

Cultural Integration for State Identity in Nasarawa State's Choreographic Approach to NAFEST Danceturgy

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The concept of the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) in Nigeria is to foster national unity and identity through the performance of the variegated aspects of the Nigerian cultural heritage. In tandem with the festival ideology, dance performances at NAFEST are expected to reflect statehood and unity. However, most states of Nigeria are multi-ethnic and thereby multi-cultural. Consequently, reflecting state identity in their creative outputs proves a daunting task. Having over thirty distinctive ethnic groups, Nasarawa holds its place as one of the most ethnically diverse states in Nigeria. In spite of this, the state was able to clinch and retain the NAFEST Best Overall State award for five consecutive years (2007 – 2011). This implies that Nasarawa State adhered to the stipulations of the festival curriculum. In this article, I conduct an intellectual inquiry into the choreographic process of *Girma*, a dance theatre piece which was performed by the Nasarawa State Performing Troupe (NSPT) at the 2007 edition of NAFEST. I also identify the various identities of dance within the Nigerian worldview, and within this frame, I establish the constructs of the NAFEST danceturgy. In the context of this article, danceturgy simply refers to the study of the craft and techniques of dance composition, and the representation of the main elements of choreography in performance (Tume, 2019, p. 23). The data for this study was collated through participant observation, interviews, and consultation of relevant documents. NAFEST syllabi of several editions were consulted to determine the structure of NAFEST danceturgy. To validate the NSPT choreographic approach, structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with the choreographer of *Girma*, as well as the administrators of the troupe. The study finds that the *Su Dir* dance piece is purpose-built for NAFEST and specifically tailored to suit the festival themes of cultural integration and unity. The study reveals the core features of the NSPT choreographic approach to be town and gown consultations, and exploration of multiple dance materials across all the ethnic groups of the state. It is suggested that the NSPT choreographic approach should be adopted and modified to suit NAFEST danceturgy.

Keywords: NAFEST, Danceturgy, Nasarawa State Performing Troupe, *Girma*, State Identity.

Short Bio

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