

Prospects of Festival Celebration for Sociocultural Reawakening of Ijebu People in Yorubaland, Nigeria

Fabusuyi Oluwaseun Abiodun

Abstract

Festival is a way of life of people. In Nigeria for instance, there are different types of festivals and masquerades to praise the spirit or mark the return of the spirits to human societies and to celebrate or regain the fertility of people and fields. What constitutes the African theatre today can rightly be attributed to traditional festivals that epitomize the culture and religion of the Africans. This is the reason why almost every state in Nigeria has its own particular festival to showcase in a given place over a specific period of time. However, this paper aimed at describing the potentialities of cultural festivities in harnessing cultural resource for sustainable development. Moreover, Ogun state has major festivities as Ojude Oba Festivities in Ijebu land of Ogun state.

Keywords: festival, socio-cultural, re-awakening, celebration, theatre

Introduction

Nigeria is enriched with diverse cultural festivities because of multi-cultural communities in the country. The requirements needed for Nigerian cultural exhibitions are not far fetch, so it can easily mobilize the available resources that largely remain untapped. This paper aimed at describing the potentialities of cultural festivities in harnessing cultural resource for sustainable development. Culture is a way people make a living. Human beings are members of social groups with shared and unique sets of culture which involve behaviours, attitudes, language, food, dress, festivals, religion, etc. Arcodia and Whitford (2007) defined culture as the total of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours shared by and passed on by the members of a specific group. It acts as a blueprint for how a group of people should behave to enable them fit into other groups. It ties us to one group and separates us from other groups and helps us to solve the problems that all humans face. Therefore, the lifestyle of people is the main aspect of their culture that differentiates them from other geographical locations and every state has its own way of doing things as its own nature which is almost peculiar to them. People celebrate ceremonies based on their cultural heritage at different and special days in the year. Many demonstrations

of diverse cultural heritage are capable of attracting patronage from national and international tourists. The cultural diversity of places therefore serve as a colourful events to present at a different time in the year.

Okpoko (2010) argued that African countries like Nigeria have cultural festivals that are rich in mythology, which can be harnessed to generate revenue. Festival is taken to be a time for showing appreciation to the ancestors for having seen them through the planting season and for protection. During the festivals, there are displays of traditional music, magic, masquerading, dressing patterns or styles among others during festival period. Festival attracts people from all works of life and serves as a form of reunion to all indigenes.

Ijebu Famous Festival Celebration

Ojude-Oba festival is an ancient festival celebrated by the Muslim people of Ijebu-Ode, a town in Ogun State, Southwestern part of Nigeria. This annual festival usually takes place the third day after Eid al-Kabir (Ileya). It is one of the most spiritual and glamorous festivals celebrated in Ijebuland and generally in Ogun State as a whole (Fahm, 2015).

It is a festival whereby different cultural age groups known as indigenes, their friends, and associates far and near parades at the front of the king's palace on the third day of Eid al Kabir festival popularly referred to as "Ileya" in Yoruba language. Oba Adetona was the one that brought back the age groups in the 18th century into the general acceptable phenomenon that is found among the today's Ijebus, and this has become an integral part of the yearly Ojude Oba festival in Ijebu. The reason for the age groups was to bring development and progress to the community (Anifowose, 2020). Ojude Oba which means king's fore-court in Yoruba language is usually celebrated with Pomp and pageantry by about 1,000,000 people from different parts of the world and Nigeria, especially those from Yoruba origin and most especially by people of Ijebu descent all over the world

Ojude-Oba Festival is a one-day celebration of culture, fashion, glamour, candour, beauty and royalty as sons and daughters of Ijebuland. The festival always commenced with prayers by the Imam of Ijebuland, then followed by the National Anthem, then the Ogun State Anthem and the Awujale Anthem, and finally the Lineage praise of the Ijebus. After all of these, the parade of different ages known as Regberegebe with names, such as Obafuwaji, Bobagbimo, Bobakeye, Gbobaniyi and Gbobalaye begins (Abiola, 2018). Ojude Oba festival is a successor of the Odeda festival, which was also an annual event in which the worshippers of several traditional religions such as Sango, Egungu, Osun, Ogun and Yemule come together to showcase their identities by dancing in turns to

drums and songs in front of the Awujale, Olisa, various other important chiefs and the people of the town.

This is the heart of the ceremony as each group with both male and female counterparts are distinct either in their manner of appearance and style of dressing or by their dance patterns. Some of the group's members are top managers, chief executive officers, head of industries and prominent traditional title holders. The groups each has a recognisable face, like the Gbobaniyi, a group of middle-age men, that dress in rich traditional Aso-Oke, wield walking sticks and dance like conquerors, has former Ogun State Governor Gbenga Daniel as its patron, while the female Gbobaleye are noted for gaiety and dance and has as member the popular Waka music star, Queen Salawa Abeni (Abiola, 2018). In straightforward terms, these groups files in turn by turn with their drummers to pay homage through their dance, and with presentation of gifts and offerings at the feet of the King. They pray for him, wishing him a peaceful tenure and long life.

Festival and its Importance to Culture

The staging of festivals is an old social phenomenon. All over the world, people have always been celebrating and honoring something related to their cultures with events such as festivals, market fairs, and harvest celebrations (Douglas & Derrett, 2001). In time past, festivals were providing opportunities to experience things that are different from everyday life and for communal gatherings and collective wishes through art, ritual, and fiesta (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007).

Originally, festivals were held for the benefits of the local communities and not tourists. But as a result of development, religion, harvesting and honouring prominent people were among the main reasons for staging a festival (Douglas & Derrett, 2001). Thus, festivals were seeking the social benefits of a society and not economic benefits. Contrary to these elemental ideals, most festivals in this present time are utilized as a marketing tool and primarily focus on the economic benefits. Although most of the festivals have been created for economic purposes, still, festivals have great positive social impact on the people (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007).

In recent years, the number of festivals and special events keep growing tremendously; the same way festival . Tourism is developing worldwide since it has significant economic, socio-cultural, and political contributions to local society (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007). Festivals and special events have a significant role in communities' lives

Festivals can help local communities to strengthen their sense of identities as well as preserving traditional cultures (Buch, Milne & Dickson, 2011; McKercher, Mei, & Tse, 2006). Festivals may also be a way for migrant

communities to enhance their sense of identity. A festival is an important vehicle for communities to declare their identities and cultures. Besides, festivals enhance local pride and community spirit in culture and community images. Festivals also provide recreational activities and spending markets for locals and tourists (Lee, Lee & Wicks, 2004) and it also improves the relationship between host and guest.

Festivals can also create positive significant impact on both the residents and visitors subjective well-being (SWB) (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011). Despite the substantial literature on the association between leisure, recreation, tourism, travel and SWB, there are only few studies concerning festivals' positive impacts on SWB. It is hoped that this study would contribute to the limited understanding of festivals' effect on SWB of festival attendees. Many cities and towns in Ogun State are increasingly organizing festivals to improve their local economy by attracting more visitors and investment to the area; to enhance city images; to stimulate urban development, and to keep Yoruba culture alive (Yolal, Çetinel & Uysal, 2009).

The contribution of festivals to leisure industry has increasingly grown in the past couple of decades; concurrently academic interest on this field has been increased. Different cities worldwide have been creating festivals by utilizing existing resources for boosting their local economy. Festivals contribute to local economies by tax revenues, increased employment and business opportunities through increased visitor arrivals, expanded tourist season, and extended length of stay and expenditures (Yolal, Çetinel, & Uysal, 2009). Accordingly, many scholars have been interested in analyzing economic impact of festivals (Bracalente, Chirieleison, Cossignani., Ferrucci, Gigliotti, Giovanna & Ranalli, 2011). Festivals can also help to enhance destinations' image of both residents and visitors; therefore, they are very useful marketing tools to promote the destinations and their attractions and generate positive community image.

Although festival organizers, local governments and businesses have been interested primarily in the opportunity of gaining a good financial return on invested resources for staging the festival, there are many other remarkable benefits of festivals for local communities and also for tourists. First, festivals provide an atmosphere for people to gather, and offer family based recreational activities which enhance social interactions and relationships. By reinforcing the togetherness of people, festivals serve to build social cohesion within a community (Yolal, Çetinel & Uysal, 2009).

In addition to providing a social arena for the local community, festivals also assign variety of roles for those people. A resident may be volunteer, performer, festival organizer, promoter and/or just spectator. Through these roles, local residents enhance their skills and talents, enrich their lives and are proud

of being a part of the community (Getz, 2008). Festivals not only increase the community attachment of residents (Lau & Li, 2015) but also strengthen community ties with past or existing culture which help to preserve local culture (Bagiran & Kurgun, 2013). In addition to having positive economic and social impacts on local communities, festivals also generate benefits for tourists by providing cultural and educational experience that they seek, such as seeing a variety of cultural displays, eating traditional foods of other cultures, and participating in cultural games or performances (Lee, Arcodia, & Lee, 2012). Festivals can also improve relationships between hosts and guests and enhance understanding among them since festivals provide atmosphere for cultural exchange between them. Furthermore, beyond generating all these benefits and opportunities, festivals are likely to create positive significant impacts on both the residents and visitors subjective wellbeing (Packer & Ballantyne, 2011).

Relevance of festival celebration on sociocultural lives of the people

Ijebu (also known as **Jebu** or **Geebu** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ijebu_kingdom - cite_note-1) is a sub-group within Yoruba nation that has been in existence from primordial time till today in present day Nigeria. The ancient province was formed around fifteenth century. According to the historical legend, its ruling dynasty was founded by Obanta, an offspring of Ile-Ife. Its contemporary successor is one of the country's traditional states (Robert, 1969). The kingdom is one of the most developed in the region with a complex and highly organized government. The capital is situated at Ijebu Ode where the Awujale has his palace. Counterbalancing the Awujale is the Osugbo (known as the Ogboni in other parts of Nigeria)

Like many African societies, Ijebu is also divided into three age ranks, and these groups each had their own leaders. The Kingdom is made up of several towns and it stretches parts of Lagos State and also shares borders Ibadan, the capital of Oyo and Ondo States respectively. The towns that make-up for Ijebu province include, Ijebu-Igbo, Imota, Ikorodu, Epe, Lagos, Ijebu-Isiwo, Ogun Waterside, Iwopin, Lekki in Lagos State, Ijebu-Imushin, Ijebu-Ife, Apunren, Erunwon, Isonyin, Ososa, Odogbolu and Ago-Iwoye. The state rose in power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mainly due to its important position on the trade routes between Lagos and Ibadan. The kingdom imposed sharp limits on trade, insisting that all trade through the region be conducted by Ijebu merchants. The monopoly brought great wealth to the kingdom, but also annoyed the Europeans.

In 1892, the British attacked Ijebu in response to its barriers on trade. The

British were successful and occupied the capital, burning the meeting hall of the Osugbo. The British army employed Maxim guns, according to the soldier-adventurer Frederick Lugard. In defending himself against charges of excessive death rates in Uganda from his own use of the gun, he stated: “On the West Coast, in the ‘Jebu’ war, undertaken by Government, I have been told ‘several thousand’ were mowed down by the Maxim. For several years the capital was occupied by British troops as the kingdom was annexed to the colony of Southern Nigeria. Today, it constitutes one of the traditional states of Nigeria.

The Ijebu kingdom is governed by a king and his group of titled elders, who usually are men of a higher status and of considerable influence. The council governed the region and had representatives of further devolved councils who no longer have any power. Since the invasion of Lord Lugard, these councils have continued to meet and advise the Obanta kings, their power, however, is largely ceremonial since the establishment of the colonial administration in their protectorate. The elders were known to represent their various villages and the will of the people, and are now not such a significant part in the ceremonial process. The elders were all given individual titles and the lead elder was given the title prince, although he was only ever to inherit the kingship in special circumstances. The traditional belief that governed the monarchy was similar to that of the Chinese Mandate of Heaven (Lugard, 1999).

Festivals provide remarkable benefits, such as enhancing social interactions and relationships, building social cohesion within a community and contributing to a sense of belonging and social integration, which can continue after the event. Even though big part of the literature focuses on the economic impacts of the festivals, there is a growing research on the social benefits of festivals (Bagiran&Kurgun, 2013; Gursoy et al., 2004). Fulfilling the social and cultural roles of a festival is very important for the sustainability of that festival. Benefits may be related to decision-making in terms of consumer choices, and they can influence future revisit intentions (Meretse et al., 2015). Thus, it should be important for event organizers to determine what benefits visitors seek from festivals, in this way they can plan their festivals more efficiently and produce right marketing strategies. Also, communities’ perceptions of festivals’ impacts can determine the acceptance or rejection of the festivals (Bagiran&Kurgun, 2013). Gursoy et al. (2004) argue that if a proposed festival will possibly create more benefits than costs, the community should think about having the festival; if costs will likely to be higher than benefits, this means that festival is not well-planned, and organizers should reconsider their proposal. Therefore, local governments, policymakers, and organizers should try to understand the reasons for support and oppositions of festivals (Yolal et al., 2009). It is also

valuable to understand the negative impacts of festivals, as a way to see if the benefits outweigh the costs on the community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Festival is a mean of demonstrating the rich cultural heritage of people in a particular society. The rich culture depicts the lives of people and showcases their ways of doings. Festivals provide remarkable benefits, such as enhancing social interactions and relationships, building social cohesion within a community and contributing to a sense of belonging and social integration. Emirs, kings, chiefs and other traditional rulers should have a direct monthly allocation from Federal government and absolute constitutional right in conserving and promoting matters that are related to cultural activities, arts, and festivals. A cultural celebration should be promoted through organizing events in the form of culture or native day in our lower and higher institutions as well as community level.

There is a need for promotional activities in order to increase awareness of Nigerian festivities. Tourism stakeholders can communicate that through various tools such as billboard, newspaper, television and radio channels, web pages, and another form of publications including social media groups such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, etc Strengthening peace and internal security. Development cannot be in place without peace and security of lives and properties. Peace brings about progress, growth, happiness and sustained development in the society. Society can be in peace through social justice, good governance and respecting our individual differences among others. Improving infrastructural facilities. Improved infrastructure is a foundation for national and regional development. Road, power, communication, water system, waste management, etc. have a tremendous effect on our daily life as well as annual festivities.

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