

# International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 9 (1), S/No 32, JANUARY, 2019: 69-79

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v9i1.7>

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## Nationalising Intangible Cultural Heritage in Nigeria for Optimised Cultural Tourism: The *Zangbeto* Model

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### Abstract

This paper evaluates developments in the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) discourse with particular reference to Nigeria, with a view to identifying challenges to its proper conservation and management on the one hand, and projecting its potential for optimised cultural tourism on the other. Along with an overview of the ICH industry in Nigeria, the *Zangbeto* masked tradition of the Ogu of south-western Nigeria was proposed as an example of the nation's many intangible cultural heritage models and expressions that could be engineered through nationalisation for enhanced cultural tourism, national development and unity, and international collaboration. Through a triangulation of the phenomenological and case study approaches, complemented by a hermeneutical investigation of some significant themes on the subject, this paper explored the background to the UNESCO Convention on ICH and the attendant conceptual developments and critical junctures in the ICH discourse. It also examined the issue of ICH's under representation in micro and macro strategies for social and economic development, reconceptualise nationalisation to accommodate specific anthropological concerns, and went on to propose a nationalisation-based analysis and management framework for the celebration, evaluation, effective conservation, preservation and management of Nigeria's ICH with the *Zangbeto* tradition as a cultural model.

**Key Words:** Nationalisation; *Zangbeto*; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Cultural Tourism; Analysis and Management Frameworks.

### Introduction

The cultural heritage discourse in Nigeria has been more about sights and monuments than about values, knowledge systems, and other *intangible* elements. This, perhaps, explains why among the plethora of its intangible cultural heritage forms, only four are on the UNESCO's

*Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* (as of October, 2018), namely, *Argungu* International Fishing and Cultural Festival, *Ijele* Masquerade, the *Ifa* Divination System, and the Oral Heritage of *Gelede* found also in Benin and Togo; with a fifth, the *Kwagh-Hir* theatrical performance from the Benue region currently undergoing the nomination process. Meanwhile, *intangible cultural heritage* (ICH) has acquired a new place of prominence within the spheres of academic discourses and cultural tourism developments. Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) – whether localised in their import and value content, or anchored on wider universal contexts with meta-cultural significance (Spanish Institute of Cultural Heritage, 2011) – is the authentic reflection of a people’s collective spiritual identity; a dependable portrayer of their relationship with a cultural ecology and the larger universe, and their approach to the exigencies of human existence. It occupies a position of spatio-temporal primacy in a people’s social memory that makes it the ‘soft’ version of tangible cultural heritage. Besides, the expanding scopes of global cultural tourism, cultural diplomacy, and other forms of cultural interaction and consumption have intensified the importance of ICH more than anything else, as key to more profound insights into cultures and areas of destination (McKercher & Du Cros, 2002, p. 83).

Nigeria, a party to the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of ICH, is also a giant in the EMEA (Europe, Middle East, and Africa) cultural region, with both the potential and the onus of becoming a preferred cultural tourism destination. However, though successive governments have acknowledged the wealth of the nation’s cultural diversity, there has been a degree of uncertainty or indecisiveness about how to manage this diversity, and what to project as a *Nigerian* culture within the ambits of internal policy and foreign cultural diplomacy. The perennial plagues of mutual suspicion and division along ethnic and pseudo-religious frontiers in the country have left the cultural heritage industry and many other resource bases grossly fragmented. The combined upshots of negative ethnicity and religious disharmony on the one hand, and political instability and social disunity on the other have also constituted major contributors to the flagrant underdevelopment of its cultural heritage and tourism industries. The relatively constant duplication of ministerial roles occasioned by the creation of new Federal Ministries and/or merging and suppressing existent ones are additional exacerbating factors.

Moreover, the Heritage Division of Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (FMIC), especially the Department of Cultural Industries supervises and administers the operational mechanism of Nigeria’s heritage industry in addition to guaranteeing its effectiveness. It also has the specific mandate of seeing to the ‘Development of tangible and intangible Cultural Heritage including development of traditional festivals of the nation’ (<http://fmic.gov.ng/about-us/departments/cultural-industries-heritage/>), but there appears to be arrant deficiencies in the framework for appropriate intellectual analysis of Nigeria’s ICH items, and the formulation of suitable strategies for their effective exploration, conservation, preservation, and management in line with standard best practices. This discourse is an attempt at some intellectual and administrative sensitisation of concerned persons on this quandary.

### **Understanding the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage**

From the initial moments of what has been termed the “anthropologisation” of the cultural heritage discourse (Vecco, 2010; Alivizatou, 2008, p. 48; Butler, 2006), when perspectives on cultural heritage shifted from objects and domains to persons and perceptions, the ICH rhetoric has engaged two major frontiers – intellectual and pragmatic. The intellectual frontier concerns conceptual developments and theoretical critical junctures, while the pragmatic

frontier encapsulates practical issues and challenges in conservation and management strategies. In between, however, lies a third frontier regarding persistent technical, logistical, and theoretical challenges in implementing international conventions at regional, sub-regional, and national levels.

What could arguably be termed the first major critical juncture came with the creation by UNESCO, of the “Section for the Non-Physical Heritage”, with a “Committee of Experts on the Safeguarding of Folklore” in 1982 (Bouchenaki, 2004, p. 7). The “Recommendation on the Protection of Traditional Culture and Folklore” (UNESCO, 1989), a document that emerged from this creation was quite unpopular, even among state parties partly because it had proved inadequate in describing some cultural realities. Consequently, and apart from commanding minimal normative strength, it could not stand the taste of time (Bortolotto, 2007).

The launching of two programmes by the UNESCO in 1993 and 1998 as a follow-up on the 1989 Recommendation signified some equally important critical junctures in the movement towards the institutionalisation and universalisation of the ICH concept. The first, on the “Living Human Treasures”, was in recognition that human skills and not mere objects constitute the reservoir of cultural meaning; and the second on the “Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”, was specifically aimed at broadening the scope of understanding of world’s diverse cultural identities and heritage. These programmes resulted in the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2001), and the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2001) respectively.

Another critical juncture and a more aggressive and circumspect sensitization and mobilisation of concerned parties on the profound essence of ICH was the *Istanbul Declaration* on “Intangible Cultural Heritage – a Mirror of Cultural Diversity” adopted by the Third Round Table of Ministers of Culture (UNESCO, 2002). The meeting’s *Discussion Guidelines*, a two-part document contained the conceptual development and expert scrutiny of the notion of ICH, tracing the journey from the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore, down to the two international meetings in January and June 2002 in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) and Paris respectively, to work towards the international convention on ICH (UNESCO, 2002). The more critical and decisive moment in ICH discourse came with the emergence of the UNESCO Convention on ICH (2003), which today constitutes the standard binding international instrument on the subject, with 177 state parties – as at 22-02-2018 – (UNESCO, 2018). Otherwise, and as the document itself indicates, there was “no binding multilateral instrument ... for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage” (UNESCO, 2003). Article two of the Convention defined ICH as: “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.”

The document goes on to identify the various expressions of ICH to include “*performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship,*” among others (UNESCO, 2003). Significant and widely accepted as this convention has been, it, has also provoked several intellectual disputes and arguments bordering on the dialectical and specialized relationship, as well as the semiotic interface in the notions of “intangible,” “culture,” and “heritage,” as key concepts, and the realities they represent. “Intangible”, for instance, with such conceptual connotations as elusiveness and vagueness, among others, has triggered the most diverse sentiments especially among cognitive anthropologists (Beller& Bender, 2015; Blaunt, 2011;

Bennardo & Kronenfeld, 2016), who argued that culture itself is essentially intangible, consisting of ideas and non-material cognitive patterns that reside in the human mind. But perhaps the greater challenge revolves around determining, what rightly belongs in the realms of *heritage*, and how aspects of cultural heritage acquire the status of universal relevance so as to pertain to all humanity without compromising their meaning and value, or undermining divergent cultural sensitivities.

### **Issues and Challenges in Conservation and Management Strategies**

Challenges in the conservation and management strategies for ICH constitute the pragmatic frontier of the discourse. Most or all of intangible cultural elements and practices, for instance, lose their potency and meaning once they are estranged from their human carriers and practitioners. This means that conservation and management efforts require much more than *storage* and *localisation*, needing emphases on anthropocentric dimensions, including the lives and living conditions of the people who produce and bear them. Three factors: human expertise, community participation, and political will of governments, have been identified as key challenges. Though both the UNESCO Convention (UNESCO 2003) and its Operational Directives (UNESCO 2008, Art. 89.) *encourage* State Parties to act creatively and decisively in these regards, one and a half decade into the Convention, the challenges seem to persist, possibly because state parties were merely “encouraged” rather than strictly mandated.

Concerning the involvement of cultural communities, the 2003 Convention not only advocates for “respect for the intangible cultural heritage of the communities, groups and individuals concerned” (UNESCO 2003, Art. 1), but also emphasizes on their “participation” and active involvement (UNESCO 2003, Art. 15). There have, however, been inconclusive, and sometimes conflicting approaches to the modalities for these (Blake, 2009; Chirikure, et al., 2010; Chirikure & Pwiti, 2008; Kuruk, 2004).

The political will of governments is another significant element in the advancement of the ICH industry. As at August, 2018, 51 of the 178 State Parties to the 2003 Conventions are in Africa alone. Articles 11 to 14 of the Convention charge these State parties with the responsibilities of taking inventories of the ICH items in their territories, educating the society, raising popular awareness, building capacity, and fostering safeguarding and management strategies that ensure collective participation. However, apart from the usual challenges of ‘translation and interpretation’ in efforts to align the Conventions’ provisions with municipal laws and local institutions (Bendix, et al., 2013, pp. 11-20), the political will of national governments, apart from being sometimes beclouded by short-sightedness and regime tenure interests, is never fully disentangled from the personal interests, ethnicity and, often, the religious beliefs of government officials. This is usually further exacerbated, especially among developing nations, by ambiguous policies on resource control, improper devolution of power and functions among the various tiers of government, undue external political and economic influences from dominant economies and their agents; and is typically reflected in poor educational policies, apathy towards research, and lack of commitment to indigenous perspectives and values (Okure, 2015).

### **Nigeria’s Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2003 UNESCO Convention**

Perhaps the most reliable source of “official” and authentic information on the current state of the ICH in Nigeria, in the absence of a comprehensive national list, is the Cultural Industries and Heritage department of the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (FMIC). It disclosed that:

Over the years 12 major festivals have been identified across the 6 geo-political zones of the federation to be developed and upgraded to international festivals; these are Argungu fishing festival, Osun Osogbo festival, Mmawu festival, Eyo festival, Oju-Ode Oba festival, Durbar, New yam festival, Keana salt festival, Ekpe heritage festival and Bade fishing festival (FMIC, 2018).

While only 10 festivals are mentioned, this is an official but gross under-representation of the variety of popular and some other rituals, languages, crafts, festivals and communal celebrations, knowledge systems, symbolic representations, and other intangible cultural elements spread across the more than the 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, that have shaped and defined the cultural identities of the communities associated with them.

### **ICH and Nigeria's Socio-economic Development Agenda**

The gross under-representation of ICH in the micro and macro socio-economic development agenda of Nigeria owes to such factors as ethnic militancy and insurgency, terrorism, environmental degradation, low skill base, and under resourcing that have been the bane of the nation's cohesion and economic progress. Other factors, which have also affected the cultural tourism industry, include lack of cultural unity and proper national orientation, undue tension between religion and culture, lack of interest in long-term investments by successive government regimes, misconceptions about civilisation (whereby development tends to mean substituting the indigenous with the foreign), absence of clear policy directions, and lack of political (policy) continuity. Instead, the supervision of cultural heritage and tourism matters tends to be the victim of functional ambiguities and duplicated roles in the various departments of Nigeria's FMIC. For instance, the department for *International Cultural Relations* supervises the collation of the nation's cultural resources, making an inventory thereof, and projecting same to the international community; *Tourism Promotions and Co-operations* with its twin divisions of *international tourism promotion* and *international tourism co-operation* ensures that tourism contributes meaningfully to the country's economic development; *Entertainment and Creative Services* promotes and coordinates affairs of the entertainment and creative services industries, including the National Troup of Nigeria and the National Theatre with a view to enhancing the national GDP, wealth creation and employment for the youth, while the *Cultural Industries and Heritage* department, with its three divisions of *Cultural Industries*, *Heritage*, and *Innovations and Entrepreneurship* initiates and supports the process of job creation, wealth generation and empowering of the vulnerable groups.

### **Reconceptualising Nationalisation**

Nationalisation has largely been associated with state control, that is, with the disengagement of foreign or private control from the (economic) products and political structures of a sovereign state and their subsequent control by the state and its citizens (Frynas, 2000; Genova, 2010; Caramani, 2004; Guriev, et al., 2011; Klinghard, 2010). The emphasis is usually on ownership based on power of control, and the expected material benefits, in which case an economic product becomes 'a national commodity that belongs to all' (Ukiwo, 2008, p. 78). However, away from this rather technical and restrictive understanding of the concept, which denotes government acquisition and control, nationalisation also has a more social scientific nuance that connotes a systematic and methodical approach to public patrimonies, especially in relation to socio-historical heritage, national identities, and nation building (Kuzio, 2001; Vecco, 2010; Carretero, et al., 2013; Moore, 2015; Tokoley, 2015). Though not synonymous with patriotism, this rendition tends to merely raise a nationalistic consciousness

and a sense of collective ownership of heritage that would imply recognising the whole or aspects of intangible culture as National Heritage, and would merely constitute the initial threshold of the subject. Veritable *nationalisation*, while not overlooking the originating cultural base, will have to transcend the “community-based cultural heritage resource management (COBACHREM) model” (Keitumetse, 2016, p. 89 ff.), for instance, and place ICH on the scale of national asset and priority. In the case of Nigeria, such rhetoric as tribe, geo-political zones, and their affiliate vocabulary would only have to be assumed than be accorded any major significance. Nationalisation of ICH should involve a specific and deliberate action by the Nigerian modern state to translate into action such provisions as are entrenched in the legislative list of the Constitution concerning the role and mandates of the Federal, States, and Local governments in developing and promoting the nations cultures, backed by Acts of the National Assembly and other particular legislations on the matter. It must, in the present context transcend provincial and insular or hidebound considerations, including the very idea of common ancestry, and see ICH from the perspective of the national domain, much in the same way as the national currency, among others. Consequently, by *nationalisation* of ICH I specifically envisage *a process whereby the whole or aspects of intangible culture that is recognised and celebrated as a heritage in any part and/or region of the country is accorded a national status, such that it is included in the national ICH list and is reflected in the planning and execution of the national non-fiscal calendar, and with appropriate budgetary implications.* This is different from cultural nationalism (Nielsen, 1999), and is far from implying *cultural primordialism* (Smith, 2000). Instead, it requires that the government, especially at the Federal level, remodels its cultural policy framework and becomes an “‘architect’ or ‘engineer’ ” rather than a “‘hands-off’ nurturer or facilitator,” of ICH and associated institutions which, far from suggesting the re-invention of an existent intangible culture, obliges the national government to accord ICH “a core priority for government policy and expenditure,” rather than see it as “a (budgetary) footnote or *marginal* responsibility” (Craik, 2007, pp. 35-36). Obvious challenges will emerge from the share magnitude and staggering number of ICH items, but there is a way of classifying them based, for example, on chronological primacy, geometrical spread, annual seasons, and economic potential, among others, which would also form the basis for formulating their conservation and management strategies. The challenges of recognising and managing Nigeria’s cultural diversity are minimal compared to the tragedy and dangers inherent in neglecting or ignoring them.

### **Understanding the Zangbeto Tradition**

The *Zangbeto* masked tradition occupies the spheres of indigenous knowledge forms, informal social control, and traditional spirituality. Its unique symbolic representations, musical expressions, and other creative skills significantly transcend local parochial ambiances. Though widely explored from diverse interest and disciplinary perspectives (Okure, 2016; 2015; Hunsu, 2011; Oyefolu, 2010; Messawaku et al., 2000), It still represents one of the many ICH forms in Nigeria that have been under galvanized and their symbolisms and cultural relevance under estimated. It originates from the Ogu of the Aja cultural group occupying the West African regions spanning from Porto Novo and Weme in Benin Republic to the Yewa communities of Ogun State in Nigeria (including parts of Abeokuta and Ifo (Okure, 2015). Various narratives are found concerning the origins of the cult (Okure, 2015; 2016; Hunsu, 2011; Oyefolu, 2003; Oyesakin, 1994) bearing a mixture of belief in reincarnation and the immortality of ancestral spirits, as well as elements of historicity and myth.

Today, *Zangbeto* has acquired immense complexity and sophistication essentially deriving from the Ogu traditional cosmology, religious perceptions, indigenous knowledge and vigilantism; serving as an agent of socialization and crime prevention. It has an assortment of colourful costumes (*zanho*), which once made and dedicated, acquire magical properties such that a strand of material (*zanshan*) taken from them, could be, and is often used as a totem to secure property and other items against vandalism. Today, *Zangbeto* retains a cultural form that is colourful and entertaining but also fortified with mystery.

In Agido Quarters of Badagry, for instance, *Zangbeto* still remains both an active element in the life of the community and a powerful cultural heritage, with various masked forms. These include the *Zanholu*(King of the night), the “king” of all masked *Zangbeto*, believed to inhabit the aquatic realms, appearing only once in three years during the ritual *Zangbetofestival*; the *Ataho*, more commonly seen during cultural exhibitions and local community festivals; the *Oho yin-yin Ataho*, which though less complex in form is more “youthful”, with spectacular dance moves; and the *Ohosi*, the “beautiful warrior” with horns of breaded hair, also called *Ogbo*(Goat) due to its “warrior-like recalcitrance and seemingly stubborn behaviour”, which symbolically portrays the elements of gender inclusiveness within the cult, and the asexual nature of ancestral spirits (Okure, 2016, pp. 17-21).

**Analysis and Management Framework**

Any meaningful analysis and management framework for ICH presupposes an accessible national inventory with a taxonomy of intangible heritage items utilising such elements as historicity, chronological interval, cultural spread, and economic and sustainable development potential, among others. Such an inventory also requires a typology of ICH elements consistent with the model in the UNESCO Convention’s definition. The framework would also require specifications and projections on the ICH’s tourism potentials, targeted consumer bases and their socio-economic characteristics, expert sub-sector involvement, and the levels and manners of government’s involvement. It could also contain a multifaceted technological (system of database and search engine, multimedia content development, software applications design, etc.) blueprint for its storage, preservation, and accessibility to various categories of users (Artese& Gagliardi, 2014). This would allow for extensive and evolving expert inputs from scholars and other stakeholders that will continually strengthen the data base and ensure the dynamism of the ICH resource warehouse. What I propose here, however, is an impetus for something of a national scale that is less complex, but broad enough to include the essential ICH items in Nigeria, and remain accessible to scholars and cultural industry experts, tourists, and other categories of interested persons. The framework could be designed as a single module that incorporates all the above elements, or as two separate unites, one with the elements of identification and analysis (Table 1 below), and another with the elements of exploration and management (Table 2 below).

**Table 1: A Framework for Identification and Analysis for *Zangbeto***

ICH Item	Category/ Type	Historicity	Calendar Of Celebration	Cultural Domain	Associated Artefacts	Cultural Space
Zangbeto	Performing Art, Ritual & Festival, Oral Tradition, Knowledge and Nature Practice, Traditional Craftsmanship	17 <sup>th</sup> Century AD	August/ September (Summer), Triennial Major festival	Ogu, Badagry South-Western Nigeria	<i>Zanho</i> (the masked costume); The Drum	Sacred Grove; Local and Community Shrines

Of critical importance in this framework are the elements of identification and analysis (Table 1) that encompass the descriptive components of the ICH item. For instance, the *Zangbeto* tradition falls into more than one of the designated UNESCO categories. It is a *performing art* that involves specialised music, dance, and other acts which demonstrate the powers and potencies of the Ogu ancestral presence. Through its *rituals* and *festivals*, it strengthens communal bonds and sustains the links between the people and the spiritual realms of ancestral spirits. As a custodian and repository of *Ogural traditions* it preserves and transmits social values, thereby aiding social control. It also traverses the spaces of *traditional knowledge* and *nature practice* through its ability to detect and manage the elements and forces that are inimical to the people’s wellbeing, and finally, its costumes, *zanho* (house of the night) and associated artefacts are an exceptional product of *traditional craftsmanship*.

Table 2: A Framework for the Exploration, Preservation and Management of *Zangbeto*

ICH Item	Socio-Economic Character	Economic & Sustainable Development Potential	Expert Sub-Sector Involved	Level of Government Involvement/ Sponsorship	Targeted Consumer Base	Preservation Domain/ Repository
<i>Zangbeto</i>	Inclusive/ Nature Friendly	High	Cultural Studies and ICT Experts, Cultural Industries, Tourism Organisations	Federal State Local	Local & Foreign Tourists, Scholars	Museums, Institutional Libraries, Local Shrines, Local community specialists

The *Zangbetotradition* can be characterised as an inclusive and eco-friendly cultural practice owing to its gender inclusiveness, openness to community participation, and respect for and harmony with the ecosystem. It is also supportive and benevolent towards the lucrateness of the tourism industry. From the economic and sustainable development perspectives, the masked tradition has high value yielding prospects arising from its resilience and adaptability to various topographical, climatic and general environmental contexts, which makes its display and performance feasible all year round. Besides, every material item and artefact associated with the masquerade and its performance can be replicated and made available for purchase as souvenirs by tourists and cooperate entities for museums and galleries without any major disruption to the ecosystem. The *Zangbetoc*celebration could benefit from the professional know-how of cultural studies experts, tourism organizations, and cultural industries for packaging and marketing. On the other hand, these sub-sectors could immensely benefit from the organization’s uniqueness for the increase of both their knowledge base and product repository. Since nationalisation cannot be effective without the involvement of the *emic* machinery, local governments will have to work with specialised indigenous communities to evolve and entrench viable modalities for exploration, preservation, and management.

As a unique cultural element with an immense functional value, *Zangbetoe*asily commands a broad consumer base that could include local and foreign tourists, and scholars. The traditional repository and preservation domains for the core intangible elements of the masked cult are primarily the local indigenous community specialists, while its emblems and associated artefacts have mainly been preserved at the local community shrines within Ogu domains, and in some cases, a designated sacred grove. Currently, there have been attempts



by some departments in academic institutions, like the Lagos State University's (LASU) department of sociology, to initiate the collection and preservation of the costumes and material artefacts associated with Nigerian masked organisations, including *Zangbeto*.

### Conclusion

The predominant thrust of this discourse has been the exigency for government's prioritisation of Nigeria's ICH enterprise, and the need for renewed and more committed intellectual involvement by anthropologists, museologists, IT experts, government MDAs, and individual stakeholders, with a view to initiating some form of national reawakening and attracting global attention to the subject. It would in turn prompt the generation of new ideas and modalities for the advancement of the country's cultural tourism industry, while broadening the spectrum for expertise among young and emerging scholars and entrepreneurs. The present quests for alternative income generating avenues through economic diversification, and job creating ventures could find some long-term solutions in an aggressive national commitment to the pursuit of the ICH scheme and the promotion of cultural tourism. The current scanty ICH items on the UNESCO list should be reviewed and upgraded to reflect their overarching impact, overall patrimonial significance, and historical import to the nation. The critical internal structural and ideological hindrances, ranging from specious policies to negative collective and individual attitudes that currently adversely affect the vibrancy of the cultural tourism industry need to be discarded and supplanted by greater proficiency and resourcefulness. Consequently, I have emphasised the conviction that nationalisation, properly conceived and implemented, remains a major step towards effective conservation, preservation, and management of Nigeria's ICH for enhanced cultural tourism, even in the 21st century.

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