CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sociocultural materials and visual art: A functional analysis of Nigerian banknotes, 1973–2009

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Abstract: In the past, crude material such as foodstuffs, textile materials, and ornaments (cowrie shells, manillas, and beads) served as money across nations and communities. In the time being, forms of monies have totally differed. Modern notes undergo processes of deliberate design, considering forms and imageries. Such imageries and elements included in currency design convey humanistic preoccupations relevant to societies in several ways. And as part of the characteristics, the notes are symbolic, stylistic, and functional to reveal prominent societal ideals as well as experiences of the people. This paper, through historical and analytical approaches, has investigated some of Nigeria’s banknotes from 1973 to 2009 as visual data for producing meaning from viewpoint of art and society. Here, I put forward the analysis of forms and meaning of imageries used in the bank notes designs using iconographic, iconological, functional, and structuralist methods. The paper has underscored naira banknotes as historical documents, archived with certain didactic functions. It has also established the need for routing society’s developments through art practice localized in content and context.

Subjects: Art & Visual Culture; Arts; Cultural Studies; Heritage; History of Art & Design; Humanities; Social & Cultural History; Visual Arts

Keywords: Naira; imageries; banknote; design; Nigeria; style; sociocultural

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This work examines selected Nigerian Naira banknotes. The focus of this paper is to functionally analyze and review Nigeria’s development in money art and to refocus readers on the current forms of notes as art works rooted in culture, politics, economy, socialization, among other contexts in society. Imageries representing national ideals and realizations are applied to the design of these notes to preserve them as legends. This study has also positioned banknotes as not just mere tools of transaction and exchange but deliberate works of art whose design elements are symbolic and functional in sociocultural contexts, didactic in functions and archival in documentation, as depository of heritage evidences. In this study, topical issues covered include didactic presentations of agriculture; the much needed coexistence in the multiethnic Nigeria and levels of development through the “de-ethnicizing” or detribalizing characteristics of sociocultural activities and interactions.
1. Introduction
Following historical developments in Nigeria, in 1973, Naira, depicted with the symbol “N” and Kobo written as “K” began to be the official currency of Nigeria. Before this time, Nigeria’s diverse groups, like many other indigenous groups in Africa, had adopted several “primitive monies” in the form of commodities as means of exchange and media of transaction (Pankhurst, 1962). In his article, “Economic and socio-cultural aspects of cowrie currency of the Dagaaba of Northwestern Ghana aspects,” Yiridoe (1995), confirmed that the use of such primitive currencies was a widespread phenomenon. Eyo (1979), in a related account, underscored the application of such object monies in Africa, with particular focus on Nigeria. In reviewing Eyo’s work, “Nigeria and the evolution of money,” it is clear that the materials which served Nigeria as money in pre-coinage days assumed dual classifications based on internal and external exchanges. While materials such as iron, tin, cattle, salt, feathers, seeds, farm products, textiles, and beadworks functioned in local marketing; cowrie shells, iron and copper bars, manilas, textiles, beads, salt, gin, and tobacco served in multinational transactions. Different groups (which later formed Nigeria) particularized their use of these object monies following their trade patterns and natural resources available to them. For instance, while iron served the northern parts of Nigeria in response to agricultural implementation, cattle served the animal husbanders of Fulani. Salt and farm products such as yam, palm oil, palm kernels, dried fish seemed to be of common importance and so served in barter exchange, especially amongst the riverine southerners and those around sea beds.

Furthermore, beads formed another important money item of widespread usage. Eyo’s work revealed that peoples of Igbo extraction, Benin, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Kano, Bida, and Yoruba had long history of the use of beads as money and this informs why it has a continued presence amongst the people in body adornment, coronal/royal paraphernalia, and decorative experiences. Cowrie shells which assumed the most universal usage in pre-coinage currencies was introduced through international trade for domestic uses. It served Nigeria for centuries, strung in varied denominations across the country. Although the exact date of its introduction into Nigeria is not clear, it is certain that by the fifteenth century, parts of the places which was later known as Nigeria had begun to experience transaction with cowrie shells and its existence continued until its importation was outlawed in 1923. Cowries continued to be in use even as late as 1940s in bride price settlements. Manilla was also used in Nigeria, first as an ornamental piece until it became a tool of trade in the sixteenth century and as a store of value with kings and royals. Within the second decade of the twentieth century, its uses and importation was prohibited.

Although the use of coins found its origin amongst the Babylonians and the Middle East around the sixth century and its developments through the Greek empire, China, and other nations of the world, West African people experienced the use of coins introduced as early as 1825 before the amalgamation of their different ethnic groups into formal nations as seen today. Nigeria shared an equal experience of currency, banknote, and banking development with some West African nations. With the establishment of the African Banking Corporation of England in Lagos in 1892 and with the formation of the Bank of British West Africa in 1893, which was later changed to Bank of West Africa in 1957, the British formally supplied and financially coordinated the nations: Nigeria (in Lagos), Ghana (in Accra), Sierra Leone (in Freetown), and Gambia (in Banjul). In other words, before their independence, these countries used the same legal tender (Yiridoe, 1995). According to Eyo, originally, coins were introduced and used in Nigeria under the British colonial administration and notes were later launched in One Pound (£1), ten shillings (10/-), two shillings (2/-), and one shilling (1/-). Five pounds was issued in 1919, and was withdrawn and reintroduced in 1923. Smaller denominations were added in coins of florins: two shillings, one shilling, six pence, three pence, one penny, half penny, quarter penny, and one-tenth penny.

With the establishment of its Central Bank in 1958 and the beginning of operations in 1959, the Nigeria pound-shilling system was introduced bearing the inscription “Federal Republic of Nigeria” on the new banknotes, while the British pounds and shilling system was abandoned. Even though Ade (1976) has claimed that the most important transformations in finance and money were made in
Nigeria about the late fifties, it could be strongly argued that Nigeria became full-grown when she indigenized her currency notes in 1973 by exchanging her pound-shilling system with the Naira-kobo system. The birth of the Naira in 1973 gave rise to four Naira-kobo banknote denominations: 50 kobo (50k), 1 Naira (N1), 5 Naira (N5), and 10 Naira (N10). The fifth note, Twenty Naira (N20) was added later in 1977 in response to economic growth of the oil sector (Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), 2009; Eyo, 1979). The first series of the Nigerian notes were issued alongside four coins: half kobo, one kobo, five kobo, and twenty-five kobo. Eighteen years later in 1991, the fifty kobo and the one Naira notes were changed to coins. Further changes that took place in Nigeria’s monetary system came “in response to expansion in economic activities and to facilitate an efficient payment system” leading to “the N100, N200, N500 and N1000 notes being introduced in December 1999, November 2000, April 2001 and October 2005 respectively” (CBN, 2009). In all, Nigeria has introduced a total of 21 notes, while currently her banknotes are printed in eight denominations: N5, N10, N20, N50, N100, N200, N500, and N1000 Naira.

I agree with Yiridoe (1995) when he noted that currencies (mediums of exchange) possess “monetary and nonmonetary capabilities” (p. 17). This assertion undoubtedly underscores the fact that beyond economic functions, banknotes possess essential nonmonetary properties. Such nonmonetary properties of exchange mediums make them depositories of sociocultural effects of the people. Forms and features in banknote designs qualify them as either conceptual art piece, cultural heritage site and functional tools. While the Naira notes remains contemplated in economic terms, they have hardly been studied in terms of visual renderings of imageries and sociocultural significations. Therefore, following historical backgrounds and interpretative methods from archival information and interviews, this study has sought to: (a) identify and discuss the sources of images used on the Naira notes; (b) determine the stylistic developments of the Naira design; (c) and reveal the societal import of their imageries.

2. Identifying imageries of Naira notes in their social spaces

Beyond their functions as tools of transaction, naira banknotes give certain functions through the imageries and symbolic signatures they possess, but we must first locate these representations in their society’s space. For the Naira banknotes, imageries come from a variety of sources. In a personal communication, G. Sansa confirmed that these images are products of certain government’s reference materials, which contain numerous illustrations, original artefacts, drawings, and photographs of Nigerians captured in different activities, such as farming, trading, dancing and drumming, women plaiting hair, people in festivals, persons walking, reading and cooking. The CBN releases such reference materials to designers of her banknotes to reproduce relevant pictures or images therein following themes intended by the apex bank. This would then lead to a prototype note (G. Sansa, personal communication, June 11, 2009). Although the period under study spans more than three decades, a critical observation of the banknotes shows that imageries of designs fall under issues of: Arts and Culture, Architecture, Oil and Electricity, Agriculture, Commerce, Society and Environment/Tourism. These inform the rationale for locating the images sources.

Although from a wider perspective, Nigeria has not truly and exhaustively projected herself in fecund cultural and art enterprising, as underscored by Ikwuemesi (2006), reflecting art and culture symbols on Naira notes reveals Nigeria’s simplistic inclination to artistic and cultural heritage. The notes which are laden with heritage properties and cultural indices include the 1979, 1984, and 2007 issues of Five Naira, the 1979 and 1984 issues of One Naira (see Figures 1 & 2). These cultural representations of Nkponkiti dance troupe on the Five Naira note, and the Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 1977) image on One Naira, present a national focus in accentuating and preserving heritage elements. Nkponkiti group as an Igbo performing group of Umunze, Nigeria, has a long-standing celebrity of social and entertainment functions. The artists here, in creating his design, used a photographic representation to capture a receding perspective of these artistes in their cultural apparatuses and regalia—headaddresses, drums, gongs, and dresses which are in themselves objects of creative art and craft. Moreover, the image of FESTAC cultural art and performance of 1977 held in Lagos for all of the black nations has become a legend of sort by its inclusion on naira banknote. The mask has remained an acclaimed cultural object for Nigeria following the deftness with which the sculptural piece was rendered.
Another level of inclusion of design elements and imageries is that which derives from Nigeria’s development of society: architecture and oil and gas industry. The manifestation of architectural images on Nigerian notes began after the establishment of her central bank when as yet Nigeria maintained the British Pounds-Shilling system of currency. Example is seen in Nigeria’s One pound note of 1967 (Figure 3). Later reflections of architecture came in the first issues of the naira notes (Figure 4). Architectural imageries captured on naira notes include two Nigeria’s central bank’s headquarters. The former, located in city of Lagos, is featured in the designs of the 1973 issues, while the later (and current), located in Abuja, is featured in the One Thousand Naira note. These high-rise multi-story architectures are legends of national importance in terms of functions, cost, and service as Nigeria’s apex institution, thus, informing the reason they were “archived” on the naira notes. Figures 3–7 show the transition in representing architectural imageries in naira notes. Although these architectures are not deeply rooted in indigenous styles of house type, they have become evidences of Nigeria’s acceptance of modern architecture.
Furthermore, Kanji dam, located on the north-central state of Niger, Nigeria, across the Niger River is Nigeria’s major power source. Nigeria has had a difficult experience in establishing a regular supply of power up until this time. Yet, it is arguable that the illustration of the Dam on the 1973 issue of Ten Naira (see Figure 6) reveals initial “breakthroughs” in the country’s power institution. Nigeria has left a critical issue of distrust condemned by the citizens around issues of power supply. Equally, representing an oil rig system as captured on the Five Hundred Naira note shows Nigeria as an oil-producing state since her oil boom of late 1950s (Figure 7). As a major source of revenue, issues around the production of crude oil and petroleum, and its exportation from the Niger-Delta region of the nation without fail needed to be part of representations in Nigeria naira note.

Following developments in Nigerian banknotes, agriculture has been heavily represented in naira design—the designs of banknotes that existed before the Naira equally received a substantial influence from the theme of agriculture. On the Naira, the influence of agricultural can be observed on
the first three notes of the 1973 issues: Fifty Kobo, One Naira, and Five Naira. Others appear on the 1991 and 2007 issues of Fifty Naira notes and on the Two Hundred note of 2000. In a realistic representation of the images shown on these notes, the graphic designer captured agricultural experiences of deforestation, and groundnut packaging into pyramids. Others activities captured include hoeing and tillage, use of animals in farming, packing and storing of farm produces, fish farming, harvesting and husking of palm bunch. The agricultural activity of palm production is common in southern Nigeria, which is a tropical forest region (see Figures 8–13).

Naira notes, with strong commercial values of Nigerian peoples are the 1979, 1984, and 2007 issues of the Ten Naira. Although, one may argue that notes in Figures 8–13 whose imageries relate to agriculture and technology equally have commercial interests since they represent processes of creating wealth as shown, the imagery on Nigeria’s Ten naira note (Figure 14) is primarily a trading
Figure 10. Harvesting palm fruits.
Source: Five Naira. (1973) © Central Bank of Nigeria.

Figure 11. Hoeing the earth for planting.
Source: Fifty Naira. (1991) © Central Bank of Nigeria.

Figure 12. Farm products.
Source: Two Hundred Naira. (2000) © Central Bank of Nigeria.

Figure 13. Fish farming.
Source: Fifty Naira. (2007) © Central Bank of Nigeria.
experience. Hawking is a common experience in Nigeria, perhaps as developing country. Young men, women, and children are seen across Nigerian cities hawking their wares of assorted kinds either on their heads or pushed in trucks. The “Fulani Milk” maids as the illustration in Figure 14 is called shows a trade style of northern Nigerian women of Fulani group whose major occupation centers on cattle rearing. They trade in the milk product of their animal husbandry. Moreover, the representation of trading here lends support to the possibility of women’s enterprising towards domestic subsistence. In the contemporary society, both men and women engage in ventures that are financially lucrative.

Attention to the environment is a notable concern in any given place and Nigeria has shown a protracted willingness to promote its development. In 1999, the image of Zuma rock, a point of attraction in Nigeria’s geography, was captured in One Hundred Naira. This single massive rock captured in One Hundred Naira note is located in Suleja, a city in north central state of Nigeria. The rock has stood out as a good attraction center of international renown in Nigeria. It is one of the many rockscapes which define and adorn Nigeria’s geography for better tourists’ interest. On this banknote, (Figure 15) the rock is captured in an aerial view. This note remains the only one whose subject is adopted from a known Nigerian environment. Although Nigeria is to fully conquer its public spaces and become a developed place environmentally, it has continued to show pockets of evidences towards this requirement for development.

3. Remarkable developments and design styles
Style involves the characteristics, features, or inherent elements of designs developed over time (Frank, 2006). Although, choice of images and illustrations on banknotes are not made by a single artist, certain developments of design styles are usually identified. From archival evidences, an important feature of the Naira design is that which reveals a conveyance of imageries previously used in Nigerian pounds and shillings system. It is notable that the lumberjack of the Fifty Kobo was adopted from 1967 and 1968 Five shillings note, the imagery showing a harvester of palm fruits of
the Five Naira came from the One Pound of 1967 and 1968, the imagery of the young men building groundnut pyramids on 1973, One Naira note featured previously in the Ten shillings. Other notes which carried these representations are: the Five Naira of 1979 and 1984 issues, the Ten Naira of 1979 and 1984 issues which were also relayed into the 2007 issues. Ten Naira note of 1973 does not bear any image of human figure and it has remained the only note without figure representation throughout the history of the Naira. The reverse illustration carries a strong similarity with the Five Hundred Naira note in its idea of national economic interest. Right from the shilling and pounds era, Nigeria has included the national coat of arms in all her notes. The coat of arms in the Twenty Naira note before the 2007 issues was highly exaggerated to cover a large portion of the reverse. Across the years, four major styles stand out clearly. These are the (1) architectural representation, which appeared on the first four Nigeria Naira notes of 1973 and the One Thousand Naira notes; (2) the linear convolutions style, which was carried over from the colonial banknotes to the first set of Naira note; (3) the portrait inclusion commencing from 1977; and the (4) rectangular models of notes created in 2007.

3.1. Architectural representation style
The use of architectural images in currency notes began in Nigeria during the colonial days when Nigeria used pounds and shillings (see Figures 3–5). This style in which edifices are shown on notes continued to manifest in the design of the initial four notes of 1973—Fifty Kobo, One Naira, Five Naira, and Ten Naira until its latest manifestation in One thousand Naira note of 2005. In a personal communication, Sansa identified that Nigeria includes relics and important historical objects, artefacts, or structures in currency design so as to preserve memory and knowledge. This fact provided the ground for representing the first CBN headquarters building in the designs of early Naira and kobo notes of 1973 as a means of preserving the memory of this important economic structure, which served the country during her metamorphosing years.

3.2. Convoluted linear style
In a similar stylistic development, and certain linear effects (such as cog-wheel framing) manifested on the obverse of Nigeria pounds and shilling notes years before the introduction of the Naira. This style of design was relayed to and advanced in Naira design of the 1973 issues. With later developments, designs were modified into circular framework and other kinds of line structures rendered in wreathed and intricate patterns. The highpoint of this style manifested in intricate linear work and convolution of design superimposed in harmonious tints and shades of hues, enclosed around blank circles to the right of the banknotes. A good instance of the style is the 1984 Twenty Naira note whose linearity is rendered in some resemblance of plant and floral growth. Although the linearity expressed on these notes shows a use of mechanical tool, they equally underscore the creativity of the time, even without the availability of modern digital tools (see Figure 16).
3.3. Portrait style

The inclusion of pictures of notable persons on banknotes has been a common practice across nations, but its introduction in Nigeria’s note began with the image of Brigadier Ramat Murtala Muhammed who was a military head of the Nigerian state between 1975 and 1976. In less than two years of his demise (i.e. in 1977), the new Twenty Naira banknote was introduced bearing Murtala’s portrait. This highlights his successor’s swift action to perpetuate Murtala, who widely enthused the people with his developmental agenda for the nation before the coup that ousted him. Figure 17 shows a catalog of persons whose portrait images have been used in all of Naira banknotes. The portrait representation has continued its existence in Nigeria’s currency history till the present. Other figures captured in the design of Nigeria’s banknotes include deceased Herbert Macaulay (on One Naira note and coin), Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, (on Five Naira note), Dr Alvan Ikoku (on Ten Naira note), Chief Obafemi Awolowo (on One Hundred Naira note), Alhaji Ahmadu Bello (on Two Hundred Naira note), Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (on Five Hundred Naira note), and Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Borno and Dr Clement Isong (both on One Thousand Naira). It is noteworthy that only once did a known female character appear on Nigeria’s note. She is notable potter, Ladi Kwali whose experience of pottery exposed to
national endearment. The Kwali artist has perhaps inadvertently made a point for the womenfolk whose creativity and enthusiasm have the potential of showcasing even beyond national recognitions. It is clearly observable that these national figures whose portraits appear on the Naira notes are drawn from the three major parts (and language groups) of the country—Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. Across countries, the basic criterion for selecting persons to represent on banknotes remained that of meritorious service and relevance. In other words, currency notes are artistic vehicles for conveying individuals to national plaudits. But in Nigeria's case, a critical study of the Naira confirms an evidence beyond this reason. It goes towards that which is ethnic and sociopolitical. The manifestation of “important” political figures on the banknotes projects naira as a tool of politics. Looking closely at the ethnic or geopolitical arrangement of those whose images are used, it is understandable that the balancing of the political equation of Nigeria was pursued. Yet, the figures on One thousand Naira note are neither from any of three major ethnic groups. After Mr. Roy Pentelow Fenton ended his tenure of office as the colonial governor of the CBN in 1963, indigenous Alhaji Aliyu Mai-Borno (1963–1967) and Dr. Clement Nyong Isong (1967–1975) took over the gubernatorial position successively.² It is perhaps in honor of their significant and fundamental leaderships that they are chosen to be featured in the Nigeria's highest currency denomination—the One thousand Naira note.

3.4. The rectangulation style
As a development in style, the use of rectangle as an element of art became predominant in the design of Naira notes published in 2007. They include Five Naira, Ten Naira, Twenty Naira, and Fifty Naira notes. The design modeling as revealed in Figure 18 below identifies the artist's simplistic approach in the use of shape as element in design, which manifests in all the notes of this time. Parts of the notes are actually divisible into different units and sizes of the quadrilateral. The artist clearly differs from the previous designs where convoluted linearities formed huge characteristics of the banknotes. The simplicity expressed with rectangles here is also combined with monochromatic schemes of hues in tints and shades. This further delineate the possibility of achieving visual creativity by rendering designs with the most minimal elements. The masses for whom the notes are made would as it were experience better communication of ideas through such simple maximization of shapes. Thus, the idea connotes the relationship between creativity and its psychological effects.

4. Toward proper interpretation and meaning of the design imageries
Images, production of images, and people who interact with images (audience) are all contributors to the production of meaning behind representation (Gillian, 2001). Following the structuralist point of view interpretation, meaning could be drawn from beyond surface towards that which affects the society in analytic depths (D’Alleva, 2012). At such point, social and political issues that formed and informed choice of imageries are identified. This answers the question of why the images are there. Banknotes are vehicles for cultural and functional essences revealed in imageries. Such imageries symbolize national ideology and spirit. Beyond their economic function, in expressing humanistic experiences of the people, banknotes serve didactic functions for the society; act as agents of

Figure 18. Rectangulation model of 2007 banknote series.
Source: Twenty Naira note. (2007) © Central Bank of Nigeria.
continuity for artistic and cultural protocols; and as a depository of ideals. For the Naira notes, such issues of societal concern are seen in the areas of: (1) promoting agriculture, professionalism and industry in Nigeria; (2) aiding cultural continuity and preservation; (3) advancing unity among the many ethnic groups in Nigeria, and (4) holding up national ideals and developments.

4.1. The Naira and agricultural practice in Nigeria
Nigeria is an agrarian society. In the past, it was the mainstay before the oil boom and in the recent time, the prospects of the practice of agriculture has begun to manifest as the government has set a ban on the importation of certain agricultural products such as rice, chicken, and others. The didactic function of naira banknote extensively manifests in issues of agriculture. We see banknotes as having the capability of serving as aids for learning among users. Including agricultural images on Naira design more than any other experience informs a desire to underscore and teach Nigerian citizens on the subject using banknotes as teaching aids. The images in Figures 8–13 suggest that agriculture has been an economic mainstay for Nigeria. These replicated imageries undoubtedly underscore a pursuit to uphold the activities of the industry for domestic consumption and export trade. A number of agricultural practices are identified: (a) Forestry (Figure 8). (b) Cropping: planting and harvesting of cereals, vegetables, tubers, cash crops (palm trees), others (Figures 9–12). (c) Fishery: This can be observed in the image in the 2007 issue of Fifty Naira (see Figure 13). (d) Animal Husbandry (see Figure 12). Apart from crop production, animal husbandry stands a good source of employment for the teeming Nigerian population. Though some of the notes portray agriculture, they equally epitomize entrepreneurship, industry, and skill. They canvass against indolence, as the industry accommodates both skilled and unskilled labours, as well as it cuts across genders. Today, as economic fluctuations persist, a number of these activities pass for a suitable entrepreneurship skill for the people (Morgan, 2014).

4.2. Cohering sociocultural varieties and multi-ethnicity in Nigeria
As a multi-ethnic state, Nigeria is made up of about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with diverse languages (Obi-Ani, 2002). Over the years, there seems to have existed a competitive struggle amongst Nigerians, especially those which have caused religious upheavals and killings, ethnic clashes and sociopolitical tensions. Ibenwa (2014) underscores this reality when he wrote that systems of belief (religion), politics, poverty, territorial control are part of the factors that engender conflicts, unfriendliness in multi-ethnic nations and peoples. Images on the banknotes reveal as clear indication of the desire to bring about some cohesiveness amongst Nigeria’s diverse peoples. By representing Nigeria’s cross-cultural elements and imageries in Naira design, the Naira becomes a good instrument for seeking peace and unity. The imageries of four anonymous Nigerians in their traditional attires, which represent ethnic from Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba captured on the Fifty Naira note reveals a demand for a united Nigeria.

A study of the facial details of the imageries in Figure 19(a, b) shows the figure right top represents a northern Nigerian, usually Muslim in attire and Hausa in language. The figure is hooded and turbaned leaving only the face uncovered. This figure compares favorably with portrait of Alhaji Ahmedu Bello seen on the Two Hundred Naira note in Figure 17. Although rendered in blue monochrome, the
figure bottom right represents an Igbo man with his usual traditional red cap (Nwigwe & Morgan, 2013) in combination with a sturdy face type. The figure bottom right shows a Nigerian Yoruba, whose short soft hat and roundness of face are characterizing features of the group, particularly in profound tradition of dress code. Furthermore, although not definitive of any group, the only female in the piece represents a cultural instance of Nigeria’s traditional womenfolk who are known for simple adornment of the face and the common use of the scarf as head covering. Only a few or perhaps the fashionable younger women of today have a preference of exhibiting hairstyles and coiffure, affected largely by westernization. In the same cohesive role of the Naira, the portraits of the important national figures used on the banknotes serve to promote the sociocultural equation of the multi-ethnic groups of Nigeria. In other words their inclusion is a tripartite grouping along the three major ethnicities—a just representation portending a fact that over two hundred and fifty indigenous groups would be speaking the same “money language.” This quest for unanimity across Nigeria is further pushed using the national coat of arm, which has continued to appear on Naira notes with the inscription: unity and faith, peace and progress complements efforts towards unity. This inscription expresses the idea of Nigeria’s common interest, ideology and humanism for a cohesive and developed society. Although crises and wars are part of human societies, people rise above such predicaments through proper understanding and absorption of their national dreams.

4.3. Of art, culture, entertainment, and national development

For development across multi-ethnic societies, possibilities must be sought along diverse aspects of art and culture. Although its development is relatively on the upward trajectory, Nigeria has sought ways around the exploitation of arts and culture-related activities to create social spaces for growth. As seen in Figure 2, the image of Nkponkiti dancers and drummers are captured in their traditional instruments of music—local drums and gong for entertainment. Dance as performance art is a cultural experience that offers ease and release of tension after periods of toil and labour. In their flavours, cultural activities possess the capability of entertainment and attracting intercultural or intercommunity spectators, which helps bridging multi-ethnic differences. The influence of art on culture is here captured in the attire and costume and the creative posture and vibrancy with which the theater is performed. It shows the import of creative art in the promotion of theatrical, cultural performances of the people. Without cohesive existence, national development would amount to sheer illusions. On national development, although government in Nigeria proffers the most contribution from the federal, the integrated public roles cannot be divorced. Although problem of development in Nigeria seems multifaceted, Uzuegbunam (2013) identified “ethnic consciousness” as a major bane. This accentuates the reality that most people would as it were become disloyal to national dreams and goals in the attempt to maintain personal, ethnic, or sub-ethnic interests and identity, thus leading to distrusted and corrupted public service delivery. One of the major points of control suggested by Uzuegbunam underscores the relevance of enlightenment, which countenances the role of communication. We then understand the rationale behind utilizing the banknotes as instruments and visual aids in this communication. And, as such, designs imageries stand out as suitable visual communication campaign tools for reaching out to the rural and urban people.

5. Aesthetics and design

Marten and Kula (2008), in underlining the economic functions of money, noted that “money has physical, aesthetic and symbolic qualities” (p. 183). Every given design must evidently need these characteristics to produce creative meaning. In Naira design, as in other works of art, elements of aesthetics intrinsically stand out in certain ways. Although, there are various perceptions of aesthetics among individuals, in works of design, ingredients that determine beauty remain the same: proper engagement of principles of design for effective communication; simplicity in the use of elements such as shapes, lines, colors, forms, space, typeface, among others. As we survey Naira banknotes, a pattern of development of aesthetics could be observed: designers of the Naira have usually engaged a combination of diverse tints and shades of hues, where single color schemes are dominant. This chromatic grading has quite been more successful in recent mints. The 1984 issues(see Figure 1) most strongly relay monochromatic effect, while notes like the 1977 issue of Twenty Naira (Figure 16(c)), 1979 issue of One Naira (Figure 16(b)), 2000 issue of Two Hundred Naira (Figure 12), and 2001
issue of Five Hundred Naira (Figure 7) show the most colorful blends in plurality of hues. Though most currencies of the world are monochromatic in renderings, designs that engage tints and shades of harmonious hues are usually more artistically appreciable. From professional standpoints, 1973 Naira notes are quite excessive with motifs—shapes and lines in different tones project sharply from the background, thereby becoming somewhat busy. Across its development, before 2007, the naira seems to project some linear verbosities resulting from several rectangular and circular shapes, and forms used. This contrasts with the simplicity of design found on the later banknotes. Simplicity in design results from artist’s mastery in organizing elements, and appropriating design principles. Fewer elements make simplified and better designs. Another important factor is size. This complements simplicity in banknotes. This makes handling and carrying of notes easier, i.e. portability, perhaps when considering the available size of wallets in market. Apart from reduction of printing cost when notes are moderately sized, large notes are not usually aesthetically satisfactory. Hence, artworks and design of whatever sort must pursue exquisite chromatic rendering, simplicity, standard and effective size for aesthetic appeal.

6. Conclusion
Following the foregoing analysis, imageries used in banknote art are usually important legends of a society across experiences of culture, socialization, politics, and commerce, among other things, and hence, are symbolic and functional in certain ways. Such visual elements and representations found in banknotes possess capacities to teach, instruct, and preserve prodigies for the current users of the money. Although our current shift towards cashless economy would as it were minimize the regular exhibition of these symbolic works of design, the naira banknotes in their functional capacities serve as a depository for Nigeria’s multi-cultural resources. This agrees with the assertion put up by Ikejiani-Clark (2004) that “art remains an intrinsic part of the universal and African culture and civilization, interpreting and preserving human and African history” (p. 7). Thus, notes could be reutilized as archival documents for historical, political, and sociocultural references. The viewers of these images must adjust perception to produce meaning relevant to individual and the society. Hence, the need to appropriate inherent messages they possess for cohesive existence, national development, professional and entrepreneurial possibilities. It further demonstrates the plausibility of deliberately engaging images that are situated to cultural and indigenous arena for functional art-making and communication.

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1. George Sansa is an economic analyst at the CBN headquarters, Abuja. He took me on a tour of CBN currency museum as well as attended to my interview on June 11, 2010.
2. A catalog of successive governors of the central bank (CBN) updated as of 2009 was posted at the museum from which inquirers can draw their information.

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