Figure 15: The Iwure(Invocation of blessings dance)



Figure 16: Shadi dance from Kano State



Figure 17: The closing ceremony
4Figure 18: Royal dance from Kano



ceremony unity dance

Gong

The gong is the national symbol of NAFEST celebration. The gong is the award given out to the participants. The gong is one of the prominent musical instruments used in every state. It has the design of coat of arms on it symbolizing the country's national unity.



Figure 19: The Gong awards which is the NAFEST symbol

Figure 20: The executive Governor of Ekiti and some important dignitaries pose with the gong awards won by Ekiti State contingents

In conclusion, NAFEST EKITI 2021 has brought together a lot of people from the six geo-political zones of the country. Moreover, it has brought unity among the indigenes of Ekiti state. Also, the festival has exposed to the world the natural nature of Ekiti which has brought improvement to the tourism sector in the state. The study reveals that the festival is a unique multi-ethnic event that brings together Nigerians and their kinsmen in the diaspora. NAFEST has equally provided a good opportunity to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Ekiti people and the economic values of their products and materials.

Furthermore, it was gathered that during the week long NAFEST event, Ekiti State people witnessed a boom in their businesses. All the artisans were smiling to their banks after the event. Also, hoteliers could not hold their joy from money realized during this event, this was a big turnaround for them, because, many of their rooms were hardly fully booked, but during this event all hotels were fully booked. In fact, the available hotels in Ekiti could not serve close to 10,000 contingents that were on ground for the event.

Findings

The study discovered that, individuals should note the strong difference between religion and culture. In view of the above, there is need harness the cultural artifacts in the state. The study further reveals that the festival is a unique multi-ethnic event that brings together Nigerians and their kinsmen in the diaspora. NAFEST has equally provided a good opportunity to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Ekiti people and the economic values of their products and materials.

Recommendations

In other to improve the cultural sector of every State, there must be:

- 1) Regular meeting of directors of cultures. This will foster cultural exchange activities in each state and promote the art and cultural artifacts of each area.
- 2) The meeting is expected to promote and improve development of literary, visual and performing arts in the country such as traditional music, dance, drama, folklore, oral tradition, poetry, embroidery, weaving among others.
- 3) Government should do more of cultural orientation programmes in each state, this will make the people of that environment understand the benefits they can derive from events such as NAFEST. This will erase the misconceptions of people that NAFEST is about idol worshipping. The programme will set difference between religion and culture.

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