



## HERITAGE NARRATIVES AND CONTINUITY IN THE ERA OF PANDEMIC: THE RURAL NIGERIA EXPERIENCE

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**ABSTRACT:** *Literature has it that heritage resources have not felt better with the series of previous global pandemics. These pandemics have created a lot of discontinuities in the life of these resources. However, this study was aimed at interrogating how COVID-19 pandemic has created hiatus (discontinuity) in heritage narratives in rural Nigeria. The study engaged key informant interviews, focus group discussion and observations, and data collated were analyzed descriptively. Multi-stage sampling was used in the sampling of 12 communities and 36 key informants for the study. At the end, aspects of heritage narratives as it concerns various traditional communities in Nigeria were interrogated. This includes heritage preservation, heritage transfer, heritage identity and promotion, heritage making and authenticity, heritage tourism, and heritage studies. From the discussions, it was deduced that the hiatus (discontinuity) that was induced by Covid-19 lockdown order, has monumental effects on cultural heritage resources in rural Nigeria with implications on their use and sustainability. The study further recommended stakeholders collaboration, registration and digitization of these cultural heritage resources.*

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19 Lockdown Order, Hiatus, Heritage narratives, Cultural Heritage Resources, Traditional communities, Heritage Digitization.



## INTRODUCTION

The entire globe was impacted by Covid-19 pandemic, which was first discovered in Wuhan China in 2019. Covid-19 is the apt name for CoronaVirus Disease, which is a deadly virus that is highly contagious and infectious. As at 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, the Worldometer information center had reported that this deadly virus has caused over 424,706 deaths across the globe with over 7,635,251 persons infected and several quarantined at various locations across the world. The spread of the virus can be likened to the speed of light considering the shortest period it took to spread across the world. The implication being that the virus has the most spread rate when compared with some other viruses (i.e. HIV, Flu, Ebola, Zika, Laser, etc.) that have ravaged the globe before now. This makes it more dangerous across the world, hence the resultant global lockdown on so many activities including sports, leisure and businesses. To contend the spread of this deadly virus, many national governments in line with the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), have adopted some protective measures like the use of face-masks, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, maintaining social distance of about one meter between persons, regular washing of hands with soap and running water, restriction on movements, closure of international borders, compulsory stay at home directive, closure of markets and suspension of all socio-economic, socio-religious, socio-cultural and socio-political activities (UNWTO, 2020).

This was the condition in Nigeria, when the president on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 announced a total lockdown of states including the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, to contain the spread of the deadly virus. Many state governors followed suit and closed their state boundaries ordering a total lockdown on all kinds of activities within their respective states. All these stringent measures were geared towards securing the health of the nation against Covid-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding, these drastic measures have had enormous implications on various aspects of the Nigerian economy. It has negatively impacted the nation's socio-political, socio-cultural, economic and religious lifestyles. It may be erroneous to think that these other aspects were not drastically affected since the fight was for human life and safety. It is imperative to conduct investigations into the destructive tendencies of Covid-19 pandemic in these various aspects of the people's life to enable a balanced understanding of the scenario and help in taking proactive measures against future occurrences.

Heritage resources are the great endowments of people in their localities (Holtorf & Ortman, 2008; Esfehiani & Albrecht, 2018; 2019). Heritage is categorized in two major sub categories of tangible and cultural heritage resources. While the tangible has to do with heritage resources like caves, rivers, streams, rock shelters, mountains, land, sacred groves, wildlife, bridges, astonishing edifices and lots more, cultural heritage resources has to do with those untouchable aspects of a people's heritage resources like traditional ceremonies, festivals, cultural dance, belief system, traditional value system, masquerading, indigenous knowledge, among others (Aplin, 2002; Chhabra, 2010; Nwankwo, 2013; Harrison, 2013a). Unique heritage resources have distinguished Africans from their neighbors. Most African communities have over the years maximized this comparative advantage to boost their communal, regional and national economies. However, the discussion in this work is based on the implication of Covid-19



pandemic on cultural heritage resources in Nigeria. UNESCO defined cultural heritage resources as including indigenous folk cultures that are a product of collective work originated from a community based on their tradition. These creations are transmitted orally or by gesture, and are modernized over a period of time through the process of collective recreation like oral tradition, language, mimic, ceremonies, dances, myths, rituals, traditional medicine, culinary art, festivities, including all kinds of special skills that are connected with the material aspects of culture such as tools, features and habitat (UNESCO, 2001).

This brings us to the idea of the Hiatus concept that is one of the fundamental concepts in archaeological studies. It has to do with a break in a process or a discontinuation in a process that later continues after a while. The term is associated with archaeological and geological landscape investigations that show a discontinuation in human habitation or activity that continued after a period of time. For instance, in an archaeological investigation, the process of systematic digging is expected to end at the sight of a sterile layer (no evidence of single cultural material). This implies that life had not started in the history of that locality or that no human occupation existed at that layer (Andah & Okpoko, 1994; Ashmore & Sharer, 2005). However, the hiatus concept dislodges this claim by noting that there is a possibility of human disturbance earlier in that locality, if the excavation continues after the sterile layer. This does not imply that a hiatus exists in every archaeological investigation, but the possibility should be patiently investigated after the sterile layer, before drawing the conclusion on life in that locality. One of the archaeological researches in Lejja-Nsukka, uncovered the possibility of a hiatus in cultural continuity in some of the excavation trenches (see Eze-Uzomaka, 2010; Ngonadi, 2020). So many reasons could cause a possible hiatus in archaeological investigations. It could be that the 'no life sign' was as a result of famine, drought, war or deadly disease that may have wiped out the former inhabitants and discontinued life in that locality for hundreds or thousands of years before it was inhabited again by some other people, who could be descendants of the former people or a totally different people.

However, most of the aspects of the cultural heritage resources in Nigeria like traditional ceremonies and festivals, ritual practices, masquerading, cultural dance among others, are seasonal with peculiar processes of celebration in their respective activities. This is as a result of the historical origin and cultural background that established their existence. The existence and activities of these cultural heritage resources (IHR) have been controlled by these cultural factors since inception and through generations in their respective localities. The announcement of a total lockdown on all kinds of activities by the Nigerian President, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March, 2020, and subsequently by most state governors, as part of the measures to contend the rampaging Covid-19 pandemic, has impacted most of these cultural heritage resources (especially those of them that are by nature celebrated within the months of March and May of every year; likewise some of them that have fixed dates). This introduced a hiatus in the historical life of such IHRs. There are two types of archaeological hiatuses; the shallow hiatus of about 20 cm and deep-stratified hiatus of about 60 cm as recorded in Lejja-Nsukka (Eze-Uzomaka, 2010, Ngonadi, 2020). In this context, we are dealing with a shallow hiatus causing loss of cultural transfer or transition of values both physically and symbolically from one generation to another. Evidence shows that consistency in performance of folklores,



wrestling, dance and masquerades display, initiation into age-grades, ritual practices and burial rites have been lost due to Covid-19 pandemic lockdown. Gate keepers or cultural custodians that died during the lockdown of whom required traditional ceremonies during their burials were not carried out, neither was there a transfer of knowledge from generation to generation, thereby creating a vacuum and total loss of knowledge (see pages 2-3). To make the matter worse, their various custodians were not consulted nor carried along prior to the announcement of the lockdown order by the government. However, this study was aimed at investigating the implications of this hiatus that was occasioned by Covid-19 Pandemic, on the heritage narratives of these traditional communities.

## METHOD

This is a qualitative research design that engages key informant interviews, focus group discussion and observation as approaches, including documentary sources. The study had a huge population size of about 567 traditional communities across Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for sampling a sizable size for the study. In the first stage, cluster sampling techniques enabled the clustering of these communities into six zones of South-south, South-east, South-west, North-East, North-west and North-central. In the second stage, systematic sampling technique was used to sample two communities from each of these clusters. At the last stage, purposive and convenience sampling techniques aided in the sampling of three adults (two males and one female) from each of the communities for key informant interviews and focus group discussion sessions. To this end, a total of thirty six informants were used for the study. More so, systematic observation and documentary sources aided in the cross fertilization of data. Twenty four research/field assistants facilitated the study. At the end, data collated were analyzed descriptively.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic-motivated Hiatus on Cultural Heritage Resources (IHRs) in Nigeria.*

From the foregoing, it has been established that the lockdown order occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic has introduced an indelible hiatus in the historical reconstruction of IHRs in most traditional communities in Nigeria. This has triggered a multiplicity of implications on the heritage narratives of these IHRs from so many dimensions such as heritage preservation, heritage transfer, heritage identity and promotion, heritage making and authenticity, heritage tourism and heritage studies. These implications are discussed in sequence below.

#### *Implications on Heritage Preservation*

Most African societies are identified with valued cultural heritage resources, which are the embodiment of their culture and tradition. Heritage preservation has to do with both conscious



and unconscious attempts that are aimed at ensuring the sustainability of these cultural heritage resources to maintain an unbroken cultural historical continuity of these IHRs through generations in a particular traditional society (Nwankwo, 2013; Prompayuk & Chairattananon, 2016; Fredheim & Khalaf, 2016). The sustainability concept in heritage resources is traditionally necessary since culture and tradition are the integral parts of these traditional communities in Nigeria and in other African states. Most of the time, the African worldview has part of the interpretations in their cultural heritage resources; hence understanding attitudes and attributes outside cultural heritage resources is a complex task in African studies.

Furthermore, Nigeria as an integral part of the African state has similar understanding with respect to their culture and tradition. This informs one of the reasons why preserving cultural heritage resources is a compulsory task amongst African societies. To this regard, periodic and unbroken celebrations coupled with other indigenous cultural practices have always been part of the vehicles to achieving this purpose (Hogberg, Holtorf, May & Wallentz, 2018). Such indigenous values are preserved through seasonal celebrations, cultural practices and communal participation. Masquerade festivals, cultural dances, ritual practices, traditional ceremonies among others, are among the IHRs whose periodic, seasonal and fixed celebrations have been affected by the Covid-19 lockdown order in Nigeria.

A few examples of the above disruptions include the popular and age long *Ikeji* festival that is celebrated among the Arochukwu indigenous communities in Southeast Nigeria. This festival was grossly affected by the pandemic. Intercommunity displays and competitions that are an integral part of the festival were suspended; new masquerades were not displayed in the process as well. The same is applicable to the *Okposi* masquerade festival that is always celebrated during this lockdown period, by traditional communities in some parts of Anambra State, Nigeria. The *Oriokpa*, *Odoh*, *Omabe* and *Akatakpa* masquerade festivals that are phenomenal with traditional communities in the Nsukka culture area of Enugu State, Nigeria were affected and have not been able to carry out their quarterly activities. Other festivals include the *Argungu* fishing festival, the *Eyo* masquerade festival, the *Eko* international film festival (EKOIFF) slated to hold from the 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> of March, the *Ekpe* festival, the *Osun Osogbo* festival, *Sango* festival and the *Ojude Oba* festival, to name a few. Several other cultural displays in the northeastern and southwestern part of Nigeria were also victims of Covid-19 lockdown order in the country. Cultural dances that had already concluded their preparations for display were suspended. Other notable cultural and ritual practices were canceled since most of them cannot be fixed later in the year. Most of these IHRs are celebrated annually during the months preceding the onset of the farming period, and the implications being that they would have a one-year hiatus in their indigenous histories. Factors like age, death, ill health, age-grade migration and rural-urban migration, etc., would also have deprived some individuals and groups of Year 2021 participation, thereby creating significant difference from the cultural celebrations. This has implications on the preservation of such traditional celebrations among rural communities in Nigeria. The future of other IHRs, which are slated to take place after the Covid-19 saga, are still hanging in the balance due to the uncertainty prevalent in the world.



A very important implication of the above for preservation of heritage is that some of the masquerade festivals like the *Ikeji* festival mentioned above, operate a traditional cult system where a particular age-grade is admitted annually into the masquerade cult. Most of the rural communities where this masquerade festival is celebrated were not able to organize such admittance into the traditional masquerade cult in 2020. Since there is a special role that is expected from each of the age-grade in the preceding year, as they are admitted into the masquerade cult, what becomes of these traditional roles in the 2021 celebration as a result of the hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020? Covid-19 Lockdown order was total in all the states of the federation with various arrests by commissioned security agents to implement the lockdown order. Due to the special importance of this festival, some of the traditional communities attempted to go ahead with these traditional celebrations but they were embarrassed and were sometimes even arrested by the Covid-19 government special task force. This denial will have a long-term consequence on the sustainable preservation of these cultural heritage resources.

#### *Implications on Heritage Identity and Promotion*

A vital aspect of heritage resources that has been affected by Covid-19 lockdown order is heritage identity and promotion. Heritage is an integral part of the identity of Africans. Africa's traditional values and worldview are mostly represented in their indigenous heritage resources. This is common with IHRs, like folklores, cultural dances and songs, traditional festivals, masquerade system, belief system, dietary habits, ritual practices, traditional ceremonies, and myths, which form part of their collective value system. This explains why most traditional African societies are often identified with their peculiar heritage resources. For instance the *Ikeji* Festival discussed earlier, is peculiar with *Aro* communities in southeast Nigeria; and is used to identify the Igbo traditional communities of *Aro* descent. The popular *Eyo* festival is notable in identifying some Yoruba traditional communities of southwest Nigeria. The *Ekpe* festival which is the traditional symbol of several traditional communities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria and their neighboring traditional communities; the popular *Ikpai-Kpai* festival is common with the Ijaws of south-south region of Nigeria, the *Ojude Oba* festival of the Ijebu people of Yoruba land goes as far back as 1892 and was a key factor in the *Ileya* or *Eid el kabir*. These festivals have not only represented the people's traditional value system, but also promoted these value systems to the global community at large (Vargas & Gonzalez, 2020). The hiatus that was created will affect them adversely because the above festivals and many others not listed here are celebrated to promote the people's unique cultural identity and value system before their neighbors. This explains why these rural communities publicly celebrate most of these traditional festivals. Even the media, which had played unique roles in promoting these irreplaceable cultural heritages, lost the proceeds of their coverage during this period.

Heritage identity and promotion as tools in heritage resource management are more effective during celebrations. Their roles are achieved through all sorts of celebrations and uses of these IHRs (WTO, 2012; Jones, 2017; Liu, 2020). This is mostly the case with all those IHRs that are annually and periodically celebrated by the respective traditional communities. Though they could be annually, biannually, and/or quarterly celebrated, those that are annually



celebrated are more valued by these traditional communities and usually play vital roles in heritage identity and promotion. Their repeated annual celebrations enhance their values in heritage identity and promotion because of the many people that travel from far locations to participate and witness the events.

What then becomes the fate of the distinctive roles of these IHRs that are championed during annual celebrations, in the face of Covid-19 Lockdown? A deep hiatus has been undeniably created in heritage identity and promotion. A significant number of these festivals are celebrated between the months of March and May of every year in their respective traditional communities. The hiatus that is occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic has deprived these traditional festivals and ceremonies their unique roles in heritage identity and promotion in 2020; and as a result lost their peculiar contributions to the indigenous values and traditions of their respective rural communities. The impact of the 2020 celebrations on these traditional communities has been lost in the process of dealing with the pandemic. This loss may not be recovered in the 2021 celebration since each year is remarkable for its peculiar style and concept.

#### *Implications on Heritage Transfer*

This is another integral aspect of the heritage narrative of IHRs among Africans. In Nigeria and some other African states with unique IHRs, these resources are not often documented for future use. No formal education is organized to impart the knowledge on the younger generations for the sustainability of these traditional value systems in Africa. Ugwu (2014) rightly noted that African indigenous values and other cultural practices do not have formal learning processes, yet they have been successfully transferred to the younger generations through time. Heritage transfer has been conducted using the informal and indirect procedure of passing cultural traits and other indigenous value systems of Africa to the future generations. In the past, this method has guaranteed the sustenance of these indigenous values (Ehrentant, 1993; Harrison, 2013b; Liu, 2020). In addition, heritage transfer had consisted of the informal transfer of indigenous value systems and other cultural practices from the aging population to the growing population in a typical traditional African society. This has facilitated the learning process of these indigenous values in traditional communities for decades; hence the belief that indigenous values and other cultural practices are too varied and extensive to be contained in a document (Ugwu, 2014).

This heritage transfer has taken on different formats and peculiarities in many rural communities in Nigeria to sustain their cherished IHRs. These informal transfer mechanisms have been facilitated by various traditional celebrations and ceremonies where the old and young are brought together to play their respective roles. During such events, the younger ones are informally expected to learn by observation and participation; while the adults perform their duties in a more tactical and detailed manner as they had learnt from elders during their own youthful days. Apart from this method, some other IHRs like myths, folklore, culinary skills, attitudes and habits, language, diet, among others are learnt daily without a formal event to transfer the knowledge. That notwithstanding, the basic argument here is on those IHRs that



are unconsciously transferred through organized events like traditional festivals, cultural practices, masquerade events, among others.

The Covid-19 Lockdown Order by the government has created an unforgettable hiatus in heritage transfer among various traditional communities in Nigeria. Since the majority of the aforementioned events are celebrated annually in their respective traditional communities within the first half of the year, the younger generation who could not observe nor participate in the 2020 traditional activities of these IHRs have been deprived of valuable and irreplaceable heritage transfer in 2020. Many of them may not have the opportunity to witness and participate in these events in the following year as a result of unforeseen circumstances. The hiatus in the heritage transfer chain will most likely create lasting implications on the quality and nature of heritage transfer, since each annual event comes with its own unique styles and flexibility. The implication being that the lack of relevant cultural activities to facilitate traditional and informal transfer of the IHRs in 2020 is a big blow on the sustainability and quality of indigenous value system and cultural practices of traditional communities in Nigeria (also see Fredheim, 2018).

#### *Implications on Heritage Making and Authenticity*

Heritage making and authenticity is another trending debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century heritage discourse across the globe. The two concepts are interconnected and complement each other. Heritage making connotes the dramatization/demonstration of heritage before a wide public. Heritage authenticity is the exactitude rate of what was demonstrated/dramatized in response to the reality. Though some works see heritage authenticity from the visitor gaze and narratives (Dueholm & Smed, 2014; Zhu, 2015), the discourse here is on the difference between the represented heritage and the real heritage. Through cultural displays, exhibitions, and dramatizations, aspects of a people's heritage resource like culinary habits, child rearing patterns, marriage system, kinship system, traditional value system, traditional political institutions, traditional histories, indigenous knowledge and technology, traditional inheritance pattern, among others, are demonstrated to both the younger generation and the general public. Such dramatizations and demonstrations are usually done through cultural celebrations and ceremonies like traditional festivals and ceremonies (Dueholm & Smed, 2014; Bryce, Murdy & Alexander, 2017). It can also be done through movie making. Within the past three decades, Nigeria's Nollywood industry (like the popular American Hollywood Industry) have attempted to dramatize the IHRs of traditional communities in Nigeria. While the concern of heritage-making discussants have centered on how movie makers were able to come up with what they are representing, heritage authenticity discourse locked in with an attempt to find out the consistency of what was represented and the reality as it concerns the traditional communities represented in the movies. However, the concept of authenticity for this study is used to identify those or factors that manifest a reflection of personal origin, of genealogy and roots (Lau, 2010).

The concept of heritage making and authenticity works towards supporting the sustainability and transfer of heritage resources through actual representations. Misrepresented heritage resources will present a twist of truth in the knowledge of the actual. It sends a wrong notion





of heritage value to the wider public and this does not support true heritage preservation, which is the concern of these traditional communities. They would want to see their valued heritage resources preserved through generations without misrepresentation or any form of abuse that negates the integrity of their traditional values. It is the earnest desire of these traditional communities to periodically engage in heritage displays to re-enact their histories and to integrate the younger ones in the practice; at the same time present aspects of their heritage resources to the wider public without any form of misrepresentation. This informs one of the reasons for the periodic displays of these IHRs of traditional communities through festivals and other indigenous cultural practices.

The Covid-19 lockdown order has created a hiatus in the chain of heritage representation among traditional communities in Nigeria through the inevitable suspension of valuable traditional activities in rural communities that would have otherwise served as platforms for heritage making and authenticity. The suspension of 2020 heritage representation activities may affect the ideals of heritage making and authenticity; hence 2021 will likely present a different heritage representation that may lack the needed authenticity with that of the 2019 narratives.

#### *Implications for Heritage Tourism*

Tourism has been identified as one of the sectors with the potential to transform dwindling economies. Many nations have leveraged this fact to explore the tourism sector and its economic impacts (Nwankwo, 2017; UNWTO. 2020). To this regard, most nations are smart enough to take advantage of those aspects of tourism where they have comparative advantage over other nations. This informs why various aspects of tourism are harnessed and packaged by different nations. For instance, India has explored health tourism where they have reasonable comparative advantage over some other nations in the world; England, Brazil, Spain, France, Italy and Germany explored sports tourism, among others; Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa, Australia, explored wildlife tourism, among others.

Most African communities have explored heritage tourism, which is a collection of natural and cultural heritage resources in their environments. For instance, Nigeria has such abundant heritage resources to take advantage of other nations of the world. This includes unique traditions like festivals, cultural celebrations, indigenous practices, unique natural resources like caves, waterfalls, rivers, among others. Many culturally important sites are found mainly in the rural areas of Nigeria (Eze-Uzomaka, 2005). The various rural communities in Nigeria have great traditional values and indigenous practices that have formed part of their cultural heritage. These include all aspects of IHRs that have been detailed earlier in some other parts of this study. These traditional values and cultural practices have not only made most traditional communities in Nigeria veritable destinations for heritage tourists, but also promoted their indigenous value system before their near and distant neighbors (Aplin, 2002; Chhabra, 2010; Fredheim & Khalaf, 2016). Many of these rural communities have over the years leveraged on this aspect of tourism to boost their local economies and economic opportunities through cultural displays and exhibitions, like traditional festivals and ceremonies, masquerading,



traditional dance, among others. These traditional events have been used extensively over the years by these rural communities to make their communities veritable for visits. With these traditional celebrations, heritage tourism has grown from strength to strength in these rural destinations since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These events have attracted both local and international visitors to these various heritage tourism destinations in Nigeria. Heritage tourism has the potential to revitalize rural economies through attractive tourism activities.

Furthermore, a greater part of these traditional events are celebrated within the first half of the year. More importantly the conventional connotations of these traditional events have mandated timings, which are not flexible and cannot be postponed to another period. More often than not, they even have fixed dates. Also, the psychological impact from of Covid-19 pandemic could have also reduced the size of tourist flow to these rural communities during these events, even without the government's lockdown order. Apart from the fact that Covid-19 lockdown order affected free movements and possible visits to these rural communities, there is also a post-Covid-19 effect on the tourist flow to these communities, which would have been downsized as a result of the global pandemic. It is imperative to note at this juncture that what affects the heritage tourism potentialities of these traditional communities in Nigeria has played a more negative role on their local economy and indigenous lifestyles. Heritage tourism through rural tourism initiative has boosted the income-generation rate in rural districts through reasonable visitor arrivals. It also has a bottom-up effect on national economies for most developing nations. Take for instance, it has been estimated that the world international tourism would have declined by 20% to 30% in 2020 as a result of Covid-19 pandemic. And this has more effect on Africa and other developing nations than their developed counterparts (UNWTO, 2020).

#### *Implications on Heritage Studies*

All sorts of formal and informal inquiries and discussions on heritage resources are referred to as heritage studies. Such inquiries and discussions are usually undertaken by individual/group researchers from related academic disciplines like archaeology, anthropology, sociology, tourism, and history, among others. Different kinds of inquiries are undertaken on heritage resources by these disciplines. Such inquiries could be on documentation, challenges, prospects, implications, values, similarities, state and use, cross-examination, cross-cultural studies, impacts, among many others. These inquiries create room for more critical debates on heritage resources, provide avenue for future knowledge direction and heritage discourse, and at the same time supports concerns for heritage preservation and promotion. Other heritage concepts like heritage transfer, heritage making and authenticity, heritage tourism, among others are also affected by the debate (Vidal & Dias, 2016; Pompayuk & Chairattananon, 2016; Jones, 2017; Esfehiani & Albrecht, 2018).

Some of these studies on heritage resources in Nigeria and some other African nations were conducted using field studies to generate primary data where approaches like ethnography, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations are sacrosanct in data collection for such humanistic studies. Most of the time, the duration, timing and location of



such studies are determined by the nature of the heritage resource that is the research focus. For instance, some of them on IHRs like traditional festivals, cultural practices, masquerading, and other indigenous practices are conducted during the period of these traditional celebrations to enable detailed field observations with life photographs, interactions with the research subjects, a clearer observation of the focused traditional events without unnecessary alterations by secondary data. Most of the researchers on heritage resources in Nigeria and many other parts of Africa are encouraged to adopt these approaches to yield a more positive result that is the reflection of reality. This is also because most of these heritage resources are virgin in nature without previous attempts to study them.

Incidentally, Covid-19 lockdown has halted a number of these IHRs that are celebrated within the first half of the year. This has greatly affected both ongoing and proposed research on IHRs in Nigeria thereby causing unnecessary research gaps in heritage studies. The effect is enormous since it stretches from Covid-19 to post-Covid-19 regime in Nigeria. Apart from IHRs there are also ongoing and proposed researches on tangible heritage resources like caves, waterfalls, lakes, streams, rivers, indigenous trees, shrines, among others, that are also affected by this Covid-19 lockdown order and its aftermath on those rural communities. Apart from the fact that these studies will be delayed in the interim or permanently, the quality of data collected will be questionable; hence the inconclusiveness of the research and the impact of the hiatus on the research chain. Perhaps by the time the nation is through with Covid-19 lockdown and normalcy returns, most of these researchers may have lost interest, or the research subjects may have lost significance, died of coronavirus or other illnesses or circumstance, or that the previous informants and research focus may not be disposed or available for the continuation of the research. This scenario may lead to the abandonment of research; or presentation of research results that are not the true reflection of the study.

#### *Implication on Traditional Political Structure*

Most of the traditional African societies have peculiar traditional political structures that have determined their leadership style, authority and hierarchy. For instance, evidence during observations showed that they have categories of leaders and groups that control the authority. There are community heads, village heads, clan heads, traditional titleholders, women's head, daughters head, heads of age grade, and youths head. Each of these people has specific roles to play in the community's traditional political system (Nwankwo, 2013; Ugwu, 2014; Nwankwo et al., 2021). During focus group discussion sessions, informants from sampled communities in Imo, Abia and Ogun States of Nigeria informed that these categories of heads have built strong political authorities in these rural areas and have traditionally transmitted leadership over time. Traditional political structure is another formidable aspect of the people's cultural heritage that has been transmitted through generations. However, among the regrets of most of these traditional communities over Covid-19 restriction is the effect it had on their traditional political structure. For instance, informants from some communities in Enugu and Cross River states informed that restrictions on community engagements like meetings, celebrations, marriage rites, among others reduced the values of these traditional leaders. This is owing to the fact that positions in communicational leadership structure are made prominent and



formidable through public performances and other outdoor engagements. Traditional positions are venerated through such engagements.

More so, some of the community heads lost their traditional rights when they were blatantly ignored during the distribution of edible and monetary gifts as COVID-19 palliatives by government, churches and other individuals and groups, to the communities. Some studies have shown that over 70% palliatives shared to communities during the Covid-19 restriction came from seasoned and career politicians (Nwankwo et al., 2021). These politicians used their personal assistants, political party members, friends and relatives to convey and share these palliatives to members of these communities. On a few occasions, the women leaders like the *Umuokpu*, *Umuada*, and *Alutaradi* as found in Igbo traditional setting, have their leaders denied of their some specific functions during the sharing of palliatives. This is a total decimation of the traditional political structure as noted by one of the key informants. Another implication was identified at some communities in Ogun state where traditional women leaders were made redundant without their views considered, as their men's counterparts were taking some critical decisions on traditional matters on behalf of the community. One of the women informants cited cases of the traditional marriage rites where the leaders took decisions on behalf of other traditional groups in the villages, citing Covid-19 restrictions. This also brought about some gender-related issues in those communities, with relaxation on the Covid-19 restrictions.

## CONCLUSION

The entire global village was taken unawares by the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic; a deadly disease with the potential to wipe out entire nations at the very worst. Lockdown Orders and social distancing are among the drastic measures that were designed to contend with the spread of the virus. These requirements were not targeted at unleashing untold hardship on the masses and various activities but were a necessary punishment to contain the deadly virus from spreading. From the various impacts of this order, this study focused on heritage narratives as it affects the diverse traditional communities in Nigeria. These impacts were viewed from different concepts in heritage discourse: heritage preservation, heritage transfer, heritage making and authenticity, heritage identity and promotion, heritage tourism and heritage studies.

It will be pertinent at this juncture to consider what becomes of these IHRs after the Covid-19 episode. While some of these IHRs will be able to regain their traditional values among these rural communities after the Covid-19 regime, many of them will have a serious hiatus effect on their chronological implications. This will be discovered mostly with the heritage assets that are celebrated within the first half of the year and will consequently impact the later part of 2020. It is expected that the majority of IHRs may adversely suffer the effect in post-Covid-19 regime. Also, the psychological effect of Covid-19 will restrict visits and interactions to some extent in post-Covid-19 era. The same is applicable to heritage studies when the entire global community will be suffering from 'mind lockdown' (that is a lockdown in the mind as a result of the psychological effect of the initial lockdown). During this time, apart from the fact that these traditional communities also suffered during the official lockdown order, the fear to freely



receive visitors and express their hospitality as usual, out of the previous Covid-19 experience, will be a negative factor.

The post Covid-19 hiatus may also affect rural communities in many other ramifications. For instance, the indigenous values and other traditional values of these communities would have suffered reasonable setbacks with a long time effect on their future generations. These indigenous values and other traditional activities are the nucleus of these traditional communities, which they guard zealously. The impact of the hiatus on these IHRs will affect their communal cohesion and unity of purpose, which have been built around these IHRs since time immemorial. Virtually all these traditional communities in Nigeria have always boosted their local economies through visits by tourists and other visitors as a result of special cultural activities like festivals and other traditional events. The implication being that they will likely experience some form of economic crisis that will affect them drastically in future. Earlier on, it has been posited that many of these traditional communities have been making efforts in the last decade to harness their heritage tourism potential for meaningful socio-economic impact in their localities (Waterton, 2015; Nilson & Thorell, 2018).

The next phase of this concluding section has to do with the practical recommendations for managing the situation. This will be grouped into two subcategories of Covid-19 recommendations and post-Covid-19 recommendations. On the Covid-19 recommendations, these traditional communities will have to exercise some patience on all kinds of traditional events and comply with all government directed measures to contain the spread of the virus like staying at home, washing of hands, keeping of social distance, use of face-masks, use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, and finally reporting of suspected cases within their neighborhood to the National Centre for Diseases Control (NCDC) through official channels. This is paramount if the future is to be secured for better heritage narratives for these communities and their IHRs. More so, on post-Covid-19 recommendations, heritage digitization is highly recommended for these valued IHRs in traditional communities in Nigeria. The public and the private sector can take up the programme in conjunction with the leadership and custodians of these traditional communities (Garbelli, 2020). The digitization of heritage resources will cushion the effect of their values in the event of future occurrence (Lemmi, 2020). It is unfortunate that over 95% of heritage resources in Nigeria have not been digitized, to have a fair representation in the face of impromptu destruction/hiatus. Also, such digitized heritage resources can be taught in primary and post-primary schools through formal inclusion in the curriculum. It will also facilitate establishment of a legal framework for the preservation of these IHRs inline with the view of Eze-Uzomaka where she asserts that requisite legislative framework would aid the preservation of heritage resources in Africa and some other developing nations (Eze-Uzomaka, 2014). Invitations should be extended to both public and private sectors for this heritage digitization project considering the huge financial demand of this project. These sectors can get involved in this digitization project in conjunction with the various cultural agencies, custodians of these traditional communities and other necessary individuals and groups that are relevant stakeholders in heritage resource management in rural communities. This effort will not only support sustainability of these heritage resources but will also aid in their packaging and re-branding (Garbelli, 2020).



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