

Chapter 4 - Identity Negotiation and the Impact of ‘Modernization’ on Migrants’ Religious Affiliation and Cultural Tourism Participation

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Abstract

The impact of modernization on traditional religion in many African countries has increasingly stoked fears among its enthusiasts on the preservation and sustainability of traditional spiritual practices. The impact on cultural and heritage identities, particularly for migrants who make return visits back to their place of origin, has been increasingly significant. Thus, the study explores migrants’ identity negotiation and religious affinity to cultural heritage practices from their origin, using the Osun festival as a prism for analysis. The study employs qualitative methods to explore the validity of these concerns. In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 first-generation Nigerian migrants of Yoruba descent living in South Africa. Findings from data analysed using Nivivo reveals that attendance and participation at the grove and the festival have different meaning and significance to the migrants, such as the opportunity to reconnect with their cultural identity and heritage. While some members of the diasporic community found reintegration of the self quite easy, others had to negotiate their transnational identity to fit in and ‘feel among’ people of their kin. The findings from this study can help migrants to reconcile with the challenges posed by cultural identity and heritage.

Keywords: Migration, Religion, Spirituality, Cultural tourism, Cultural identity, Cultural heritage

Introduction

The impact of modernization on traditional religion in many African countries has increasingly stoked fears among its enthusiasts on the preservation and sustainability of traditional spiritual practices (Kasongo 2010). These impacts seem to have continued to manifest and have affected other areas, such as cultural and heritage identities, particularly those in the diaspora. A critical look at the Western effect on African culture shows good and bad influences. From the positive perspective, this Western influence has helped to abolish some harmful cultural practices, such as the killing of twin children, who culturally were believed to be evil, in a region in West Africa. These influences, however, have also given birth to several undesired problems and changes.

According to Bitrus (2017), one global phenomenon that seems unavoidable is the impact of modernity on human social life. The effect of modernity has, to a large extent, influenced intimate and personal aspects of human lives, social, cultural, and religious traditions and institutions around the world. In many African societies, especially in Nigeria, cultural festivals are often conceptualized as a medium through which humans communicate with deities. Festivals attract people from near and far, not only for social entertainment but also to enhance the relationship with and understanding of cultures (Taylor & Kneafsey 2016).

The Osun Osogbo festival in Nigeria is an annual celebration of the Osun goddess of fertility, prosperity and healing (Oparanti 2004). The festival is one of Nigeria's highly revered religious and spiritual festivals (Oladipo & Modupe 2020). The festival can also be described as a symbol of cultural identity for many diasporic community members (Oyeweso 2013). Exposure to modernisation and 'Westernization' has, however, made many of these migrants shy away from association with the entity of these festival celebrations because of its religious connotation (Umejei 2021:47).

The nature of the average Nigerian diaspora is often quite conservative (Duru 2017). However, national identity dynamics within the diaspora can range from a state of traditionalism to modernisation. For some migrants, attendance or participation at these festivals represents an avenue to fulfil a desire to reconnect with roots, cultural identity, and homeland heritage practices. The diasporic situation triggers this quest that many of these migrants find themselves. Furthermore, many embark on these return journeys back to their country of origin to address some of their life challenges, such as

healing, seeking divine assistance or exploring their spiritual belief.

In these return visits, many diaspora members are often faced with the challenge of dealing with contra values and practices from their place of origin, which they are no longer used to. These challenges emanate from resolving the conflict between the new (adopted residence) and old (place of origin) practices. Members from the diaspora born in their homeland (first-generation migrants) usually maintain a stronger attachment to their homeland, such that their identities are not yet completely transformed (ElleLi & McKercher 2016), even after migration. However, some, especially descendants, begin to identify strongly with their host country; thus, reconnection with their country of origin and potential reintegration become problematic.

During the festival, the grove, the festival location, becomes a stage for identity negotiation (Duval 2003). As migrants, their return visit back home makes them occupy a position that places them in-between domestic and foreign tourists. This renders their experiences unique and special, as they are culturally close yet geographically distant. This study explored how these diaspora members negotiate individual identities during these visits. This study adds to the emergent literature on migrants' return to their homeland and contributes to African tourism development from both business and academic perspectives. The contribution is significant, particularly because migration in the area of tourism research has been neglected for many years (Asiedu 2005; Marschall 2017a; 2017b).

Literature Review

Migration and Nigerians

Literature on migration abounds, with many studies attempting to comprehend the processes and the subsequent outcomes of these movements of persons (Wapmuk *et al.* 2014). With the prominent role and engaging debates around immigration that have continued to make headlines in newspapers worldwide, it may be difficult to deny that migration has continued to be an issue of great social and political concern. In the last two decades, 'African migration' has been the topic of an increasing body of research and policy interest (Bakewell & Binaisa 2016: 280). Previous research (Connor 2018) has mainly focused on the movement of Africans outside the continent. However, a small but growing number of studies have looked at the diaspora formation of African migrants who are still within the continent, as recent

studies have shown that most of these migrants are moving within the continent (Ibrahim Forum Report 2019).

In West Africa, Nigeria is a key regional player and accounts for roughly, half of the region's populace, with approximately 202 million people (World Factbook 2012). It is also regarded as one of the countries with a large population of youth. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse confederation with a long tradition of mobility, although, the volume, form and direction of the emigration have changed over the years (Carling 2006: 21). It has been estimated that well over fifteen million Nigerians live outside the country. The host countries for many of these Nigerians include the United States of America, the United Kingdom, European countries and many other African countries. According to Olarinde (2021), well over a million documented Nigerians have residency in other African countries.

It is believed that migration can make significant social and economic impacts on destination nations (De Haas 2005). These impacts could include cultural enhancement of the society, improving the tourism products in the country, or providing labour for travel, tourism, hospitality, and catering sectors (Ivan 2016). Furthermore, it is a known fact that the process of immigration can enrich the cultural life of host countries and provide them with a wider range of consumption opportunities. Migrants who are industrialists in their host countries often take advantage of their connections and business-related information in their country of origin to conduct and undertake profitable businesses between the two countries (Seetaram 2012). This could subsequently lead to a stimulation of outbound tourism at the host destination. These affirmative outlooks on the merits of migration do not downplay the negative aspects of migration.

Migration and Tourism

Although many migrants tend to preserve their close ties with their place of origin, they also seem eager to improve their attachments to their new host country. This often results in the sense of multiple attachments to both their country of birth and their host country (Simonsen 2017). Travelling back to their homeland is one of the boundary-crossing activities through which immigrant communities can partake and contribute to affairs in their ancestral land (Coles & Timothy 2004). Tourism is widely acknowledged as a product of contemporary social engagements, with its origin traced to Western Europe in the 17th century. However, it has several antecedents in

classical antiques. Before the 19th century, travelling, particularly for non-work-related reasons, was only available to a limited class of elites and was in itself a 'mark of status' (Urry 1990: 24). In recent times, however, tourism has become a central component of the process of globalization, subsuming ever increasing numbers of travellers to virtually every part of the world, and even outer space (Bajc 2006: 102).

The nexus between migration and tourism is quite distinct but often restricted to the visiting friends and family (VFR) form of tourism (Williams & Hall 2002). VFR has always been socially relevant and can be regarded as one of the earliest forms of mobility (Backer 2012). VFR tourism is a type of travelling that connects tourism with migration as it involves persons travelling between two sets of places they call home (Asiedu 2005). Backer (2007) acknowledges that in the past, especially in most African countries, the VFR tourist hardly recognized themselves as tourists because many thought they were just general vacationers or mere holidaymakers.

Current studies (Asiedu 2005; Marschall 2017a; 2017b). have revealed a wider impact of migration on tourism, which also involves the components of tourism demand (e.g. holiday and business). These studies postulate that the evolving presence of immigrant communities might substantially affect tourism flows in many ways (Dwyer *et al.* 2014). Marschall (2017b: 141) opines that in the African context, tourism is often regarded as a leisure activity conducted by the affluent and the privileged in society. The study identified that migrants are significant for tourism as they also engage in other tourism-related activities during their travels. After their visits, VFR tourist migrants are most likely bound to report or share their travel experiences with other friends, which might influence the latter's future choice of holiday destination.

Similarly, immigrants making return trips to their country of origin might promote their host country to individuals in their homeland, which could foster further holiday trips. Furthermore, an increase in tourism movements prompted by the presence of immigrants is also perceived, as permanent, by tourism market agents and policymakers (Council A.U.E. 2006). Consequently, there will likely be an increase in the supply of tourism services (like the hospitality sector) and tourism infrastructures (like transporters); all these will improve the destination's competitiveness.

While recent pragmatic works in the field show that migration's impacts on tourism demand go beyond the VFR segment, the empirical evidence is still limited and does not cover all the major destinations of

international tourism (Etzo 2016). Migration also has a clear tourism demand generation because of its ability to stimulate an increasingly two-way flow of expatriates visiting their countries of origin and, in turn, their relatives and friends visiting those based in the new host countries.

Migration and Identity Negotiations

Migration and tourism are closely related on a macro level because both phenomena involve the movement of individuals across geographical regions; however, the difference is in the duration of stay (Williams & Hall 2000). These return trips provide an avenue for confrontation with one's past, which 'may re-invigorate or shatter the myth; re-affirm or shift self-identity; fuel emotions and prompt insights about one's true sense of belonging, about the home, the host and oneself' (Marschall 2017b: 142). The longing for sameness; a quest for cultural bases; an opportunity for migrants to assess themselves, resolve their identity struggles, and connect with their forerunners are some motivations for many migrants to make return trips to their homeland (Timothy 2008). It is believed that first-generation immigrants are often astounded with nostalgia when making return trips to their native land.

For present-day members of the diasporas, a longing for 'home' may not necessarily mean a desire to make a permanent return to the country of origin but may rather be a preference to satisfy their yearning through tourism (Hung *et al.* 2018:55). The desire to spend some time with friends and relatives, according to Munoz *et al.* (2016), is an important motivation for a wide range of travel decisions worldwide (UNWTO 2014). Although the yearning to stay connected to one's roots may be identical, the diaspora tourism experiences may differ because of the different migration history or national origins (Huang *et al.* 2018: 62). While some diaspora tourists always feel a sense of belonging when they return to their birth country, others may not; which eventually leads to them being more alienated from their immigrant origins and heritage. The connection between 'diaspora tourism' and 'immigrants' emotional attachment' to their country of origin is not always positive (Huang *et al.* 2013:286). Many migrants are interested in travelling back to their homeland and reconnecting with their ancestral culture and heritage; however, they often do not always get their desired experience. This is because many have had to go through the process of identity negotiation on their return to their homeland (Umejei 2021).

The key theme identified from limited studies on the motivations for migrants to visit their ancestral homeland was the search for ‘identity re-affirmation’, reconnecting with one’s cultural roots and a mission to re-affirm their sense of belonging which may be absent in their current host country (Coles & Timothy 2004:16). Sometimes, however, the actual interpretations of the experiences from members of the diaspora returning to their homeland range from a re-enforcement of association to challenging and uncomfortable cultural interactions (Tie *et al.* 2015: 4). The longing being faced by members of the diasporic community to be accepted and to assimilate into their host culture is counteracted by their parallel desire to maintain their sense of identity and maintain established links with their homeland.

Migration and Modernization

Studies on ‘transnational and diasporic identities’ suggest that identities depend upon a local sense of belonging maintained with the place of attachment (McDowell 2003: 864). In some cases, the travellers find that bridging the social and cultural gap between themselves and the new society is fairly easy. These travellers sometimes discover that the reorientation process may require them to absorb new cultural history and traditions. It has been argued that making these adjustments enhances the migrant’s experience; otherwise, they risk becoming a marginalized figure separated from the surrounding society (Trew 2010: 548).

Leary (2012) opined that people have multiple, dynamic, and contextual identities, which can be foregrounded or activated in specific situations. Studies have shown that several migrants suffer identity formation and construction challenges because they might have lost their sense of identity while fighting for acceptance in the new culture of migration. In a bid to adjust to their new setting, many migrants begin to conform to the ways of their new setting, which they believe to be better than their original home (Alinia & Eliassi 2014). However, no identity formation can be completely eroded by a new identity, although the assimilation of a new identity can, to a great extent, bring about changes in the existing one.

Identity negotiation is usually demonstrated when people are unsure of where they belong. This means that the individual cannot state their place among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, which

consequently results in a struggle, to make sure that people around accept this placement as proper. For this study, identity is used as a reference to parts of a self-composed meaning that individuals ascribe to the different roles they would typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies (Burke & Stets 2009). This study draws on identity theory to explore how members of the Nigerian diaspora community in South Africa experience their journey back home, not just as festival participants but also as migrants on return journeys.

Theoretical Framework

As developed by Stets and Burke (2000), identity theory explains that the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with its role and performance. From an identity theory perspective, identities are adopted meanings given to the self as a distinct individual, an occupant of a role, and a group member (Stets & Burke 2014). Tourism scholars have suggested that identity influences travel motivation, destination choices, touristic behaviour, and experience (Pratama 2016). In their study to understand 'tourist's motivations for travel', Pearce and Lee (2005:226) postulated that self-actualization and self-development are major motivators for embarking on trips. Bond and Falk (2012: 430) opined that all tourist experiences are somehow motivated by their self-perceived identity-related needs. This suggests that identity issues lie at the heart of an individual's desire to travel. However, most of these perspectives are related to recreational tourists.

The theoretical assumption of the identity theory employed in this study essentially argues that identity is an invention of social interaction which seeks to address, from different points of view, how identities are formed, constructed and negotiated through the interpersonal interaction of these migrants. The theoretical importance of the theory in understanding the identity formation and construction of migrants cannot be excused from its shortcomings. The argument that individual identity is constructed and formed through interpersonal relationships is flawed and criticised because a mere interaction between two or more people does not possess the required impetus for identity formation. Rather, the place of socialisation and the individual's cultural identity should be given more credence (Hopkins &

Greenwood 2013). One of the primary goals of identity theory is to specify how the meanings attached to various identities are negotiated and managed in interaction (Stets & Serpe 2013:31). Therefore, this study employs this theory to explore how human behaviour influences social situation. The theory is used in this paper to understand ‘how individuals’ identities influence their behaviours, thoughts, feelings, or emotions and how their identities tie them to the society at large’ (Burke & Stets 2009:3).

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative design to gather the needed data. This design was considered most appropriate for the study because it ‘explores ways by which individuals make sense of their social worlds, and express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals’ (Deacon *et al.* 2007: 5). The techniques used in collecting data for this research include observation, in-depth interviews, and review of existing documentation. The sampling method was purposive and snowballing as the study’s approach comprised pinpointing and choosing personalities or groups of persons that are principally conversant about or have some experience with the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Clark 2011).

The sample size for this study was twenty-five participants because the researcher had reached saturation at that point. The target population was first-generation Nigerians of Yoruba descent who live in South Africa and have had cause to travel back to Nigeria in the last five years. The location for the study was Durban a city in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa, and, Osogbo, a city in Western Nigeria. Although all the participants recruited in South Africa were from the Yoruba-speaking community in Nigeria and still had very good proficiency in their indigenous/local language, the interviews were all conducted in English. This was done because, after being out of their country of birth for a while, all the recruited participants had developed their proficiency in English and thus were quite comfortable communicating with the researcher in English.

Existing and relevant documents were also gathered from reliable sources such as the Adunni Orisa Trust (AOT), the Osun state (and local) government, and the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM). These documents were used as secondary data to complement the data gathered during the interviews. This was done to ensure comprehensiveness and to enrich the data collected.

The Findings

This section presents the contributions of participants like Yemi (pseudo name), who was born in Nigeria but has spent much of her life outside Nigeria. She left Nigeria at about 5 to live with her mother in the United States of America (USA). After having been married for years and still unable to conceive, even after two failed IVF (in vitro fertilization), Yemi decided to follow her mother's suggestion to visit the Osun sacred grove and seek assistance from the Osun goddess. She claimed to have fallen pregnant after visiting the sacred grove. The said daughter was preparing to celebrate her 6th birthday at the interview time. Yemi believes so much in the efficacy and wonders of the Osun goddess. Her primary reason for attending the annual Osun Osogbo festival was not for the fun and festivity, but mainly to find a solution to her problems. Yemi is one of the many Nigerian migrants residing in South Africa who participated in this study.

The Osun goddess is regarded as 'the goddess of wealth and beauty, a herbalist or healer, a diviner, a dyer, a giver of children, a goddess of fertility, protection, blessing, and a leader of women' (Oyeweso 2013:20). The dense forest of the Osun Sacred Grove, which has been inscribed as a UNESCO world heritage site, is believed to be the abode of the Osun deity. Every year, a traditional festival is held in August to celebrate and honour this traditional deity. The festival, one of Nigeria's most prominent cultural celebrations, is a symbol of identity for adhering to her divination by many members of the Yoruba community. Participants at the festival are usually made up of local residents and citizens from across Nigeria, members of the diaspora, local and international tourists.

The Osun Osogbo festival has different meanings and significance to different people. Consistent with responses from the different participants, the festival is perceived as a cultural celebration, a sacred ceremony, and a pilgrimage for those with spiritual allegiance to its cultural practices. The differences are in terms of the perceived significance of the tangible site, the intangible beliefs, and values attached to it by these members of the diaspora. While the migration process may have made these migrants create or establish a home in their host country, many are still strongly attached to their country of origin.

Return Journeys and Activities at their Destinations

As presented in the review of literature, the motives for migrants to embark

on return journeys are numerous. For some of the participants who shared their experiences during the interviews, attending and participating in the festival was their main motivation to embark on these return trips back to their country of birth. For some others, even though the festival may have been an attraction, the prospects of reuniting with friends and family were equally strong motivations. Some also travel, mainly to seek solutions to their problems or offer thanksgiving to the goddess. For this group, travelling is more of a mandatory task than one undertaken by choice. According to one of the participants, even when it was not convenient for them, they still had to embark on this return journey to their homeland to fulfil an obligation.

It was sort of mandatory that I attended that year, and that was why I did.. I attended the festival in 2014 as part of an obligation. It wasn't very convenient for me then, but I had to go because my mom insisted. It was just a trip that was said to be important that year, and I was able to make it (RF004: CPT, Nov. 2018).

Another participant, RM011, who described himself as an Osun devotee stated that when people are at home and attend the festival as often as they can, they may not fully appreciate the festival's richness. This, he feels, changes when they sojourn abroad and do not get to participate as often as they used to. Memory now comes into play, and that is when one begins to appreciate the legacies that their forefathers left behind. When asked to describe their experiences at the festival, all the participants opined that it was fun-filled, exciting, and entertaining.

I like the songs they sing during the festival and all the merry making. It's actually a very lively celebration. You know, the last time I went, they even had DJs after the whole festival thing; I remember that was in the evening (RF002: Durban Feb. 2019).

RM007, like most other participants who are Osun indigenes, has very high regard for the festival, the grove, and the goddess. Being also a devotee, he sees the festival as a traditional and spiritual event celebrated by many, both Nigerians and foreigners.

Issues of Experience and Identity

According to the data gathered, the thought of going back home was an

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exciting event to look forward to for many of the participants. Many of these migrants' return journey to Nigeria was motivated by a need or desire to reconnect. All participants agreed that maintaining ties with home was the primary motivation to make these return journeys. When asked how it felt to be back home after having been away for years, reactions varied; some had nostalgic looks, others had smiles that instantly brightened their faces, while for others, their responses involved a loud cheer. However, not all migrants who travel back home easily adjust to their old routine; many experiences a subtle sense of alienation. For RM014, the return trip was not as exciting as anticipated. For him, it was a rude culture shock as he could not 'blend' with his peers as he did in the past. RF007 felt she was treated differently by friends and family because she had travelled out of the country. RM013, too, had to undergo some readjustment on a level of personal comfort. Having lived in South Africa for some time, he was now more comfortable with cooler weather than what one would get in Nigeria. For RM015, the struggle was not being able to engage with most people around him in intellectual conversations, even with his peers in the academia. He said:

Sometimes I find the way they analyse issues very tiring, or should I say unbelievable that someone will still reason like that in this present day. I would say enjoying intellectual conversations with relatives back home when I travel is sometimes a challenge, but this is not to say that they are all dumb or not intelligent (RM015: Durban Sept 2018).

As previously presented, not all migrants who travel back home easily adjust to their old routine; many experiences a subtle sense of alienation. The experiences shared by these participants show the different ways that some have had to renegotiate their identity when in their birth country. It showed them what these return journeys meant and how they shaped their sense of identity. When asked to describe their experiences at the festival, all the participants agreed that the festival was fun-filled, exciting, and entertaining, although their perceptions and belief about the grove and the goddess varied.

Perception and Beliefs around the Festival

As earlier presented, this annual festival, done every year in August, involves a whole month of celebration. One of the participants, RF002, opined that

the month of August in Osogbo is just like most people see in December. RM002 described the festival as a ‘carnival of sorts’, which can be likened to those celebrated in Brazil. Some participants attested to the fun and gaiety present at the festival; others opined that it goes beyond that. According to RF005, ‘the whole thing is a belief and something that has to do with more than the ordinary’. She agrees that it can be described as extraordinary because it is a ‘mixture of culture and a belief in the supernatural’. A public opinion survey in Nigeria demonstrated that Nigerians believe religion to be more central to their identity than nationality. According to the study, Nigerians are more likely to first identify themselves as Muslims or Christians before even acknowledging that they are Nigerians. Though many of these participants have been away from their homeland for some time, their migration status had little or no alteration in their sense of belief or acknowledgement of the presence of a Supreme Being, as they all still expressed deep religious sentiments in their responses. Though their levels of belief varied, a common trend showed that they all believed in the existence of a greater power, albeit acknowledged, with different names.

Another participant, RM001, strongly believed that modernization, globalization, and civilization have almost eroded certain cultures. He, however, opined that the Osun goddess and the grove have been able to survive because of people’s beliefs. RM015 admitted that, before becoming a Christian, he used to dabble in worshipping traditional Yoruba gods, but in recent times, he would no longer like to be associated with things of that nature. ‘I’m going to be biased now, I am a Christian, and that will colour my impression’ (RM015: Durban Sept 2018). RF009, another migrant who travelled for the festival as a part of her fieldwork for a Ph.D. research, had a contrary opinion:

I could also question the existence of the Christian God from that angle. I am a Christian, but what I am saying is that if we claim to believe in the existence of a big God, why we will question the belief of another? We cannot be certain who he or she is, but I think everyone should be allowed to have their own belief and not be condemned for what they believe in (RF009: Durban Feb. 2019).

Two other participants admitted to having attended the festival but stated that they do not worship the goddess because of their Christian beliefs. RM012

said that he has never gone to the grove for supplication because he can pray to God anywhere.

That's my belief. My belief is in the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth. I know there are other lesser gods, but that is not my belief (RM012: Durban Sept. 2018).

Some other participants, however, had a contrary opinion. RM003, who claims to be a concrete believer in his culture and tradition, thinks Africans should do all they can to preserve traditional indigenous religion. RM014 also shared this sentiment with RM003. He said it is unfortunate that 'Western orientation has eroded our mind-sets about the gods of our fathers' (RM014). He went further to elaborate on a personal ideology that he had formulated. He feels that the gods of Africa are angry. According to him:

I personally feel that the reason why Africa is underdeveloped and perpetually remains underdeveloped is because we have left the gods of our fathers because if you look at this, when these deities protected us over time, we were developing at a pace over time. But with the caution of the European settlers and Western thoughts coming into Africa, we stopped worshipping these deities. These are significant deities in our lives. Before that, we were developing almost at the same paths with the West, but once we stopped with these deities, and we moved to start worshipping other deities of the West. So, the West continuously strive because we are, as it were like feeding the deity of the West while putting our own deity on starvation. So, at the end of the day, the deity of the West blesses their people while we are where we are today. We are where we are today technically because we have refused to give honour to where honour is due (RM014 Durban Feb. 2019).

Findings from all the interviewed migrants show that, even when these diaspora members did not have absolute belief in the powers ascribed to the goddess, many still felt the festival was an opportunity to reconnect with their culture and foster social ties. Even those who claimed to now have a deeper Christian or Islamic religious belief still love to be associated with the festival. However, many would appreciate it if all the 'ritual' aspects were taken out.

Discussion

Findings from the data gathered confirms that migrants use these journeys to fulfil their desire to reconnect with their roots, cultural identity, and heritage. People migrate from one setting to another, or from one culture to another, with their knowledge and cultural heritage. Upon arrival at the new location, their cultural identity becomes altered, incorporating the new order while still being in touch with the old one (Axelsson 2009). The discourse of identity formation has largely been credited to individual daily activities, and experiences garnered through social engagement (Alinia & Eliassi 2014). Therefore, the lived experiences and activities of migrants with other members of their host communities play a crucial role in the understanding and formation of their identity as migrants.

According to ElleLi and McKercher (2016), first-generation migrants usually maintain a stronger attachment to their homeland, but some begin to identify strongly with their host country. For the latter, the connection with their country of origin and potential reintegration becomes problematic. In other words, these migrants' identities might be transformed or shifted while assimilating into the host culture and social system as they integrate with members of the host society (Bhatia & Ram 2009). For some members of the diaspora, depending on the complexity of individual and collective histories, subsequent homeland visits may assist in reinforcing their homeland identity (Corsale & Vuytsyk 2016) or heighten their sense of hybridity (Tie *et al.* 2015).

In the canon of migratory studies, a sense of belongingness remains a fundamental component of identity formation and construction for migrants (Kim & Merriam 2010). However, the search for this belongingness for migrants continues to question the formation of migrants' identities. According to Hopkins & Greenwood (2013), understanding migrants' identity formation should include a consideration of the host or community locations, migration guidelines, cultural identifiers, the value system of the host countries, and the migrants' country of origin. Studies have shown that several migrants suffer identity formation and construction challenges because they might have lost their sense of identity while fighting for acceptance in the new culture of migration. This results in what can be called an idealized image of the new settling point they perceive as better than their original home (Alinia & Eliassi 2014; Owens *et al.* 2010).

According to Jongman-Sereno & Leary (2020), finding happiness

means living in harmony with one's true self. Identities are understood to influence human behaviour and become activated (or invoked) in circumstances where the individual perceives that the meaning of the situation matches their identity (Carter 2013: 204). The theoretical assumption of the identity theory employed in this study essentially argues that identity is an invention of social interaction which seeks to address, from different points of view, how identities are formed, constructed, and negotiated through the interpersonal interaction of tourists with their host counterparts. Identity, therefore, answers the question of what it means to an individual to be, for example, a festival participant, a Nigerian, or even a member of the diaspora community. The position, meanings and expectations attached to these different identities originate from a common culture shared with others. Within this common culture, people can understand what it means to hold that identity and, thus, link their personality to that social structure and culture (Stets & Burke 2014: 59).

In the context of 'diaspora return travel', migrants with different identity backgrounds may experience more complex changes after their return. The religious, spiritual, and ethno cultural identities of these members of the diaspora play a significant role in their tourism mobility decision. Many visitors to the grove and Osun Oshogbo festival are more intentional in their traveling decision. Their identity contributes to their motivation for their journey as some of them use it as an opportunity to reconnect with others who share similar cultural and religious background with them. For others, it is used as a means to address more pressing needs like a remedy to fertility issues. Some people may find that they behave in ways they ordinarily will not because of situational factors. When this happens, people adjust their behaviour until it matches the level of their identity standard (Grandberg 2006: 111).

The Osun Osogbo grove is a tourist destination, a pilgrimage and cultural heritage site, thus placing the festival at the intersection of pilgrimage, heritage, and tourism. This makes it a viable site that invokes the process of cultural negotiation and identity formation. Identity theory, which provides a conceptual framework that links identity, attitude, and behaviour (Nunkoo & Gursay 2012), is employed in this study to understand how these groups of migrant tourists under focus, experience the Osun Oshogbo festival, especially their spiritual beliefs, and how it affects their sense of identity. Identity, migration, and related studies have shown that many

migrants go through acculturation to assimilate and establish their identity in the new community of their host (Ramelli *et al.* 2013).

The contention that identity formation is acquired through time has been grossly criticized. Several criticisms have been reported in literature. that the acquisition of identity does not happen throughout an individual's lifetime but only forms at a specific life stage (O'Brien 2011). In other words, these authors argue that identity formation is synonymous with personality development, at which time, personality development only happens at a specific stage of development and not through life (Eliassi 2013). Other drawbacks concerning the formation of identity by migrants within their host communities have also been grossly flawed. For instance, critics asserted that it is still not plausible for a migrant to develop an identity within a short space of relating with his host community. This argument was stretched further that rather than attributing the formation of a migrant's identity to the activities and experiences acquired in his host community, much attention should be given to the role of culture, customs, and origin (Bhabha 2014).

Data gathered showed that the individual beliefs and exposure of these migrants played a very important role in their perception and acceptance of the cultural practices associated with the festival. While all the participants acknowledged the importance of cultural sustainability, which the festival represents, some people shy away from partaking in local cultural practices because of their religious beliefs. Some participants struggled as attendance at the festival is assumed to be a 'sin' or fetish. This attests to the school of thought that claims that many cultural traditions, events, and practices that possess cultural and heritage tourism potentials, given their rich aesthetics, have become denigrated and relegated to a state of insignificance (Ibagere & Adeseye 2013).

In today's globalized world, tourism cannot avoid capitalization, and academics have agreed that culture is not static but evolving, moving, adapting, and changing (Hopper 2007). However, according to many adherents of African religion and culture (Awolalu & Dopamu 2005; Obasola 2014), a condition in which intellectual traditions of people are deliberately destroyed, denied or subjugated to the point of non-existence is quite problematic. Many of the participants, particularly the devotees, opined that if people continue to view these practices in frivolous terms, the chances of the culture of their forefathers going into extinction is inevitable.

Conclusion

This paper explored the identity negotiation process of migrants on their return journey to their place of birth. It probed the experiences of South Africa-based Nigerian migrants, to understand the extent to which modernisation has affected their religious affinity to cultural heritage practices from their birth country. Data presented showed that the festival is a strong motivation for return travel. However, while some members of the diasporic community found reintegration of the self quite easy, others had to negotiate their transnational identity to fit in and 'feel among' people of their kin. Furthermore, it is seen that individual beliefs play a very important role in the perception and acceptance of the cultural practices associated with the festival. Some who had participated in the festival before claimed that they no longer do so because of their exposure to more modern practices. The fear here is that, with increased condemnation of the cultures that are laced with religion of old, many will begin to shy away from it, consequently, leading to a situation where many cultural traditions, events, and practices denigrated and are relegated to a state of insignificance.

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