



GAZE AND NARRATIVES ON HERITAGE VALUES: DISCARDING THE VIEWS OF HOST COMMUNITIES IN AFRICA

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Cite this article:

Nwankwo E.A., Agboeze M.N., Agboeze M.U., Nnate P. (2023), Gaze and Narratives on Heritage Values: Discarding the Views of Host Communities in Africa. African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research 6(5), 62-81. DOI: 10.52589/AJSSHR-OJZNEAD5

Manuscript History

Received: 20 July 2023

Accepted: 6 Sept 2023

Published: 28 Sept 2023

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ABSTRACT: *There has been a conflict of perceptions on heritage values. This has stalled the development of some natural heritage resources in parts of Africa. This study argues that the host perception is paramount in the responsive development of heritage resources within their localities. However, this study investigated the values of undeveloped natural heritage resources in Abia State, Nigeria, from a rural gaze and narratives. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and detailed observation were employed for the study. Findings showed that these natural heritage resources have domestic, agricultural, leisure and protective values according to the host, who also supports possible development programmes for these resources. This has posited rural gaze and narrative as focal in understanding the values of undeveloped heritage resources. The study further proposed the concept of the Rural Heritage Approach (RHA). This concept is focused on a prior understanding of the peculiar nature of heritage values in traditional African societies through rural gaze and narratives before development initiatives. This study has implications for responsible rural tourism development in most African communities.*

KEYWORDS: Natural heritage resources; Rural gaze and narratives; Heritage value; Ezie-Ofri Cave; Ifutiti Waterfalls; Rural Heritage Approach (RHA); Rural development



INTRODUCTION

Results from previous ethnographic studies and some other related studies among traditional African societies have hinted that heritage gaze and narratives should be understood from the context of the provenance. Even when some other dimensions may apply, the provenance has many clues to the origin and environmental response of heritage resources over time (Ashmore & Sharer, 2005). Quite several tangible and intangible heritage resources have their respective host communities as their provenance, and as a result, they are better understood from the context of these communities at the first instance. The extent of the values of these heritage resources needs to be measured within the confines of the rural gaze and narratives on such heritage resources. Heritage resources in various African societies are almost inseparable from the traditional value system and beliefs of such communities and cannot be understood and represented in a research result outside the narratives of these communities.

Some of the previous debates have tried to infer that these heritage resources can be understood deductively irrespective of their provenance; to have a global view of the subject matter. This may not be possible in a typical traditional African society where the traditional value system is inseparable from the people's biodiversity features. The concept of smaller units as found in traditional African societies, is gradually being eliminated in some other parts of the globe. For instance, in Africa, burials and funerals are part of the traditional values and are conducted within these traditional units with peculiar cultures and traditions. And this informs us why burials and funerals are done at these traditional hamlets, in the disease's inheritance and not in the public cemetery as found in some other parts of the world.

However, the misplacement of values and realities has not only misrepresented the values of African heritage resources but also deprived most of these heritage resources of some reasonable investigations. A preliminary investigation into the majority of these undeveloped heritage resources is still a mirage. In the last decade, most of the studies have abandoned such research hence their (African heritage resources) assumed insignificance to global scholarship. Over 90% of journals with international repute have countless times declined publications for such localised studies from Africa. This scenario may have motivated the majority of African scholars to focus on regional, national and continental issues in their studies to gain research relevance and acceptability in global debate and scholarship. This is ridiculous; hence, it may not be reasonable to assume that *Study Areas* for academic research operate at the same level of research values. This situation has left many African heritage resources unharnessed and yet to be investigated. These heritage resources need preliminary investigations to motivate further classified inquiries on their value and existence. This will further harness the opportunities of these heritage resources for responsible rural development in traditional African societies.

The rural Heritage Approach (RHA) as a concept is in contrast to the concept of diffusion, as was noted by Everett Rogers in 1962 in his book, *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers, 2003 [revised]). More so, Diffusionism is a concept in sociological discourse that postulates that cultural traits and other cultural interpretations are transmitted from a common society and diffused to some other societies. The proponents, which include Eliot Smith, William Perry and W.H. Rivers, believe that everything happens just once in a place and diffused to some other places. Therefore, this infers that knowledge from other more developed societies is used to understand the antecedents of some other smaller societies. However, within the concept of the current study, diffusionism is the concept of understanding the state, use and nature of heritage resources in a place without recourse to the narratives and gaze of the host, hence the



belief that such natural phenomena exist in some other earlier developed societies. This has led to a series of misinterpretations and misrepresentations of the history, nature, state and antecedents of most heritage resources within traditional African communities. In most cases, hostilities from host communities obstruct proposed initiatives to harness these heritage resources for tourism development. This is because the rural communities misconstrued the intention of the developer or project initiator because their opinions, concerns and interests were not appropriately sought after. However, RHA tries to look at this particular gap in the concept of diffusionism by applying a different approach that understands these heritage resources from the gaze and narratives of the rural communities before comparative engagements with some other societies around the globe where such heritage resources equally exist.

Colonial-motivated scholarships in Africa have almost decimated so many tangible and intangible resources that are of immense value to their respective communities. Significant studies have not been conducted within their provenance to launch their existence and values to global scholarship and debates. Quite several local communities in Nigeria have caves and waterfalls that have not been previously documented to attract further studies. Unfortunately, an attempt to view them from a global argument and/or significance would debase their original values within their provenance. For instance, the values of Ezie Ofri Cave and Ifutiti Waterfall in Amekpu-Ohafia part of Abia State Nigeria need to be investigated and documented in their provenance (using rural gaze and narratives) to promote the knowledge of their existence to the global scholarship and at the same time preserve them for the future and possible tourism development. This is expected to boost the opportunities of these rural communities as veritable rural tourism destinations in Africa. Surprisingly, some community members are unaware of their existence, as many of them (natural heritage resources) are still lying fallow in the thick forest unharnessed. However, what is the relationship between heritage values and rural gaze and narratives? And what is the implication of this relationship for responsible rural development? This background motivated this study to investigate the heritage values of Ezie Ofri Cave and Ifutiti Waterfall in Amekpu-Ohafia in Nigeria from a rural gaze and narratives. The result is expected to spur further studies on rural values in traditional African communities.

Method of the Study

This is a humanistic study that requires a qualitative research approach. The study was an attempt to elicit primary data on these natural heritage resources from the perspective of the host rural who had lived with these resources for years and have provenance information on them (the heritage resources). In this regard, three broad approaches from the qualitative research method were employed for the study. The approaches include key informant interviews, focus group discussion (FGD) and observation. The population of the study was estimated at 14,000 knowledgeable adults (male and female) in Ohafia rural (World Bank, 2018). To this end, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the study. For key informant interviews, a judgmental sampling technique was used to sample 150 adults of 100 males and 50 females. In the final stage, a convenient sampling technique was used to sample 14 males and 7 females, to give 21 informants as the sample size for key informant interviews. The interview sessions lasted an average of one hour and ten minutes at their various homes in the rural. More so, a stratified sampling technique was used on the initial sample size of 100 males and 50 females to sample 24 males and 12 females (excluding the people that were already engaged during the key informant interview sessions) for four Focus Group Discussions (FGD) sessions. Four focus group discussion sessions were organised on different



dates from the previous interview sessions. Different informants (nine informants for each FGD session) were invited for these focus group discussion sessions that lasted an average of one hour and twenty minutes at different venues (family halls). Also, a detailed field observation took place at the various locations of these heritage resources with the aid of digital recordings and field notes. It was done in the company of field assistants that were assigned for that purpose during the FGD sessions. While the key informant interview sessions took place in Ohafia rural between 6th August and 23rd August 2019, the FGD sessions took place during our second trip to the site (15th October to 21st October 2019). In addition, the observational studies and site visitations took place during our third visit to the site (12th November to 28th November 2019). These visits and other engagements in the course of this study were self-funded by the authors. Finally, this primary data, which was supported by secondary data (documentary sources), was descriptively analysed using a descriptive method of qualitative data analysis.

In key informant interviews, twenty-one adults (between 40-70 years of age- fourteen males and seven females) were sampled for interview sessions that lasted on the average of one hour and ten minutes at their various homes in the rural. Four focus group discussion sessions were organised from the previous interview sessions on different dates. Different informants (nine informants for each FGD session) were invited for these focus group discussion sessions that lasted an average of one hour and twenty minutes at different venues (family halls). Also, a detailed field observation took place at the various locations of these heritage resources with the aid of digital recordings and field notes. It was done in the company of field assistants that were assigned for that purpose during the FGD sessions. This primary data, which was supported by secondary data (documentary sources), was descriptively analysed.

Clarification of Key Concepts

There is a need to examine the meaning/operational definitions of some basic concepts used in the study. These basic concepts include rural gaze and narratives, heritage values, caves and waterfalls, and responsible rural development. However, rural gaze and narratives are among the trending concepts in heritage debates. The concept was first used in psychology. Psychologists view the concept as learning from the rural's view and understanding of a phenomenon in their localities (Humphreys, 2000; Rappaport, 2000; Olson & Jason, 2011). Within the confines of this study, rural gaze and narratives are seen as the rural's reaction in response to their perception of natural resources within their locality. Primary data for such studies are with these communities that have coexisted with the heritage resources for quite a number of years.

Provenance is a concept that is widely used in archaeological investigations to connote the likely original source of archaeological materials like artefacts, ecofacts, chronofacts, and sites, among others. It suggests to the archaeologists the possible original environment of a given archaeological material. This information helps archaeologists to make more valid analyses and interpretations of archaeological data (Andah & Okpoko, 1994, Ashmore & Sharer, 2005). However, within the current study context, provenance is used to depict the original environment of heritage resources. It further connotes that these heritage resources are better understood within the context of their original environment. This is mostly applied to tangible heritage resources like caves, waterfalls, mountains, rivers, lakes, sacred groves, etc. (Aplin, 2002; Nwankwo, 2013; Esfehiani & Albrecht, 2018). This implies that the host rural also has a valid opinion of the existence and use of the heritage resources. This opinion can contribute to the existing knowledge of such heritage resources as found in other places. Heritage



authenticity has to do with the originality of heritage resources representation, be it tangible or intangible. The concept of heritage authenticity is used to assess the represented heritage resources in association with the ideal. Representations of heritage resources are authentic when they reflect the ideals of the represented heritage resources. However, the authenticity of such heritage resources can be determined from provenance. Africans have rich oral traditions that answer the existence of heritage resources within their domain.

Moreover, another active concept used in the study is heritage values. Heritage values have to do with all sorts of opportunities that lay within particular heritage resources (Aplin, 2002; Waterton, 2015; Nwankwo & Agboeze, 2014; Prompayuk & Chairattananon, 2016; Esfehiani & Albrecht, 2018). These opportunities are as defined by the host rural since the values have to do with their perception of the heritage resources as affecting their well-being in their rural. Other extended values may be determined by external agents, who can also assign values from their respective viewpoints of the heritage resources. For the purpose of this study, heritage values are seen as the various opportunities for natural heritage resources as determined by the host rural.

In addition, the cave has been defined as large rock formations with cavities like rooms and pathways (see Fig. 6); many of them were said to have predated human existence hence they provided shelter to early humans in prehistoric times (Pastoors & Weniger, 2011; Oguamanam & Nwankwo, 2015). Different concepts in cave formations have been noted (see Pastoors & Weniger, 2011) based on the kind of rocks they are formed from. For the purpose of this study, the cave is seen as huge geological formations of different sizes with cavities in the form of mini rooms and pathways, as the case may be, and may have predated human existence in their various locations. From different caves, archaeological excavations have discovered arrays of cultural materials, which help interpret and conclude possible human existence in those caves in the past.

More so, the waterfall was another key concept in the study. Ranasinghe (1997) and Haghe (2017) have, in their previous studies, defined waterfalls as a natural outpour of spring water from a rock. Such flows are natural and can maintain the same tempo in their rate of flows for several years without fluctuations. The flow could be from a valley or a height between 5ft to 500ft, as the case may be. Some studies have shown that with the speed of the current, the flow from some waterfalls can generate hydro power if explored (see Ranasinghe, 1997; Offem & Ikpi, 2012; Haghe, 2017). However, waterfalls can be seen as a natural flow of spring water from a rock of 5ft to 500ft in height.

The last but not the least concept is responsible rural development. Rural development is seen as rural-based initiatives that have socioeconomic transformational capacities for rural life. Such initiatives lead to the revival of fortunes for people living in rural areas and, at the same time, demeaning rural-urban migration (Clay & Jones, 2009; Johnston, Lane, Davin & Beatson, 2018). However, responsible rural development has to do with rural development initiatives that are found beneficial by all the relevant stakeholders to the initiative. Such development initiatives are responsible since they respect the interests of the host rural, investors, project initiators, individual members of the rural and the government. More so, such initiatives are sustainable in nature. This current study is expected to not only harness other values of heritage resources in the study area but also create an opportunity to maximise the potentialities of these heritage resources for responsible and sustainable rural development in the study area. Some previous studies have noted that harnessing heritage resources for heritage tourism has



transformational tendencies for rural development in traditional African communities with rich heritage resources (see Yen & Luong, 2008; Matthias & Cunningham, 2010; Eja & Ndoma, 2011; Itanyi, Okonkwo & Eyisi, 2013; Rindam, 2014; Waterton, 2015; Prompayuk & Chairattan, 2016; Esfehni & Albrecht, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This brief literature review is established within the confines of two notable debates in the study; rural gaze and narratives and values of heritage resources in rural areas. For instance, Olson and Jason (2011), in their study, affirmed that the understanding of the values of heritage resources is better viewed from the position of the owner or the host rural. Hence, the values of such resources are not separable from the host, not minding other external values that may have been established from external factors. This view was supported by Humphrey (2000), who asserts that the knowledge and value of existing phenomena are better understood from personal experiences. That is to say, people who have experienced the phenomena over the years would have a better opinion of the phenomena. Moreover, Rappaport (2000) had a similar view but with a mild difference. He notes that the views of host communities, which should be sought at the first instance, may not be free from minor errors due to possible prejudice and other internal/external factors.

Furthermore, Eduardo (2010) and Pastors and Weniger (2011), in their separate studies on cave sites, believe that the internal and near authentic information on these caves is better sourced from their respective localities through informed interactions with the host communities. That notwithstanding, the fact that some of the existing studies may have more information on the formations and existence of caves from a scientific point of view, understanding their values should commence with detailed interactions with the host rural. Although these views were not agreed with completely by Ranasinga (1997), Offem and Ikpi (2012), and Haghe (2017), who noted in their separate studies from different locations that waterfalls have numerous national and regional values which can only be explored through detailed and relevant scientific enquiry on their formations, existence and other natural features like hydropower, etc. That notwithstanding, they still maintained that local views are still relevant in aiding successful scientific enquiry on these natural heritage resources. The underlining argument from these studies is that the views of the host cannot be jettisoned completely in an attempt to understand the values and existence of natural heritage resources in their communities.

Moreover, in understanding the position of natural heritage resources in rural development in developing countries, Blackstock (2005), Okech (2009), Eja and Judith (2009), Rindam (2014), and Oguamanam and Nwankwo (2015), in their separate studies argue that majority of rural communities in most African societies have enviable natural heritage resources that can be harnessed for rural development options for these traditional communities. They further posit that most of these natural heritage resources have been given adequate studies that will propel their imminent development. Eduardo (2010) and Haghe (2017) asserted that relevant academic research on these virgin natural heritage resources coupled with relevant publications would not only bring their knowledge of existence to the global village but will equally spur other studies to explore some other values of these resources like tourism values, hydropower values, among others. For instance, Itanyi, Okonkwo and Eyisi (2013) and Nwankwo and



Agboeze (2014) were of the view that harnessing the tourism potentialities of various natural heritage resources will further serve as a self-development option for many rural communities that have been denied meaningful development initiatives over the years. The first attempt should be to understand the current state and use of these natural heritage resources to avert hostilities from the host rural or wasteful investment.

It is worth noting also that these heritage resources have astonishing values that are attached to them by the host communities. Developing them for tourist visits outside the involvement of the host communities and their interpretations may not be sustainable. This is because the proper expression of these rural heritage resources lies hugely on these communities (Waterton & Smith, 2010). They further informed that the views of these communities are essential in considering the development options for these sites. More so, exposure of these sites to tourist activities does not always go down well with the host communities. Hence the imminent danger such unrestricted activities may pose on these sites. For instance, Larson and Poudyal (2012) informed that the Machu Picchu site in Peru has over the years, been posed with the danger of unrestricted tourist activities. They further suggested an Adaptive Resource Management framework that will involve the communities in the management of these sites. Also, Caust Vecco (2017) have noted that the exposure of sites to the UNESCO list poses some danger to the sustainability of these sites due to the imminent unrestricted tourist activities and possible hostilities from the host communities. They argue that responsive management frameworks should be designed for such sites to manage visitors' activities, site sustainability and opinions of the host communities.

In addition, responsible rural development has been argued and presented in recent studies as among the major drives for improved living for people living in rural areas (Matthias & Cunningham, 2010; Johnston et al., 2018). More so, Isreal, Schulz, Parker and Becker (1998) and Yen and Luong (2008) had, in their separate studies, argued that rural development initiatives with maximum rural involvement and consideration guarantee the sustainability and responsibility of such projects when executed in the rural. The implication is that rural development initiatives in the 21st Century need to be rural-based throughout the various stages (Clay & Jones, 2009).

In conclusion, this review has been able to support the fact that the concept of rural gaze and narratives is necessary for rural research since it aids in understanding the fundamental values of these natural resources before exploring some other values. Also, most of these natural heritage resources have some other potentialities that can be harnessed for more value. However, this current study would be investigating the values of some selected natural heritage resources in Nigeria through the lens of rural gaze and narratives and further explore some other values of the selected natural heritage resources for responsible rural development.

Theorisation of Concept

One of the most popular anthropological schools of thought, the Cultural Evolution Model by Franz Boaz, posit that societies have evolved through different stages at various points as a result of the evolution theory of Charles Darwin (see Darwin, 1859). Hence there should be elements of generalisation (deductive reasoning) while studying traditional societies since it should pass through the same cultural evolution and development stages. Some other schools of thought from the 1960s have put some doubts on this anthropological school of thought by



insisting that societies have peculiar stages of cultural development and cannot be at the same level of cultural development or critical thinking as some others.

One of these anthropological thoughts that debased the main proposition of Franz Boaz's Cultural Evolution Model is Historical Particularism which was developed in 1968 by Marvin Harris (an American Anthropologist). This thought rejected the precepts of the earlier thought by Franz Boaz by noting that it is a misinterpretation of facts to place societies at par with each other in terms of cultural development (Harris, 1968). Marvin maintains that each traditional society has peculiar histories, cultures, environmental features, challenges, social factors, belief systems, etc., that may have determined their cultural evolution and development. He further posits that each traditional society is better studied in isolation to understand the unique peculiarities that are particular to it.

However, to a greater extent, this study is anchored on the propositions of Marvin Harris's Historical Particularism by arguing that the generalisation of facts on heritage values would demean the very essence of heritage resources in their respective communities. Since these traditional communities may not have the same historical and cultural similarities as a result of peculiar factors, each rural and its worldview should be understood from its context before any further attempt to make inferences on what is obtainable elsewhere. Moreover, the current study stands on the precepts of historical particularism to further propose a concept known as Rural Heritage Approach (CHA). The concept implies that the values of heritage resources should be understood inductively through the lens of gaze and narratives of members of the host rural who have been in the same provenance with these heritage resources in their rural. The approach explores the original values of heritage resources from the gaze and narratives of the host rural, putting into consideration the peculiar nature of the rural under study. The CHA concept, as an extension of the historical particularism concept by Marvin Harris, is hereby proposed for research in heritage studies with the aim of understanding the values of heritage in rural communities. The first-class understanding of these values should be viewed through the lens of rural gaze and narratives before juxtaposing the fact with what is obtainable elsewhere.

The Study Area

Ohafia is one of the traditional communities in Abia State, Nigeria (see Fig. 1) with an estimated area coverage of 110 square miles and lies at Latitude 5⁰30' and 5⁰45' north of the equator and Longitude 7⁰45' and 7⁰55' east of the equator. Historically, Ohafia has a unique historical tradition which traces the origin of the people through a historical migration from the Middle East (probably Israel), through Egypt, Benin Kingdom, Umunede, Ndoni, Ibeku and to their current location in Abia State, Nigeria. This took several years, and many factors motivated their continuous migration to their present locality. The rural is in the tropics with Savanna vegetation cover and climate condition that is similar to what is obtainable from some other rural communities in southeast Nigeria (see Fig. 1) (Njoku, 2000; Uduma, 2017).

From the sociocultural point of view, Ohafia rural has an age grade system with various categories of age grades saddled with respective responsibilities in the rural. There are also some traditional cults system which was said to have been borrowed from the neighbouring communities in Cross River State. Most prominent among these traditional cult groups are Obom, Ekpe, and Akang, which were meant for different age grades in the rural. The people also engage in local craft-making and other indigenous technologies and industries to boost

their socioeconomic life in rural. Amakpu-Ohafia is one of the villages in Ohafia Rural. More so, Ezie-Ofri Cave and Ifutiti Waterfalls are located in Amekpu-Ohafia (see Figs. 1&2).

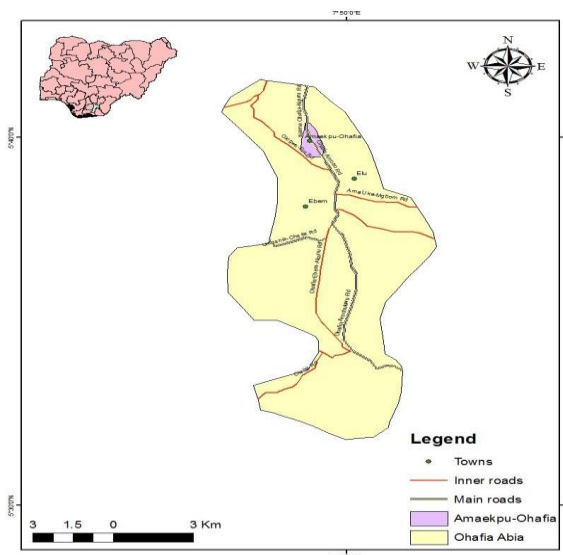


Fig. 1: Map Ohafia with inset Map of Nigeria (showing Abia State), showing Amekpu and other communities (Fieldwork, 2019)

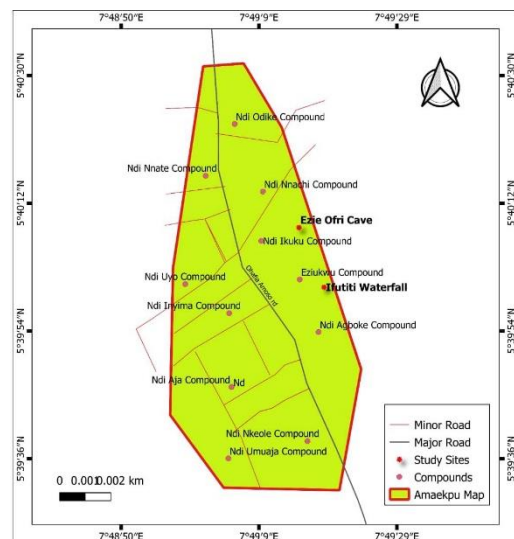


Fig. 2: Map of Amekpu-Ohafia showing Ezie-Ofri Cave and Ifutiti Waterfalls (Fieldwork, 2019)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study was an attempt to understand the values of some natural heritage resources from the rural gaze and narratives. Ezie Ofri Cave and Ifutiti Waterfalls in the Amakpu axis of Ohafia in Abia State, Nigeria were the focus of the study. The results of the discourse analysis and subsequent discussion will be presented under each of these unique natural heritage sites in Nigeria.

Ezie-Ofri Cave

This is an undeveloped natural heritage site in Ohafia rural that has some relevance to the rural despite its remote location in the middle of an undisturbed thick forest (see Figs 3&4). One of the informants (Participant 1) notes that the forest is a historical landmark. In his words,

'The forest was fearful in the past, and we were afraid to enter it when we were growing up for the fear of the unknown, until recent'.

The forest was named 'Ezie-Ofri', meaning 'King of Forest', because of its intimidating coverage and scary look. Hence, the cave was named 'Ezie-Ofri Cave', meaning 'King of Forest Cave'. Most of the informants, during the key informant interview sessions, informed that the cave is feared owing to its remote location and the firm belief that it is a gift from their god since they had no clue about its formation and presence in the rural. They believe that the

cave was sent by their gods to them to serve as a refuge during uncertainties like communal wars. They further assert that during communal conflicts with their neighbouring communities, while men of the rural are expected to be at the war front wedging the war, their women and children are expected to run into this cave for refuge. During such inter-communal wars, the enemy rural is always afraid to enter the cave for fear of being confronted by the gods of the people. In the first session of the focus group discussion, it was gathered that there are some other caves provided for other villages to serve the same purpose of protection during inter-communal wars.

Recently, informal visits to the cave by people are causing some level of defacement on the cave by various kinds of inscriptions (see Fig. 5). This attitude is not going down well in the rural. They were meant to understand that this particular attitude of visitors to caves is not peculiar to Ezie Ofri; Cave hence such attitudes were also witnessed at Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State and Marshal Caves in Bauchi State (Oguamanam & Nwankwo, 2015). For instance, Oguamanam and Nwankwo (2015) reported that one of the visitors to Ogbunike cave in 2006 informed that the inscription was aimed at marking his presence at the site for people to know that such persons visited the cave for years to come. Such attitudes should be discouraged at cave sites; hence defacement can lead to the loss of aesthetic values of these caves. It can also arouse unnecessary hostility from the host rural hence they conceive such acts as an abuse of their traditional belief system and gods.



Fig. 3: The first entrance of Ezie-Ofri Cave. (Fieldwork, 2019)



Fig. 4: The second entrance of Ezie-Ofri Cave. (Fieldwork, 2019)

Also, members of the rural claimed that they never knew that Ezie Ofri Cave is extended to another part of the rural known as Elu-Ohafia until in the late 1980s when a traditional hunter's dog got missing in the Ezie Ofri Cave when it entered the cave. The said dog was later discovered three days after when it was found coming out from the Elu-Ohafia entry point of the cave (see Fig.4). This exposition made the two villages begin to nurture the thought that



Amekpu-Ohafia and Elu-Ohafia may have been closely related than they had earlier thought. Future studies may expatiate more on this claim through an ethnographic approach. Moreover, there has been a kind of population advancement towards the forest to accommodate the growing population of the rural. During one of the key informant sessions, the informant informed that,

'among the reasons the forest is not looking much scary as usual was because of the population advancement towards the forest that led people to farm in the forest. This communal act did not only do away with the fear of the unknown but also scared away big games from the forest'.

Furthermore, the rural perceive the cave's value to the rural in the area of serving as a refuge for them during inter-communal wars as fundamental. This informs their firm belief that the cave is a gift from their gods. During the last Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session, the informants quite agreed that as far as their rural is concerned, there are no sociocultural or sociopolitical activities that are attached to the cave. Also, the cave does not have any deity inhabiting it since time immemorial. This contrasts the information from Ajalli cave and Ogbunike cave, which informs that deities are inhabiting these caves (see Oguamanam & Nwankwo, 2015). Also, an informant (Participant 2) informed that recently, due to the farming activities within the Ezie Ofri forest, which have reduced the thickness of the forest, some social activities like visits, picnics, and hunting, among others, have been going on within the cave vicinity. Most of the informants note that the rural used to perform some ritual sacrifices in the cave in the past with items like Oji (kola acuminata), Okuko Ocha (White Cock) and Otu Ekpem Mmii Oku (One Bottle of Gin) to thank their god for the gift of the cave. This information contradicts the earlier information that deities are not associated with the cave. This assumption could be that the practice was an age-long tradition that may have been overtaken by time and events in the rural. This is because one of the informants informed in the following lines;

'this traditional practice (ritual sacrifices at the cave site) which was done periodically in the past, has almost been terminated as a result of the emergence of a foreign religion in the rural'.

Furthermore, the rural revered this cave based on their perceived value of the cave within the confines of the rural. The informants that participated during the first session of the focus group discussion were of the opinion that this cave may have been inhabited by their ancestors who built little or no house to take shelter from sun and rain. That means that the cave may have provided a kind of routine accommodation for the extinct society in that rural (A further archaeological investigations may clarify this claim to a reasonable extent). Unfortunately, this view was refuted by many of the informants, who also attributed the presence of the cave in their rural to natural factors that are beyond human comprehension. Oguamanam and Nwankwo (2015) and Itanyi et al. (2013), in their respective studies on Ajalli and Owerreezukala Caves in Anambra State, noted that these communities have no idea of the factors that led to the presence of these caves in their communities but accord much value to these caves due to their provision of shelter and refuge during communal wars. It was only that Ajalli added that the cave in their rural was once serving as a good source of water (Oguamanam and Nwankwo, 2015). Some studies, like Eduardo (2010) and, Pastoors and Weniger (2011), gave an understanding of cave formations and values from scientific and

archaeological dimensions. They noted that caves are formed through rigorous scientific processes that were controlled by natural factors.



Fig. 5: Visitors' Inscriptions on the Ezie-Ofri Cave (Fieldwork, 2019).



Fig. 6: The first caveat of the Ezie-Ofri Cave (Fieldwork, 2019).

Also, it is most likely that early men inhabited caves and used caves as hideouts against big games that threatened their livelihood in the prehistoric era. This may have been possible during the periods of Homo Erectus, Homo Habilis and other hominids like australopithecines that once inhabited the universe, according to claims from archaeological finds. For instance, some archaeological excavations in caves from Africa, Europe, Asia, America, etc, have revealed that early humans had lived in these caves. This assertion was made based on the presence of cultural materials that were found in trenches within the cave by archaeologists. This further revealed that this habitation in caves lasted for thousands of years until humans were able to erect houses (see Martens, 1989; Dolukhanov, 1989; Andah & Okpoko, 1994; Fagan, 2004; Ashmore & Sharer, 2005). This explains why caves are of immense significance to archaeological investigations in different parts of the globe; since the caves have stories to tell about early humans (Fagan, 2003; Ashmore & Sharer, 2005). One of the post-study expectations of Ezie Ofri's cave is to further attract archaeological investigations within the cave to give a more scientifically proven fact that the cave was previously inhabited in history by humans as was obtained in some other caves in other parts of the globe.

However, the rural perception of the value of the cave was based on the utility and security values of the cave to the rural. Unfortunately, the rural's gaze and narratives on Ezie Ofri's cave may not be in accord with the existing studies and theories on cave formations; hence they strongly believe that the cave is a gift from their god as against the scientific reason of detailed scientific process. That notwithstanding, these views are not all that divergent since they have



one strong meeting point of 'natural factor'. Also, the expected detailed archaeological investigation should be accompanied by a detailed ethnographic study to enable reasonable correlations between the data from the extinct rural (through excavation) and data from extant rural (through ethnographic study). The information and some other support from the host rural will not only encourage the research through robust data collection but will also guarantee the success of the research through the provision of needed security and other necessary assistance.

Ifutiti Waterfall

Ifutiti Waterfall was another focus of the study with the aim of understanding the values of these natural heritage resources through the lens of rural gaze and narratives in Ohafia Rural, Abia State, Nigeria. This unique undeveloped waterfall is situated within the vicinity of Ezie-Ofri forest, just like the cave (see Fig. 7). There is approximately a twenty-minute walk between the two natural heritage resources within the forest. Incidentally, there is no established direct pathway to the waterfall; hence, visits to the site are usually complicated and confusing. One of the informants (Participant 3) asserts that what informed the thickness and vast coverage of this forest could result from the rural settlement pattern. The rural prefer clustered settlement patterns to enhance their communal living within the rural and allow for a large expanse of land available for farming activities. The people are mostly agrarians and, at the same time, create opportunities for their unborn generations to farm as well.

Moreover, in trying to describe the physical features of this site further, an informant made the following statement;

'the mighty sound of the outpour and rattling of birds remains the dominant sound around this special waterfall we are endowed with by our gods'

Just like the case of the cave, members of the rural could not explain the formation and presence of this waterfall in their rural. They have more scary beliefs about the waterfall that have deterred them from regular visits to the site. During the field observation, it was gathered that the pathway to the site was lonely, even up to the site proper. The site is a sizeable waterfall with about 15ft height and a clean water flow that one can behold particles with the naked eye (see Fig. 8). The site has a unique environment with a relatively cold atmosphere that can serve as a site for leisure and film making by the movie industry. The thick forest around the site supported this unique atmosphere (see Figure 10).



Fig. 7: The vegetation of Ezie-Ofri Forest. (Fieldwork, 2019).

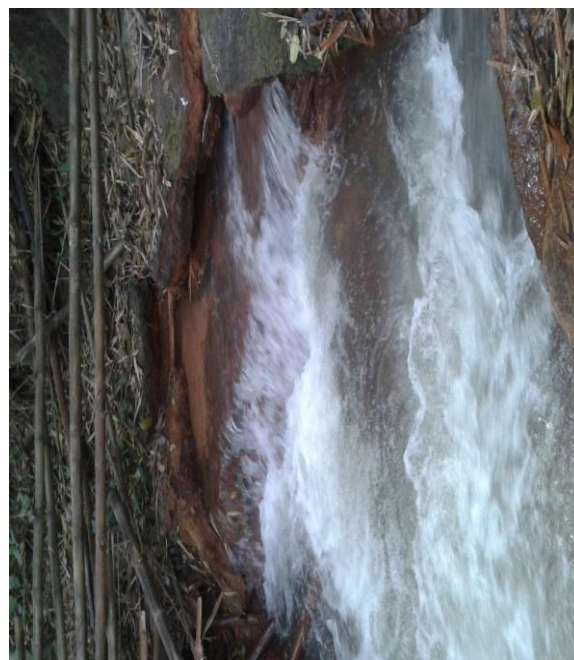


Fig. 8: The first step/head of Ifutiti Waterfalls (Fieldwork, 2019).

Furthermore, during focus group discussion sessions, the informants noted that the name 'Ifutiti' given to the waterfall was derived from the kind of troubling noise from the waterfall. And this noise which is the only of its kind in the rural almost scares people away from the site. The rural strongly believe that the sound is produced by the deity that inhabits the waterfall (presumably the owner of the waterfall). Later one of the informants (Participant 1) informed that part of the mystery of the waterfall was revealed to them by one visitor from Scotland who tried to convince them that the waterfall does not have any mystery but exists just like some other water bodies. Despite this explanation, most members of the rural still believe in the traditional belief with respect to the origin and ownership of the waterfall.

Furthermore, the waterfall pool is about 9.7m wide and 2m deep (see Fig. 9). This figure varies during the rainy season. The rural believed that the sound that radiates from the site is a sound from an unknown deity who has inhabited the site since prehistoric times. This may have informed why no farming activities were existing around the site, unlike that of the cave. So many aged trees of big sizes were seen around the site as a result of the limited human activities in the site due to the fear of the unknown within the site (see Fig.7). That notwithstanding, virtually all the informants maintained that the waterfall is among the most valued natural heritage resources in the rural due to its provision of clean water for human consumption and domestic uses. One of the informants (Participant 4) puts it this way;

*'I do not buy water. I use the water from Ifututi waterfall to wash clothes,
wash plates, cook food, bathe and also drink whenever I am thirsty'*

Unfortunately, members of the rural rarely go near the waterfall to collect water as a result of the fear of being killed by the deity. Rather, they wait for the flow of the pool at a distant location to collect water for domestic and other uses (see Fig. 10). One of the myths, according to Participant 4, has it that the water has maintained the same tempo and size since the birth of the rural without variations. This is widely believed by members of the rural because the noise from the waterfall has been consistent over the years.



Fig. 9: the height of Ifutiti Waterfalls
(Fieldwork, 2019)



Fig. 10: The pool of Ifutiti Waterfalls
(Fieldwork, 2019):

Moreover, apart from serving as a source of water, the waterfall also aids agriculture in the rural as claimed by these informants. The water was used to irrigate their farms to yield bountifully, even during dry seasons. They also assert that native doctors perform some sacrifices at the waterfall every August to thank the gods for giving them the waterfall as a veritable natural resource in the rural (focus group discussion). This shows that even with the scary nature of the site, the rural reverence it and would not wish it to cease to exist in their rural. These communal values cannot be written off despite some other values that may also be derived from the waterfall. For instance, Haghe (2017) noted that the Gimel waterfall in France has multiplicity of values to both the host rural and their neighbours. In line with this, Ranasinghe (1997) inform that most waterfalls may have the potentialities of hydropower generation if scientifically examined and can generate electricity for nearby communities, even regions depending on the extent of hydropower generation potentialities of the waterfalls. However, apart from the agricultural and domestic values, the Ohafia people have not scientifically investigated the potentialities of Ifutiti Waterfalls for hydropower generation. Physical observation of the tempo and speed of the waterfall may suggest possible hydropower generation from the waterfalls if examined by relevant scientific inquiries.



More so, Offem and Ikpi (2012) note that waterfall has the potential to support sustainable ecosystems through the preservation of biodiversity. This was not far from the rural's view that Ifutiti Waterfalls supports agriculture and a quality environment through the provision of a cool and calm environment within the vicinity of the site. This atmosphere also supports the site as a unique destination for relaxation and some other leisure activities if sustainably developed, like some waterfalls around the world. Also, Rackmann, Robson and Matthew (2013) informed that waterfalls can also serve some other values, like serving as habitats for lotic insects if explored. This was based on their findings from their study on some waterfalls in Western Australia, which shows evidence that waterfalls have conservation values to biodiversity from the perspective of habitats for some kind of insects. This is expected to help in further studies on these insects, climate change and pollen analysis (Rackmann et al., 2013). This has not been explored for Ifutiti Waterfalls to ascertain its possibility for entomological studies to understand past biological activities in the area. This current study is also expected to motivate such studies towards harnessing other values of the waterfalls.

In addition, other studies like Eja and Abonor (2017) and Nwankwo (2013), etc. are of the view that waterfalls have great tourism values if purposefully harnessed in that regard. And that such values can be exploited to boost the local economy of a given destination, at the same time, promote the cultural identity of the people through branding as a veritable tourist destination. Just like in the case of Rackmann et al. (2013), such tourism values can only be promoted after bringing the knowledge of the existence of natural resources to the wider public. Hence, Ifutiti Waterfall is an undeveloped site that needs significant exposure to attract more studies and meaningful development initiatives that will explore other values of the site, as noted by Batinas (2010), Eja and Ndoma (2011), Offem and Ikpi (2012), Rackmann et al. (2013), and Nwankwo (2013) in their respective studies from some other parts of the world.

CONCLUSION

The Ohafia rural is aware that these unique natural heritage attractions in their environment have some other values apart from the ones expressed in their narratives. Even with the current undeveloped state of these sites, members of the rural are very optimistic that the sites would have great touristic value if developed like some other related natural attractions in Nigeria (Like the Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State, Marshal Cave in Bauchi, Ikogosi Waterfalls in Ekiti State, Obudu Mountain Resort Waterfalls, just to mention a few). This informs one of the rural's vociferations on the government to make efforts in developing these unique attractions to boost rural development in the rural. This is supported by Rindam (2014), who, in his study on the potentialities of caves for rural tourism development, noted that the Ascar Cave in Lenggong Valley is a veritable resource for rural tourism development in the area. He further advised that attempts to develop this unique natural heritage resource should recognise the values and interests of the host rural to ensure the sustainability of the project. The implication is that the sustainability of such projects should be guaranteed by the host rural, among other factors.

A closer observation and assessment of Ezie Ofri Cave and Ifutiti Waterfalls reveals that the rural has some other cultural heritage resources that can motivate rural tourism development in the area and, at the same time, harness other values of these sites. These include unique indigenous festivals like Igba-Ekpe (masquerade festival), Igba Oto-omu (traditional



retirement), Iri-ji ofuru (new yam festival), Ite-obuon (for members of the traditional secret cult groups), and other indigenous cultural dances like Igbirigbi-ogu (Ohafia War Dance), among others. These are integral aspects of the rural's indigenous values. Njoku (2000) and Uduma (2017) had, in their individual studies, inferred that the Ohafia people have high regard for their indigenous values and would collectively preserve and enjoy such values within their rural. This is an indication that the rural would support sustainable development for these sites.

Responsible rural development, which is expected to improve the standard of living for members of Ohafia rural, is possible; hence the rural is not left out. The expected tourism development in rural through the harnessing of the potentialities of these two natural heritage resources could be translated into responsible rural development (Clay & Jones, 2009). Members of the host rural have great roles to play in ensuring the sustainability and responsibility of rural development initiatives in their localities. Their involvement and orientation are among the motivating factors in that regard (Johnston et al., 2018). Although the development initiatives for these sites might be external, regard for rural gaze and narratives are factors for responsible rural development through tourism in the rural.

However, even as the Ohafia rural would expect further development of these natural attractions to enhance the values of Ezie-Ofri Cave and Ifititi Waterfall to the rural, there are a few challenges to the harnessing of these natural attractions for tourism development in the rural. For instance, these natural resources have some myths and beliefs that may need to be contained at the initial stage of the site development initiatives. This can be facilitated through rural liaison and requisite enlightenment initiatives. Also, the challenge of poor accessibility to these sites is a factor. It will take approximately one hour to walk from a motorable pathway to the site, unlike that of Ajalli cave which has a motorable pathway to the frontage of the cave (see Oguamanam & Nwankwo, 2015). This road which may not be up to 5 kilometres, can be in the first phase of the site development initiatives.

Moreover, the people have much regard for land resources and may be reluctant to release such land for rural development initiatives. A majority part of the land surrounding these heritage resources is owned by individuals, families, and clans. Awareness campaigns and the involvement of members of the rural in this development project may contain this particular challenge. In addition, even when members of the rural have some other sources of water, they may find it difficult to withdraw from the Ifutiti Waterfalls for meaningful development due to the neatness of the spring for consumption and other domestic uses. The previous measure (awareness campaigns and rural involvement) can also put this challenge in check. However, it is obvious that most of these factors are not out of control in ensuring the sustainable development of these sites for responsible rural development. Rindan (2014), Batinas (2010), Oguamanam and Nwankwo (2015), and Itanyi et al. (2013), in their respective studies, concluded that rural involvement and consultation are among the keys to sustainable rural tourism development. Therefore, with reasonable consultation, enlightenment, and involvement of members of Ohafia rural, coupled with the application of RHA, Ifutiti Waterfall and Ezie Ofri Cave can be sustainably harnessed to explore other veritable values of the sites. The rural also has some other indigenous values and celebrations that can add to the tourism values of the rural.

In conclusion, the Concept of RHA predicts that the values of heritage resources can be understood first from the rural gaze and narrative within the vicinity of the heritage resources. This concept would open up most of these heritage resources that have been unharnessed due



to the errors of previous approaches. For instance, development initiatives for such natural resources should commence from the narratives of the host rural to exploring some other values that may have been proven in other parts of the world. Finally, it is evident from the narratives that the rural may be open to further attempts to harness other values of these natural heritage resources within their locality. This is expected to make way for responsible rural development in Ohafia rural.

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