

Monuments as Living Heritage: The Challenges of Safety and Implications on Lost Memories

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Abstract

Monuments have been identified as living heritage of a people that represent their antecedents and past. They play significant roles in the recovery of past memories and also serve as heritage tourist sites for some classes of tourists. In Nigeria, a number of monuments have been declared by the Nigerian government through formal legislations so as to contribute to their sustenance. The quandary now is that most of the monuments declared by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in Nigeria are currently facing safety challenges that threaten their sustainable preservation as standing histories of a people. This study investigates, using ethnographic studies on sampled monuments from Southeast Nigeria, various safety issues facing the monuments and their implications on historical memories with a view to recommending sustainable preservation measures.

Keywords: *Monuments, Safety, Heritage, Challenges, Implications, Lost Memories, Measures, Sustainability.*

Introduction

Nigeria is richly endowed with a wide range of natural and cultural resources relative to other nations in Africa most of which are largely untapped. These resources fall into protected eco-systems (game reserves and recreational parks), protected landscapes or natural sceneries, cultural sites, coastline, traditional festivals and historic relics and monuments (Ekechukwu, 1990; Okoli, 2001 cited in Enemou, Anozie & Otta, 2012). Monuments are part of the rich

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cultural heritage of the people because they are the living heritage which carries lots of historical information about the people. In the words of Hendrick (2006, p. 18), monument is “a trace of the past that is integrated in the present life and traditions of the community; it is the source allied with a bottom-up knowledge, the communal memory of society”. This shows that events and activities of the past can be deduced from a monument which is a constituent of the present. It is a known fact that monuments serve as pieces of evidence of a people’s historical development and systematic civilization (NCMM, 2011). Also, Gideon, Sert and Leger (1943) inform that modern monuments are human landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute heritage for the future generations. As such, they form a link between the past and the future. They also added that Monuments are the expression of man’s highest cultural needs. Olivia (2016) stated that in the world of architecture, the product of culture and perception is a monument, which lies in the realm of form. Begić and Mraović (2014) also noted that monuments play symbolic and significant cultural roles in people’s lives. The Headwaters Economics (2014) informed that communities surrounding national monuments in some western countries experience continued economic growth as a result of presence of well preserved and promoted monuments in their areas.

Also, monuments have been seen as “...sites, remains and objects which bear witness to human existence through epochs and civilization for which excavation and field survey are the main sources of scientific information” (Bjornstad, 1989, p. 72). This definition, however, views monuments from an archaeological point of view. Despite its own merits, it failed to establish the fact that apart from field surveys, monuments can equally be discovered through relevant declarations about their socio-cultural importance. Again, monuments can be seen as “...vehicle of culture and human cultural activity” (Herrmann, 1989, p. 33). This is pertinent since monuments are of great historic and sociocultural value to the owners or the people. A good example is the historical Nigerian/Biafran War Ship which is amongst the telltales of the famous Nigerian/Biafran War of 1967-1970 (see Plate 1). Apart from the regional or national bodies in charge of protection and preservation of monuments, within their jurisdiction, United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) is the apex body charged with this responsibility at the global/international level. Others include such global organizations as the ICOM (International Councils of Monuments), International Centre for the Study of Preservation and the Restoration of Cultural Property (ICRROM), International Council on Monument and Sites (ICOMOS), Organization for Museums and Monuments and Site of Africa (OMMSA) and the International Institute for Conservation of Historical Works of Art (IIC). These organizations/bodies have highly qualified and specialized personnel. In Nigeria, the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) is charged with this responsibility, but

works in close relation with Universities and other cultural bodies alike (Okpoko, n.d).



Plate 1: Nigerian/Biafran War Ship at National War Museum Umuahia.

Furthermore, Saunders (1989) made a very good contribution to the understanding of monuments when he asserted that monuments are "...the surviving pattern of successive land use and settlement, whether domestic, ceremonial, funeral, economic or defensive, from prehistoric times onwards to include the recent past... building of archaeological and historic importance and the townscape and street pattern of our historic towns" (Saunders, 1989, p. 152). This implies that monument stands out as a socio-cultural statue of a society; representing the cultural linkages of societies, past and present. Ndoro (2001) opined that wherever ruined monuments are situated, they always create a sense of wonder and curiosity to know and explore more about the people and cultures that produced artistic work on such a grand scale. Drawing from these definitions, monuments can be seen as objects of great historic and cultural importance which are the standing or remaining edifices of the past. In addition, monuments can also be seen as all objects, materials, and landscapes of antiquities that preserve the cultural history of a society. Such objects or landscapes may be of cultural or natural significance to man. While some of these monuments are officially declared in Nigeria, many are yet to be declared as such. The essence of this declaration by the appropriate authority is to preserve and sustain the cultural and historic values of the monument for society. As noted earlier, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is one of the organisations saddled with the responsibility of managing monuments globally to ensure their conservation and sustenance. Similar bodies are found in

various nations with similar responsibilities. In Nigeria, for instance, there is National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) which was established by the Degree No.77 of 1979 (now an Act of Parliament). The NCMM has among its functions the declaration, protection and preservation of monuments. The Law was established to replace previous laws with relevant responsibility such as The Antiquities [Prohibited Transfers] Decree No. 9 of 1974 (Federal Military Government of Nigeria, 1979).

In spite of these efforts, lots of factors have challenged the existence and sustenance of monuments as heritage of a people. This has posed generational threats to the full realization of the potentialities of monuments for historical reconstruction. Once a monument is destroyed, it is gone forever (Ekechukwu, 2008). The extent to which the potentialities of monuments can be maximized for the human society is a function of the physical state and preservation of such monuments. Some studies have lamented the state of monuments in Nigeria and some other African nations and its implications on national identities and memories (Nwankwo, 2012; Ekechukwu, 2008; Ndoro, 2001; Okpoko, 2011; Saunders, 1989; Eze-Uzomaka, 2014; etc). Safety and security threats can undermine the cultural and historical integrity of a monument, as well as its economic value.

This study investigated the threats posed to monuments in Nigeria. Cluster and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting fifty-three (53) informants for the study. Descriptive and evaluative methods of qualitative data analysis were used in interpreting useful information collated from the field. SWOT Matrix was used for further interpretation of the data sourced from the field, while ArcGIS Extension Tool was used to locate the sampled study areas on the Map of Eastern Nigeria. The study identified the existing safety measures, their weaknesses and strengths, and finally suggested the way forward. The import of the study is to strengthen the existing monuments, while showcasing their relevance to national identities and memories. We used Chief Odo Nwokolo's Palace in Ukehe, Enugu State and some other monuments as case studies.



**Plate 2: Chief Odo Nwokolo's Palace, Ukehe Enugu State
One of the Monuments declared by NCMM in Enugu State**

Findings and Discussion

Chief Odo Nwokolo was a very influential man and a paramount chief in Ukehe, Enugu State. He was one of the earliest rich individuals in the community; and he built a palace. His sons include Chief John Nnia Nwodo, a former two-time minister of the federal republic and Chief Okwesilieze Nwodo, the first civilian governor of Enugu State (Jan 1992-Nov 1993), and former National Chairman of People's Democratic Party of Nigeria. Chief Odo Nwokolo had other children who are influential in the political arena in Nigeria. His palace was listed as a monument on 15th December, 1964. Out of the many monuments studied in the course of this research, emphasis will be on the Chief Odo Nwokolo Palace, Ukehe (CONPU), but minor inferences will be made to other monuments investigated in the study area in terms of how the situations there compare with those at CONPU.

Vandalism and willful destruction was one of the major threats identified during the study. Information collected from respondents and field observations confirmed this claim. The damage to this monument was caused by mostly members of the community as a result of their changed values, ignorance, and development activities in the community. Some dubious and/or ignorant visitors to the monument site or the community also contributed to this destruction. Huge construction activities, particularly road construction exerted pressure on the walls of this monument, thereby cracking the wall and weakening the foundation. This state of affairs was confirmed at the site and at such sites as Chief Okoronji's House at Arochukwu, Omo-ukwu Temple at Asaga-Ohafia, both in Abia State. The threat was rated high judging from its frequency, magnitude and fatality (see Table 1).

Hostility from the host community constitutes yet another threat identified by the study. Following the ignorance of the people on the socio

economic and cultural benefits of the monument to both their community and the nation at large, some members of the community antagonize visitors. An informant noted that some members of the community are not comfortable with the continued presence of visitors in the community, more especially during their none-festival periods. They are sometimes frightened at the sight of such visitors. It was also gathered during the ethnographic study that some persons or their lineage, particularly those Chief Odo may have hurt in the course of his leadership in Ukehe Community, may not want to associate with his memories whose relics and structures represent the monument. One factor that makes the monument more susceptible to this threat is its location in a remote area, coupled with the high level of ignorance in this rural part of Nigeria. We also found in one of the study sites that the structure is becoming weak and could collapse if nothing is done to redress the situation. Some walls in Chief Okoronji's House at Arochukwu were observed to have some visible cracks.



**Plate 3: Showing the bushy surrounding of Chief Odo Nwokolo Palace
Ukehe, Enugu State.**

Crime in general was another considered another potential threat at these monument sites. Considering the remote location of some of the monument, visitors and attractions in the monument can be exposed to criminal activities from both members of the community and dubious visitors to the monument. Also there is the issue of erosion as lamented by some informants at Ukehe who complained about the erosion around the walls of the monument. We equally observed and confirmed this complaint during our numerous visits to the site. The poor drainage system in the community and the poor attention to the monument by the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM), the agency charged with the responsibility to maintain the monument, account for this problem. This particular threat was equally noticed at Chief Okoronji House at Arochukwu in Abia State.

There is also the possibility of animal and insect attacks within the vicinity of the monument at Ukehe. The unkempt and lonely nature of the surroundings presents a potential breeding ground for mosquitoes and reptiles

(see Plate 2&3). A similar state pervades the Omo-Ukwu Temple at Asaga-Ohafia and Chief Okoronji's House at Arochoku both in Abia State, but not at Old Residency at Calabar in Cross River. Finally, the possibility of personal injuries including cuts, bruises, sprains, strains, etc, that may result from physical contact with some heritage materials in the sites and the unkempt environment, etc. was noted by the informants. Our field observation also corroborates this claim, with COPNU, Chief Okoronji's House at Arochoku being culpable.

Table 1: Tabular representation of identified safety and security threats at CONPU

Threats at CONPU	Probability		Rating			Remark
	Potential	Available	Low	Moderate	High	
Animal attack		X	x	x		Applicable to some
Collapse of structure		X	x		X	Applicable to some
Criminal activities		X		x	X	Applicable to some
Erosion threats	X		x	x		Applicable to some
Personal injuries	X			x	X	Applicable to others
Hostility		X	x		X	Applicable to some
Food poisoning		X	x		X	Applicable to some
Road Accidents		X		x	X	Applicable to some
Vandalism and Destruction	X		x	x		Applicable to others

Measures designed to manage these threats

One of the primary measures adopted to manage the monuments is the use of relevant legislations. Decree No 77 of 1979, now an Act of the National Assembly, gave a strong backing to the safety and security of monuments in Nigeria. The Act empowered NCMM to declare, preserve and protect sites, structures and other places of historical significance within Nigeria. COPNU, The Old Residency Calabar, Cross River State, Omo-Ukwu Temple Asaga-Ohafia, Abia State, etc are some of the monuments in the region that are under the auspices of the NCMM. Site policy and regulations are some of the observed measures for security and safety of these sites. For instance, 'visitors are not allowed access to COPNU without the guide who lives near the monument.' Furthermore, 'cars are not parked inside the site...' etc. A similar policy is in place in some other monuments visited, although the contents and implementation procedures differ from one monument to another.

Another vital safety and security measure is community orientation. It is a truism that people will strive to maintain an object or other items of importance in their community if they have value for them. Knowledge of such values often comes with awareness creation and community sensitization. One of the informants claimed that members of Ukehe Community and family members of late Chief Odo Nwokolo were informed and given proper orientation on the new status and value of the monument (M.U. Odo, personal communication, May 6th, 2012) after the declaration of the building as a National Monument. This was to keep them informed about its national value and its potentialities to host visitors from far and near. Same was applied to some other NCMM declared National Monuments visited in the course of the study. The use of community vigilante is yet another identified measure of safety and security. The informants claimed that community vigilante help to guard the monument since there are no security guards employed to work at the monument site. They are said to visit the monument on regular bases so as to provide security for both the monument and its visitors. But at the Old Residency at Calabar where some guards have been employed to secure the monument, the use of community vigilante in the site is a non issue. Police patrol teams also serve to protect the sites. Informants in the community claimed that the police and other security agencies patrol the site to prevent crimes. Field visitation and observation revealed that this measure is not constant or always available, but happens only when VIPs visit the site. Same is applicable to other monuments studied.

Finally, emergency measures are taken to protect monuments from imminent collapse, fire outbreak and threat from developmental and other construction activities around the monument. Conscious environmental upkeep was also said to be done periodically cleaning to keep the monument and its precincts clean. Site observations revealed that although this is a good safety and security measure, this claim appear idealistic given that the monument was unkempt and its precincts were bushy during our field visit. A similar fate befell some other monuments studied.

SWOT Matrix of Safety and Security Measures at CONPU

The matrix was used in this study to give a clearer picture of the effectiveness and sustainability of the identified safety and security measures at the CONP monument Ukehe, Enugu State. In other words, it was used to evaluate the existing safety and security measures employed for caring for the monument under investigation:

Strengths

- On legislation, there are relevant legislations and other government policies that are aimed at protecting the monument.
- Community legislation and measure are available to mitigate hostility and protect this monument.
- Community vigilante helps in the protection of the monument and visitors to the site.

- Site policies are in place to guide visitors and preserve the site.
- The upkeep of the environment will help to prevent possible fire outbreak, animal attacks, and keep the environment clean.
- Police patrol is invaluable as it helps to guarantee security of the site and visitors to the site.
- The use of natives as guards helps not only in protecting the site but also ensuring the safety of visitors.
- Rescue operation helps in securing the site, while promoting its security.

Weaknesses

- Poor implementation of existing laws.
- Apart from the fact that the community is not properly orientated, community orientation as a measure is quite irregular.
- Community Vigilante is not always available at the site. The major limitation is the means of mobility in and around the community.
- Most of the site policies are not only poorly implemented but also outdated to meet current demands.
- The environmental upkeep is not regular and there is no hope that this will change soon.
- Police patrol is not readily available.
- The local tour guides are not only always unavailable, but also unenlightened to operate as local tour guides for visitors to the community.

Opportunities

- The Decree No 77 of 1979 can be reviewed to include the current realities.
- NCMM can organize regular orientation programmes to enlighten the people.
- Community Vigilante can guarantee constant patrol around the site through proper arrangement and if equipped with operational vehicles and necessary facilities.
- There could be periodic reviews of site policies.
- Members of the community can be given proper orientation on the essence of the upkeep of the environment.
- NCMM can collaborate with the Police to provide adequate security at the site. Also, the Police patrol can guarantee quick response to security calls from the site during emergency situations.
- The community can be given proper orientation of the activities and essence of local tour guides. These local tour guides can also be motivated to enhance productivity.

Threats

- Nonchalant attitude of the law makers to relevant laws could jeopardize the use of legislation as an effective measure.
- Misinterpretation of the orientation programmes by the members of the community and their refusal to attend these awareness campaigns can hinder the effectiveness of the community orientation as a measure.

- Ignorance and presence of dubious community vigilante personnel are a bane to the effective use of community vigilante as a safety and security measure on the site.
- Engagement of dubious workers and possibility of animal attacks on cleaners can pose serious threat to the use of environmental upkeep as a safety and security measure.
- Presence of dubious Police officers and nonchalant attitude of Police officers could endanger the use of Police patrol as a measure.
- The use of dubious tour guides, coupled with the presence of ignorant and stubborn visitors could be a serious threat.
- Poor mobility to the site and nonchalance on the part of NCMM staff is a threat to the effective use of rescue operation as a safety and security measure on the site.

Implications of Threats to Monuments on Lost Memories

In most societies, monuments have lots of information about the people's history and as such they are of immense value to the people. It is a global concern for the carriers of the historical past of the people to be protected effectively. Since monuments are part of the community's heritage, they have to be preserved and protected for posterity. This is because any destruction of a monument is automatically the destruction of the community's past. Herman (1989, p.33) noted that "monuments are vehicle of culture and human cultural activity". Monuments serve as objects, materials, landscapes, etc, of antiquities that preserve the cultural history of a people, used by the past and respected by the present.

Furthermore, most of the threats on monuments are traced to the wanton ignorance of the people on the status of such monuments as the carriers of a people's historical past. These threats may take the form of war, wear-and-tear from tourists' activities, developmental activities like road construction, and fire outbreak through bush burning. Some of the natural factors include flooding, humidity, hurricanes, storms, and earthquakes. In more recent times, war and conflict contribute a bigger chunk in the threats to monuments. Instances include the destructive activities of ISIS (or ISIL) of such places like Palmyra, a world heritage site and an ancient city in Syrian Desert that is being used as shield by the militia. Another instance is the Buddhas of Bamiyan which is a 1,700-year-old Sandstone structure that the Taliban forces destroyed in 2001 (Stenning, 2015).

Monument houses memories that are of great cultural and historical value to the people. Mark (2005) explains memory as remainder of past experiences that are active in our mind, while other experiences are forgotten. These memories are active in our minds due to the presence of objects that carry the information of the past. In linking memories and the built environment, Dowell (2008) is of the view that humans interact with the built environment constantly which can create powerful memories. This indicates that there is a connection of memory with buildings or objects of value and humans. Dowell

(2008) further added that the shared experiences of a society's inhabitants create a general memory and identity of the place. These shared experiences are put together as the collective memory of the people which lasts for generations and then allow people to understand themselves. Through understanding of themselves, the memories allow the people involved to create identity. Monuments are part of the people's heritage which carries information about the people and their cultural pride. Tampering with monuments is tantamount to tampering with the memory for which they were built or left by society.

In a typical African traditional society, cultural values, belief systems and historical information are not virtually documented. These are written in the hearts of traditional Africans who transfer them accordingly through oral tradition in most cases (Ugwu, 2014). Hence, oral tradition has been found to be one of the major transistors of the African cultural past. That notwithstanding, the activities of westernization, materialism, acculturation, culture diffusion and wanton neglect of culture and traditional values have facilitated necessary and unnecessary modifications of these traditional values and histories which were not originally written but documented in the hearts of men. Forgetfulness, death and in some cases debility, on the part of these men and women who are the moving houses of culture, tradition and histories result in the loss of memory which is always hardly replaceable. When such pieces of information are lost as a result of these factors, society turns into a floating ball with little or no base. The implication is that upcoming generations would face culture and identity crisis amongst other negative consequences. Crisis in culture, identity and history do not consolidate sustainable society in a typical African state.

Monuments stand tall in such scenarios in rescuing the lost past through embodiment of a people's cultural values, traditions and histories. In most cases, monuments have stood to impart knowledge of culture and traditional values, histories and identities to future generations when human carriers are incapacitated or absent. Notable examples will be needful at this juncture. The Egyptian pyramids are amongst the standing edifices in the world that have so much historical relevance to the younger generations more than the documented sources. The historical past of the world economic development is embedded in this ancient edifice. In Nigeria for instance, Chief Nwokolo's ancient palace stands to tell the future generation not only the story of a great man who once ruled the community, but also their romance with the colonial masters at whose instance he was made a paramount chief. The demise of this monument through pressures from threats of varying degrees would constitute grave damage to the preserved history and memory of the people. This will undermine the mnemonic relevance of monuments as a living heritage of the people.

Improving the state of safety and security for monuments in Nigeria

The following are some other relevant and more active measures that will complement the existing safety and security measures. First is the provision of collaborative Security Network in which the community vigilante, monument

guards and the Nigerian Police Force will work together to ensure the safety of tourists to the site and security of heritage attractions. This arrangement could be initiated by the NCMM or any other relevant body. This measure can be replicated at Omo-ukwu Temple Asaga-Ohafia and Chief Okoronji house at Arochukwu both in Abia State and other parts of Nigeria. Second, the institution of rescue operations at these monuments by the National Commissions for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) should be seen as sacrosanct. Such an arrangement should be on ground to ensure safely evacuating both lives and heritage attractions in the monument during emergency situations. During field observations and interview sessions some staff of the NCMM asserted that no such arrangement was made for the monument. Same is applicable to other monuments studied. It is expected that NCMM should expedite action towards making arrangements in this regard.

In addition, periodic fumigation is another needful measure towards safeguarding the monument from attack by ants and rodents. This is very important considering the unkempt nature of Chief Odo Nwokolo's palace , Ukehe. Such periodic fumigations will scare away these wild animals from the site and ensure both the safety of visitors to the site and security of heritage attractions. In applying this measure, care should be taken to avert any negative effect of the chemical both on human health and heritage attractions. This measure is equally necessary in virtually all the monuments studied in the course of this study. Finally, there is also need for periodic orientation of the host community. Previous studies have revealed that amongst the major threats to heritage sites at rural areas in this part of the world is hostility from the members of the host community arising from ignorance and misinterpretation of information about heritage sites (Ekechukwu, 2008; Nwankwo, 2012; and EzeUzomaka, 2014). Periodic orientation will therefore help to bridge the communication gap that may be created between heritage sites and members of the host communities. The programmes should be organized by the management of NCMM in collaboration with the leadership of the communities and representatives of different socio-cultural groups in the community. Apart from the orientation, members of the host community should equally be engaged on the site as staff, casual staff, labourers, etc.

Conclusion

Monuments are embodiments of the people's history and are of immense value for historical reconstruction and sustainability of culture and tradition. Any monument destroyed is a memory lost that may not be recovered. The need to preserve such monuments as a living heritage of a people is therefore pertinent. Okpoko (n.d.) is of the opinion that relevant academic courses should be designed to manage African heritage resources, including monuments. As part of efforts to protect the heritage resources, the NCMM needs to continue her

ongoing efforts at inventorization/documentation of the rich cultural heritage of the country (tangible or intangible, movable or immovable). This effort entails the creation of National Register of historic cultural property where detailed information on all the registered items will be documented. Arinze (1990) is of the opinion that registered/documented cultural heritage should also be recorded in film/videos and carefully stored in the archives or the museums while the documentation of monuments should include detailed drawing to scale of each monument (Arinze, 1990 in Okpoko, n.d. p, 39-40).

There are quite a number of ways through which monuments can be preserved. The most significant amongst them, as Okpoko (n.d) suggested, is the use of enlightenment programmes and government policies. The aim is to educate the general public on the values of these items of heritage and the roles they play in nation building by promoting national unity and identity. Promulgation of laws and regulations will help to reduce the willful or indiscriminate destruction of the rich cultural heritage property. We had earlier discussed the significance of ground patrol (i.e. surveillance and monitoring of sites and monuments which involves mounting day and night guards around them). Moreover, they can be fenced to restrict movements of people close to them. Some are located in inhabited areas, which make them easily accessible, but when located in an abandoned area, protecting them *in situ* cannot be easily guaranteed. In such a situation, the objects/structures can be moved to a safe environment and then replaced on the site with replicas so as to ensure the survival of the original features. Damaged monuments can also be treated or repaired using conservation ethics- i.e. either through preservation or by restoration.

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