

**VISUAL ARTS AS RECUPERATIVE CHANNEL FOR TOURISM AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Every society aims for development in every aspect for its betterment. Today, tourism through arts and culture has been a major source of income for many nations. In 2019, arts and culture industry alone generated over 10 billion pounds and created over 300,000 jobs in the United Kingdom (see <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk>) whereas Nigeria relies solely on oil as major source of revenue, neglecting the other viable areas like arts and culture. This paper examines visual arts as a recuperative channel for tourism and international relations with emphasis on the Nigerian state. Two research questions guided the study, (1.) what is the state of tourism in Nigeria? (2.) In what ways can visual arts recuperate tourism cum international relations in Nigeria? The study looked at the significance of international relations with tourism. Some theories of visual art and international relations were compared and analyzed. Data were sourced from primary and secondary sources like informal interviews, journals, newspapers, books and online sources. Findings show that international relations have been part of man from the early centuries with visual art as its main channel. And also, visual arts have been neglected in Nigeria and this is responsible for the poor state of the tourism sector in Nigeria. Recommendations were made which include that the government must support the revival of the arts and culture to strengthen the tourism industry in Nigeria.

Key words: *Visual Art, International Relations, Tourism*

Introduction

Events of the world are often determined by interactions among the nations. Nations form allies among themselves mainly for military, political, economic and cultural reasons. This has been evident from the nations of the ancient period till present time. During the early period when life was at its crude stage, the early nations had every reason to interact and depend on each other because they constantly engaged in wars and needed support from their allies to defeat their enemies. Again, the need for building resources like stone and lime stone necessitated this too, as there are nations with enough natural resources while those that lack these resources depended on the privileged ones for supply when they need it. Therefore international relations date back to about 5000 BCE (Neolithic period or the new stone age), from the beginning of formation of societies that led to the emergence of nations.

However, military reason more than any other factor was responsible for the interactions of the early nations because constant wars raged among them. Illustrating this, Moore (2010: 15) observes that, “the cities between rivers Tigris and Euphrates fought with each other for centuries, without any significant outcome, until a king called Eannatum of Lagash managed to unify them for a brief period around 2550 B.C”. Economic and social factors have as well contributed to the development of international relations. Allied nations sought for economic control because the control of international trade also contributes to control of international power. In other words nations have also relied on economic and social strength as they are very relevant in international politics.

In all these, visual art is the pivot on which international relations revolve as it supports economic, social and military reasons. From the early times to the contemporary, it has been a recuperative channel for international relations among nations. In the early times kingdoms implored visual art as propaganda to exhibit their military strength and overrun or conquer their neighbours. Moore (2010: 15) again observes:

After his (Eannatum of Lagash) victory over the people of Umma he erected a limestone slab, the so-called Stele of the Vultures now in the Louvre. Almost two metres high when erected, the now fragmented stele was covered in relief carvings which record the story of the battle. One part depicts the king at the head of his troops, trampling the enemy. Another shows the vultures devouring the dead. In graphic detail the stele not only commemorates the great victory; it glorifies the god of Lagash in whose name the battle was fought, confirms

Eannatum in his supremacy and sends a warning to his enemies, and to his subjects, of the fate which awaits those who oppose him

In support, Adams (2011: 45) notes:

Under Assurnasirpal II (reigned 883–859 b.c.), Assyria became a formidable military force. Assurnasirpal's records are filled with boastful claims detailing his cruelty. The king's might is the theme of alabaster reliefs (**plate 1.**) that lined



the walls of his palace in present-day Nimrud, in Iraq. Also symbolizing the king's power were stone *lamassu* (**plate 2.**), monumental divine genii who guard palace entrances. *Lamassu* combine animal and human features—in this case, a



bull's body and legs with a human head. The hair, beard, and eyebrows are stylized, and the figure wears a cylindrical three-horned crown

Plate 1. King Assurnasirpal II hunting lions, from Nimrud, Iraq, c. 883–859 B.C. Alabaster relief, 3 ft. 3 in. × 8 ft. 4 in. (99 cm × 2.54 m). Source: Adams L. S. (2011).

Plate 2. *Lamassu* from the citadel of Sargon II, DurSharrukin (modern Iraq). Monolithic stone of gypseous alabaster. 4m high by 4m wide by 1m dept. Source: <https://sites.google.com>

Visual arts have also contributed to the growth of international relations through the invention of writing by the Sumerians. The invention of writing was necessitated by the need for proper documentation as oral method of record keeping was rather often unreliable and

doctored. Writings first started as drawings and later transformed into cuneiform. The earliest examples of writing from the late fourth millennium B.C. according to Biggs (2005: 107) are pictographic – that is, composed of signs incised on clay with a reed stylus. Most signs clearly resemble the object they were meant to depict, thus a drawing of a pig’s head represents a pig; a drawing of a donkey’s head represents a donkey; a drawing of a shaft of barley represents barley. Over time, however, the drawings developed into cuneiform (from the Latin word for “wedge”), with signs made with short strokes.

The impact of visual art on international relations is so palpable because, according to Durante (2021: 1), we live in a world dominated by images and in which images shape political events and how we understand them. Indeed, visual images not only represent and reflect the world but also affect and reshape the embedded ideologies and the connected systems of value they carry out.

Significance of International Relations cum Tourism

The significance of international relations are enormous as it gave birth to tourism, trade organizations, world sports (for example, the *Olympics*), just to mention a few. Tourism has boosted the world economy. When there are cordial relationships among nations, the citizens tend to interact and exchange visits. This way, there is exchange of cultural ideas as well as economic benefits. Nations with historic centers and cultural artifacts tend to attract more tourists. These tourists spend so much to visit these sites and also buy art pieces to take home. This way, tourism has remained grease on the wheel of international relations.

International relation (is) the study and practice of political relationships among the world’s nations, especially their governments. International relations may also refer to the interactions between nongovernmental groups, such as multinational corporations (companies that operate in more than one country) or international organizations such as the Red Cross or the United Nations (UN). International relation is a broad and complex topic both for countries engaged in relationships with other nations, and for observers trying to understand those interactions. These relationships are influenced by many variables. They are shaped by the primary participants in international relations, including national leaders, other politicians, and nongovernment participants, such as private citizens, corporations, and nongovernmental organizations. They are also affected by domestic political events and nonpolitical influences, including economics, geography, and culture. Despite all of these other influences, the primary focus of international relations is on the interactions between nations (Microsoft ® Encarta ®, 2009: 1).

Imagine the world without international relations and how dreary it will be. This shows that the spice of life is in the interactions among the peoples of the world. Therefore, international relations have improved the quality of life and its existence. It has afforded scholars the platform to study the world, people and their cultures. Today, nations of the world have embassies in almost every country and equally have their flags hoisted up to signify their territory, and their ambassadors are recognized and accorded the rights of a head of state. This is a major significance of international relations.

Approaches to Visual Arts and International Relations

Scholars of international relations believe that understanding its study lies first in understanding the approaches. Some of these approaches are realism, neo-realism, idealism and liberalism, neo-liberalism, and Marxism. Others include Feminist, Postmodern and Peace studies. Coincidentally visual art share these same approaches to its study and the approaches support its understanding as well. These approaches are sometimes known as theories and are also seen as movements in the two disciplines. Interestingly, a review of some of the approaches reveals that they share the same ideology even as they belong to different disciplines.

Realism

Realism in visual arts is a mode of representation where compositions are represented in their true image or realistically. Ideboen (2012: 1) believes that “realism in art essentially refers to composition constructed as plainly and without interpretation as possible”. On the other hand, realists in international relation affirm that realism is the best approach to understanding international relations. They believe that realism exposes the true situation in international relation which is selfish interest. Realists believe that nations act only out of self-interest and that their major goal is to advance their own positions of power in the world. In order to survive, realists believe leaders must build their power and avoid feelings of friendship or morality that might make them vulnerable to more ruthless adversaries. They believe conflict and war are inevitable. For one nation to gain something, another must lose(See Microsoft ® Encarta ®, 2009).

Analyzing realism as an approach on both sides, realism explains or enables one to understand issues or things easily. In other words, it is certain that realists represent things the way they see it or as nature presented it. The ideas of realism in international relation come from the writings of Sun Tzu of ancient China, Thucydides of ancient Greece, and

Renaissance Italy's Niccolò Machiavelli who argued that the leaders of nations use their power to advance the interests of their own nations with little regard for morality or friendship (See Microsoft ® Encarta ®, 2009). Central to that assumption is the view that human beings are egoistic and desire power and our inability to trust others leads to predictable outcomes. Perhaps this is why war has been so common throughout recorded history. Since individuals are organized into states, human nature impacts on state behavior... Machiavelli stressed that a leader's main concern is to promote national security. In order to successfully perform this task, the leader needs to be alert and cope effectively with internal as well as external threats to his rule; he needs to be a lion and a fox. Power (the Lion) and deception (the Fox) are crucial tools for the conduct of foreign policy. In Machiavelli's view, rulers obey the 'ethics of responsibility' rather than the conventional religious morality that guides the average citizen (Antunes&Camisao, 2018: 1).

In visual arts, artists that belong to realism movement which started around mid-19th century believe in realistic representations. Some of the notable artists include Gustave Courbet, Jean-Francois Millet, Honore Daumier, and Jean-Baptise-Camille Corot. Ideboen (2021: 1) believes that realist "artists sought to resist the more romantic notions represented in art and also to depict the realities of industrial revolution that began during this time period". This is in agreement with the views of Doss & Roberts (2021: 1) who affirms that realism art movement originated due to the industrial revolution and harsh realities birthed from it (and also) as a direct opposition to both this extravagant romanticism and the unrealistic portrayals and techniques of other classical arts. Realism in art serves as a representation of the world as realistically as possible. This sentiment extends as far as technique, often coinciding in artwork with naturalism, though, generally deals with landscapes, whereas, realism more often depicts poverty and the working class...Realism in art is the exact representation, without embellishment or added emotion of a real life figure or scene. Realism can be realistic in appearance, but always realistic in the scenes it represents. During the realism movements, artists viewed their works to show the world to viewers who may have been detached from or otherwise oblivious to the honest and humble scenes occurring in the world from day to day. Because of this, realism is often mislabeled as 'gloomy,' but the truth is that it is, from time to time, simply representative of extreme events and realities (Doss & Roberts 2021: 3).

Marxism

Marx focused on the inequities between the rich and poor in society and the tendency for the wealthy, more powerful classes to exploit the poorer, weaker ones. Marxists view international relations as an extension of the struggle between the classes, with wealthy countries exploiting poorer, weaker ones. Marxists mainly study imperialism—that is, the practice of stronger nations to control or influence weaker ones. They look at the unfair and exploitative aspects of relationships between the world's rich and poor nations. Marxists tend to see economic relationships as both the cause of and potential solution to the problem of war (Microsoft® Encarta®, 2009).

In visual arts, the connoisseurship stream from contextual interpretation of works of art envelope from the Marxist frame in which art is examined alongside economic considerations. The reading of images in terms of class structures, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, cost and availability of media, within a given context or the examination of patronage in relation to governance and economic system or the analysis of content as instruments of social control. (Egonwa 2012: 40).

Feminism

In Feminist approach, scholars of international relations and artists have challenged the barriers created by gender in both fields. Smith (2018: 1) affirms that “feminist theory has challenged women's near complete absence from traditional (international relations) theory and practice. This absence is visible both in women's marginalization from decision-making and in the assumption that the reality of women's day-to-day lives is not impacted by or important to international relations.” In the visual arts, feminists assume that making art and the various writings that images could be used to make (iconography) is influenced by gender. (Hence), feminist art historians decry the discrimination suffered by women in the literature of art making over the years. This is true because until about three decades ago most popular art history texts had no account of female artists (Egonwa, 2012: 40).

From the review of the approaches it is evident that these approaches have shaped the society over the years and have determined the state of many nations. In other words it has equally determined the state of tourism as tourists actually go out to see for themselves what they

have heard or read concerning the nations of the world. Museums in Europe and America house most of these art works whose artists used as channels to preach on the state of the society.

Tourism

Tourists indulge in tourism not only for sight-seeing and holidaying, but also because they can earn some money as well while on holiday. Artists participate in workshops while on tourism. Tourism has been a long practice from old. Interests in tourism most times are derived from what people hear or read concerning a nation or society and they will travel, prepared with lots of money. The Bible informs that:

The queen Sheba heard of Solomon's fame and she travelled to Jerusalem...She brought with her a large group of attendants, as well as camels loaded with spices, jewels and large amount of gold...The queen of Sheba heard Solomon's wisdom and saw the palace he had built. She saw the food that was served at his table, the living quarters for his officials, the organization of his palace staff and the uniforms they wore, the servants which waited on him at feast, and the sacrifices he offered in the temple. It left her breathless and amazed. She said to King Solomon, "what I heard in my own country about you and your wisdom is true! But I couldn't believe it I had come and see it all for myself (Goodnews Bible: 1976, 1 Kings 10 verses 4 – 7)

Tourism generates income for nations. Again, the Bible informs that the queen of Sheba "presented to King Solomon the gifts she had brought: more than four thousand kilograms of gold and a very large amount of spices and jewels. The amount of spices she gave him was by far the greatest he had ever received at any time (1 Kings 10 verse 10)".

Tourism is vital for the success of many economies around the world. There are several benefits on host destination. Tourism boosts the revenue of the economy, creates thousands of jobs, develops the infrastructures of a country, and plants a sense of cultural exchange between foreigners and citizens...Exhibitions, conferences and events usually attracts foreigners. Organizing authorities usually gain profits from registration fees, gifts sales, exhibition spaces, and sales of media copyright. Furthermore, foreign tourists bring diversity and cultural enrichment to the hosting nation (Yehia, 2019: 1).

State of Tourism in Nigeria

Tourism in Nigeria is controlled by the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) which is subsidiary of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and National Orientation. The

country is blessed with many diverse cultures owing to the many tribes that make up the country. According to information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (2023):

Nigeria offers a wide variety of tourist attraction such as extended and roomy rivers, beaches ideal for swimming as well as other water sports. The country also has attractions ranging from unique wildlife, vast tracts of unspoiled nature ranging tropical forest, magnificent waterfalls, to new rapidly growing cities, and climatic conditions that are particularly conducive for holidaying. Other attractions include traditional ways of life preserved in local customs. Also available are rich and varied handicrafts and other colorful products depictive or illustrative of native arts. (<https://foreignaffairs.gov.ng>).

Continuing, the information regrettably observed that “many of these attractions are however still largely untapped”. The reason for these remains largely to the fact that tourism is not regarded in Nigeria as it is regarded in the developed countries. This problem accounts for the yearly decline in Nigeria’s tourism statistics. After 2016 when Nigeria’s earnings from tourism thrived, Nigeria continues to experience a nose dive in tourism statistics thereafter. Nigeria tourism statistics from 2016 - 2023 shows as follows:

- Nigeria tourism statistics for 2020 was 321,000,000.00, a 78.18% decline from 2019.
- Nigeria tourism statistics for 2019 was 1,471,000,000.00, a 25.59% decline from 2018
- Nigeria tourism statistics for 2018 was 1,977,000,000.00, a 24.4% decline from 2017
- Nigeria tourism statistics for 2017 was 2,15,000,000.00, a 140.35% increase from 2016

(See: <http://www.macrotrends.net>)

It is imperative to note that the earnings stated above are in U.S dollar. Therefore one can understand how much the country is losing from untapped tourist centers.

In What Ways can Visual Arts Recuperate Tourism and International Relations in Nigeria?

Tourism as an aspect of international relations has remained an important part that have continued to sustain nations all over the globe because it remains the rallying point of all the factors; political, economic, social, educational, cultural, and religious interactions that make up international relations. World Tourism Day (WTD) in 2015 was celebrated around the theme ‘One Billion Tourist; One Billion Opportunities’ highlighting the transformative potential of one billion tourists. With more than one billion tourist traveling to an international destination every year, tourism has become a leading economic sector,

contributing 9.8% of global GDP and represents 7% of the world's total exports (Rasool, Maqbool&Tarique 2021: 1).

Tourism cannot be sustained without the visual arts because of its cultural implications. Tourists usually visit museums to view artifacts with some as old as a thousand years old or more. Unfortunately in Nigeria, tourism as a sector has remained underutilized because of the negligence of visual arts in the country which is the hub of Nigerian culture. It is important to observe that Nigeria is a nation blessed with diverse cultures and each has their rich traditional art practices. She has about 371 ethnic groups with beautiful indigenous cultures. These cultures have their traditional arts and festivals and many have survived the strong western influence but are slowly sliding into extinction except drastic measures are taken to arrest the situation. These traditional arts and festivals are strong relics that can boost tourism in Nigeria. Iwuoha (2016: 18) observes that:

People are usually drawn to places whose art and cultural heritage differ from their own. They want to see for themselves how other people live and what relics of their past can be found in the present day. Africa being the oldest civilization attracts this attention in abundance due to the desire of the rest of the world to see where civilization began. These fascinating art, culture and tourism heritage appear in forms of traditional and contemporary artistic representations, music and dances, festivals, cuisines, souvenirs, fashion and dress, historical monuments, natural endowments among others.

Some of these festivals with their artistic exhibitions in Nigeria include *Argungu* fishing festival in North West geo-political zone, *Osun* River goddess festival and *Eyo* masquerade festival both in the South West geo-political zone, *Durbar* festival celebrated in the North Central geo-political zone, *Ige-Agba* festival in the north Central zone, *IkejiArondizuogu* festival and *Mmanwu* festival in the South East geo-political zone, and *Boat regatta* festival in the South-South geo-political zone, just to mention a few. These beautiful indigenous arts and cultures are what should form the hub of Nigerian tourism.

Equally there are also archeological/historical sites in Nigeria that can boost tourism like the *Onyema* mining site in Enugu, Enugu state where local coal miners were massacred by the colonial British police for demanding pay rise on 18th November 1949. A monumental sculpture piece is erected in Enugu in memory of the event. And also the ancient Igbo-Ukwu town that stunned the world with amazing sculptures in bronze medium that found their way to British museum. The Nok town in Plateau State known for her Nok terra cotta pieces and Iron works and one of the earliest known societies in Western Africa is another great historical site. Mention must also be made of Benin kingdom where exquisite art works were

looted by the British colonialists in 1849. Tourists would like to see the town and see more art works made by the contemporary guild of artists in the Benin kingdom and possibly compare notes on evolution of art in Benin where need be. These historical sites can be likened to the historical/archaeological sites that form the hub of Iraqi museums/tourist centers in the Middle East. Ghidan&Paolini (20005: 20) affirms that:

Virtually all of Iraq is an archaeological site. More than 10,000 sites have been identified in Iraq and many more await discovery. About 1,500 have been researched. Apart from some important objects housed in major institutions such as the British Museum and the Louvre, almost all the finds recovered from these sites are housed in the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad”.

It is no doubt that tourism is one of the major sustaining factors of the Iraqi economy. As Nigeria’s continue dependence on crude oil have continued to stifle her economy there is the urgent need to diversify to tourism through the visual art and reap the gains therein. Again Iwuoha (2016: 18) strongly supports this view. In her words:

The need for diversification of the Nigerian economy has been harped upon by economists and stakeholders in the last 30 years without concrete action to realize it. Rather, successive governments have concentrated on revenue accruable from oil and gas to the exclusion of other sectors of the economy.

A diversified economy can alleviate the poor stance of Nigerian economy as it is witnessed today. Rather than depend on oil and gas alone, Nigeria can develop a buoyant and vibrant economy from tourism.

Conclusion

It is established that visual arts remains therecuperative channel for tourism and international relations in Nigeria. A lot of stakeholders believe that the role of art in the development of Nigeria’s tourism sector can never be over emphasized. Managing director/CEO of Simpli International, organizers of the International Culture and Art Festival (ICAF), Bruno Eke supports that government can explore the possibilities in art by using it to sell tourism. In an interview with *Daily Sun* Newspaper he argues, “Now this is tourism. When these people come to Nigeria, they want to see art communities, visit artists, and what roles they can play, and also participate in the art show because the art and artist are different” (Mpamugoh, 2019: 32).

Recommendations

Tourism can sustain the economy of Nigeria more than oil and gas if the right organizations are put in place. As such, this paper makes the following recommendations:

1. There is high visual art illiteracy in Nigeria. The government through the ministry of information culture and tourism, and the national orientation agency must engage in sensitization on importance of visual art, not only as a channel for self-reliance and entrepreneurship but also for development of the tourism sector.
2. The education authorities and curriculum planners should make visual arts a compulsory subject at all levels of education so as to make the students knowledgeable with the gains of the subject from an early period as it is obtained in America and Europe.
3. The Nigerian Museums and Monuments should be restructured and replica of lost traditional relics commissioned and reproduced for tourism.
4. The National Gallery of Art (NGA) should be established in every state in Nigeria and visual artists must be supported to donate works to the gallery for tourism just as there are galleries and museums all over the countries in Europe and America.
5. Government must revive the arts and culture industry especially in states where they have been destroyed completely because they serve as tourist centers in Nigeria. And also historical sculptures must be erected as they will attract tourist who would like to know the history of the people.

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