

# ● THE BIO-POLITICS OF CORONA-VIRUS & HOW IT HAS ALTERED NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES (NTCV)



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## **Abstract**

*The idea of biopolitics formulated by Michel Foucault is a very important innovation on how changes can take place concerning the ways power and coercion are exercised. This has become visible in the relationship which has occurred between nation states and the biological element of human life, which leaves the states with no option than to begin to exercise the management of spheres of social life, like an attempt to guarantee the health of the population. Faced with coronavirus, This work intends to align with the argument posed by Agamben suggesting that our society no longer believes in anything, but naked life. People are prepared to sacrifice anything as long as they don't fall sick.*

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## **Key words-**

*Biopolitics, Coronavirus, Culture, Family, Tradition, Value.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The idea of biopolitics as formulated by Michel Foucault is a very important contribution to our understanding of changes that may occur regarding ways whereby power and coercion are exercised. Biopolitics has become a key concept in critical discourses of security governance. This can be seen in the new relationship which has occurred between nation states and the biological element of human life, which leaves the states with no option than to begin to exercise the management of spheres of social life, like an attempt to guarantee the health of the population. Biopolitics can be considered and regarded as an oxymoron, that is, a combination of two terms.<sup>1</sup> It has been imagined that politics in the classical sense is about common action and decision making and is exactly what transcends the necessities of bodily experience and biological facts and opens up the realm of freedom and human interaction. Hence, biopolitics can be said to

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<sup>1</sup>Biopolitics carries multiple meanings. Laurette T. Liesen& Mary B. Walsh, *The Competing Meanings of "Biopolitics" in Political Science: Biological and Postmodern Approaches to Politics*, 31POLITICS & THE LIFE SCIENCES. 2, 5-7(2012).

denote a politics that essentially deals with life.<sup>2</sup> Biopolitics has a strong bound to rational decision making and democratic organization of social life.<sup>3</sup>

Biopolitics can be imagined to be a result of contemporary biotechnological innovations<sup>4</sup> marking the beginning of a new era, like that of the current coronavirus pandemic, which is a deadly respiratory virus. In this new era, biopolitics aims at the administration and regulation of life processes on the level of population.<sup>5</sup> Faced with coronavirus, Nigeria, like most nations of the world have exercised population control in order to curtail its spread. This has led to an expansion of all forms of state intervention and control such as, state lockdowns, social distancing, and so on. The nature of the population, for instance, birth rate, death rate<sup>6</sup> and even disease is capable of being influenced by specific measures in order to see to its effective management and control.<sup>7</sup> In this way therefore, the nature of the population in relation to this article is the coronavirus disease as well as its increasing death rate which has the tendency of being influenced by measures for its management and curtailment leading to the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

Through the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria, it has become possible to define norms, establish standards and determine average values. It has also become possible, through this process to govern individuals by practices of correction, exclusion, normalization, discipline, therapeutics and optimization.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, the Nigerian government, through biopolitiking, in order to curtail the spread of coronavirus which has spread through the nooks and crannies of the country had put in place several measures in order to manage the lives of the population. These measures includes; restriction of movements, both inter and infra state, avoidance of mass gatherings, be it religious, social or ceremonial, shutting down of all schools and markets, closure of boarders, social distancing and also, the work from home order to those in the working class. The overall interpretation of all these measures in Nigeria is

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<sup>2</sup>THOMAS LEMKE, BIOPOLITICS: AN ADVANCED INTRODUCTION 9-14(New York University Press 2011). Biopolitics is the political power that has taken over the care of biological life. Dario Padovan, Biopolitics and Social Control of the Multitude,9 DEMOCRACY & NATURE. 473, 473-478(2003).

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Lemke, From State Biology to the Government of Life: Historical Dimensions and Contemporary Perspectives of "Biopolitics", 10 JOURNAL OF CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY. 421, 421-423(2010).

<sup>4</sup>Eva Slesingerova, Biopower Imagined: Biotechnological Art and Life Engineering,5791SOCIAL SCIENCE INFORMATION. 59, 59-65(2018).

<sup>5</sup>Biopolitics intervenes at the level of population. Michael Laurence, Biopolitics and the State Regulation of Human Life, OXFORD BIBLIOGRAPHIES (2016). <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756223/obo-9780199756223-0170.xml>.

<sup>6</sup>Laurence, Supra note 5.

<sup>7</sup>Different modes of control, discipline and surveillance emerged aiming at producing disciplined and normal individuals. Danielle Guizzo& Lara Virgo de Lima, Foucault's Contributions for Understanding Power Relations in British Classical Political Economy, 16ECONOMIA194, 194-197 (2015).

<sup>8</sup>This is a kind of power that emerges much later according to Foucault, which care after the maintenance of life as well as the wellbeing of the population. Id. at 195-197.

<sup>9</sup>LEMKE, Supra note2.



that everyone should stay in their respective homes without interacting with anyone.<sup>10</sup>

All these attempts and measures regarding the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria has affected immensely the Nigeria Traditional cultural Value (NTCV) system which is deeply rooted in customs as defined by traditional family roles.<sup>11</sup> Nigerians tend to be more relaxed about physical contact. People of the same gender will often touch each other on the arms or back whilst having conversation, and this is considered perfectly normal.<sup>12</sup>

However, with the coming of the biopolitics of coronavirus, the issue of social distancing has created a great barrier which most Nigerians are finding it difficult to adapt to, and according to Agamben, bare life and naked life has become the order of the day as long as people don't interact with one another. Other human beings are seen as potential contaminants to be avoided at all costs or, at least to keep a distance of at least one meter.<sup>13</sup> The naked life, brought by the agencies of coronavirus is against the Nigerian traditional cultural values.

This study discusses the effect which the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria has had, and is having on the NTCV. The biopolitics of coronavirus having immediate and direct effect on the NTCV includes; nationwide lockdown, social distancing as well as the total ban on group gatherings be it religious or ceremonial. The result shows that in the event of a very prolonged biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria, which is very imminent, the entire structure making up the NTCV will be completely eroded. Many Nigerians would have become adapted to the ways and manners brought about by the biopolitics of coronavirus. Thus, according to this study might have a significant effect on how we relate as a people within the society.

Consequently, this study is divided into seven parts comprising; the introduction, the coronavirus disease, what is meant by biopolitics, the part dealing with the actual biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria, then the section relating to the Nigerian traditional family values, another caption regarding the evaluation of the effect of biopolitics of coronavirus on the Nigerian traditional cultural values, and lastly, the conclusion and recommendation aspect.

<sup>10</sup>In an effort to curtail the spread of the coronavirus, the federal government of Nigeria has consistently, since 23 March 2020, impose several lockdowns on Abuja, Lagos and Ogun States. Other states' governors has followed suit locking down their various states and maintain the stay home order. TofeAyeni, Coronavirus: Nigeria's varied Responses to Controlling Covid-19, THE AFRICAN REPORT, May 10, 2020, (July. 14, 2020, 10:47 AM) <https://www.theafricareport.com/27773/coronavirus-nigerias-varied-responses-to-controlling-covid-19/>.

<sup>11</sup>Values are rooted in the family as the basic institution and primary agent of socialization. OlayinkaAkanle&Olanrewaju A. Olutayo, Modernity, McDonaldisation and Family Values in Nigeria,5 THE NIGERIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY45, 45-48 (2007).

<sup>12</sup>A *Guide to Nigeria- Etiquette, Customs and Culture*, (July. 14, 2020, 12:00 PM) <https://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/guide-to-nigeria-etiquette-customs-culture-business>

<sup>13</sup>Gordon Hull, Why we are not Bare Life: What's Wrong with Agamben Thoughts on Coronavirus, (March. 23, 2020, 3:20 PM)<https://www.newappsblog.com/2020/03/why-we-are-not-bare-life-whats-wrong-with-agambens-thoughts-on-coronavirus.html>.

## II. CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

Coronaviruses are group of related RNA viruses that causes diseases in mammals and birds. In humans, these viruses causes respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal. Mild illnesses include some cases of common cold (which is also caused by other viruses, especially, rhinoviruses), while more lethal varieties can causes SARS, MERS and COVID-19.<sup>14</sup>

Coronaviruses vary significantly in risk factor. Some can kill more than 30% of those infected, such as MERS-COV, and some are relatively harmless such as common cold.<sup>15</sup> Transmission of respiratory infectious disease like COVID-19 can occur as a result of the presence of pathogens in the expiratory droplets which are large enough to settle around infected individuals. This was the views of Carl Flugge in 1887.<sup>16</sup>

These droplets, which has been classified into large and small by William F. Wells in the 1930s, are capable of being emitted upon exhalation. Consequently, these droplets mediates transmission of respiratory diseases. Recently, it has been discovered that exhalations, sneezes and coughs consists of mucosalivary droplets which are primarily made of a multiphase turbulent gas cloud that entrains ambient airs and traps carriers within it clusters of droplets.<sup>17</sup> These droplets can contaminate surfaces, while the rest remain trapped and clustered in the moving cloud. Eventually, the cloud and its droplet pay load lose momentum and coherence, and the remaining droplet within the cloud evaporate, producing residue droplet that may stay suspended in the air for hours.<sup>18</sup>

In order, therefore, to minimize the risk for disease transmission, the latest World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations for COVID-19 is that healthcare personnel and other staff are advised to maintain a 3-foot (1-m) distance away from anyone showing symptoms of the disease such as coughing and sneezing.<sup>19</sup> The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention recommended a 6-foot (2 arms length) separation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Qun Li et al, Early Transmission Dynamics in Wuhan, China, of Novel Coronavirus-Infected Pneumonia, N. ENGL J MED.(Jan. 29, 2020, 10: 30 AM) Early Transmission Dynamics in Wuhan, China, of Novel Coronavirus-Infected Pneumonia | NEJM.

<sup>15</sup>Anthony R. Fehr &Stanley Perlman, Coronaviruses: an Overview of their Replication and Pathogenesis, RESEARCHGATE. 1, 12 (2015). (10) (PDF) Coronaviruses: An Overview of Their Replication and Pathogenesis (researchgate.net)

<sup>16</sup>Yuguo Li, Basic Route of Transmission of Respiratory Pathogens- A New Proposal for Transmission Categorization based on Respiratory Spray, Inhalation and Touch, 31 PMC. 3, 3-6 (2021).(Jan. 29, 2021) Basic routes of transmission of respiratory pathogens-A new proposal for transmission categorization based on respiratory spray, inhalation, and touch (nih.gov)

<sup>17</sup>Katherine Randall et al, How do we get here: What are Droplets and Aerosols and how far do they go? A Historical Perspective on the Transmission of Respiratory Infectious Diseases, (Apr. 15, 2021) <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3829873>

<sup>18</sup>Yuguo, Supra note 16.

<sup>19</sup>World Health Organization, COVID-19 Advice for the Public: Getting Vaccinated, (Jun. 22, 2021), COVID-19 Vaccines Advice (who.int)

<sup>20</sup>Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, How to Protect Yourself and Others, (Jun. 11, 2021), How to Protect Yourself & Others | CDC



The mode of transmission of this respiratory disease as highlighted above account for the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus disease.<sup>21</sup> Four months after its emergence was reported in Wuhan, China, the virus has blown its wings to over 210 countries of the world including Nigeria. It has infected well over 5 million people and has claimed more than 500,000 lives world over.<sup>22</sup>

This virus represents a unique global challenge due to its contagious and lethal nature. The contagiousness and deadliness of COVID-19 have necessitated drastic action and management to curtail its transmission especially in Nigeria where more than 170,000 people have been infected of the virus and over 2,000 deaths have been recorded as at July, 2021. The acts, management and control to halt the continuous transmission of the disease by the Nigerian government has resulted in the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria.

### III. WHAT IS BIOPOLITICS?

The very idea and notion of biopolitics as formulated by Michael Foucault, has been a very important contribution to our understanding of the changes that might occur as a result of passage to capitalist modernity, especially with regards to ways whereby power and coercion are exercised. From power as a right to life and death that is held by the sovereign, to power as an attempt to guarantee health, productivity and population. This has led to an expansion without precedent, of all forms of state intervention and control.<sup>23</sup>

Biopolitics can then be understood as a political rationality which takes the administration of life and population as its major concern in order to sustain such life as well as see that such life multiplies. Biopower is a way in which biopolitics is put to work in the society.<sup>24</sup> Michael Foucault saw Biopower as a series of events, from theoretical ones to concrete practices, which formed the basis of a new relationship between nation states and their biological elements of human life.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Biopower is a descriptive

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<sup>21</sup>Lydia Bourouiba, Turbulent Gas Clouds and Respiratory Pathogen Emissions Potential Implications for Reducing Transmission of COVID-19, 323JAMAINSIGHTS (Mar. 26, 2020) Turbulent Gas Clouds and Respiratory Pathogen Emissions: Potential Implications for Reducing Transmission of COVID-19 | Infectious Diseases | JAMA | JAMA Network

<sup>22</sup>Chris G. Sibley et al, Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Nationwide Lockdown on Trust Attitude towards Government and Wellbeing, AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (2020) [https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp\\_0000662.pdf](https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp_0000662.pdf) . As July 2021, coronavirus cases has gone up to 193,007,589. The total number of deaths as a result of coronavirus has reached a total of 4,146,092 as at July, 2021. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

<sup>23</sup>Biopolitics denotes social and political power over life. It is also the power of a state over individuals. Social and political power can be used to structure and control human life through biopolitics. Liesen&Walsh, Supra note 1.

<sup>24</sup>Rachal Adams, Michel Foucault: Biopolitics and Biopower Critical Legal Thinking, (May. 10, 2017) <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2017/05/10/michel-foucault-biopolitics-biopower/>

<sup>25</sup>The power over life by the sovereign is Biopower. Gardar Arnason, Biopower (Foucault) in DAN CALLAHAN & PETER SINGER (Eds) ENCYCLOPEDIA OF APPLIED ETHICS 295-99 (2d ed. 2012).

index of the moment when state began to exercise the management of spheres of social life.<sup>26</sup>

In the works of "Society must be Defended"<sup>27</sup> and "History of Sexuality"<sup>28</sup>, Foucault introduces the concept of Biopower, which according to him is critical for the development of capitalism, which helped to ensure the controlled inclusion of the bodies in the production apparatus and adjust the phenomena of the population. Biopower is a technique of rationalization and strict economy of power that must be exercised in the whole system of surveillance.<sup>29</sup>

Faced with the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, majority of nation states have continued to exercise strong sanitary surveillance and population control in order to prevent as well as curtail the spread of the disease. Actions are being taken worldwide to prevent greater death toll associated with the coronavirus disease. Such measures put in place by nation states places us in the domain of Michael Foucault's conceived population management techniques which is focused on how to better the condition of living forces.<sup>30</sup>

The policy responses suggests that these living forces are weak and are in need of protection, both from others and from themselves. Consequently, governments world over have been forced to seize power in the name and under the guise of biopolitics in order to lead the war on the coronavirus, seeking to reinvigorate central authority and to nationalize and unite the societies in the collective struggle for security.<sup>31</sup> The state of emergency that emerged today is one of population management on a territorial grid seen from above and led by the power of experts.<sup>32</sup> This is exactly what is being witnessed today with each country around the world adapting to similar forms of biopolitics.

#### IV. BIOPOLITICS OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) IN NIGERIA

Foucault has called our attention to how power has been able to act on the body, how

<sup>26</sup>The concept of Biopower marks the moment power begins to invest in life. Pedro P. Gomes Pereira, In and around Life. Biopolitics in the Topics, 10 VIBRANT: VIRTUAL BRAZILIAN ANTHROPOLOGY(2013) [https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1809-43412013000200001&script=sci\\_arttext&lng=en](https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1809-43412013000200001&script=sci_arttext&lng=en)

<sup>27</sup>Michael Foucault, *Emdefesta da Sociedade: Curso no College de France (1975/1976)*. Sao Paulo: Martins Fontes. (Jul. 27, 2000) <https://joaacamilopenna.files.wordpress.com/2018/05/foucault-michel-em-defesa-da-sociedade.pdf>

<sup>28</sup>Michael Foucault, *Historia da sexualidade I: a vontade de saber* Rio de Janeiro:Graal; [https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/2940534/mod\\_resource/content/1/Hist%C3%B3ria-da-Sexualidade-1-A-Vontade-de-Saber.pdf](https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/2940534/mod_resource/content/1/Hist%C3%B3ria-da-Sexualidade-1-A-Vontade-de-Saber.pdf)

<sup>29</sup>Francisco R. Ferreira et al, Biopower and Biopolitics in the Field of Food and Nutrition, 28REVISTA DE NUTRI CAO(2015) [https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1415-52732015000100109&script=sci\\_arttext](https://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S1415-52732015000100109&script=sci_arttext)

<sup>30</sup>Clare O'Farrell, Biopolitics and Coronavirus, or don't forget Foucault, FOUCAULT NEWS (Mar.21, 2020)<https://michel-foucault.com/2020/03/22/biopolitics-and-coronavirus-or-dont-forget-foucault-2020/>

<sup>31</sup>Public health is an important element of national security. Menizibeya O. Welcome, The Nigerian Healthcare System: Need for Integrating Adequate Medical Intelligence and Surveillance Systems, 3JOURNAL OF PHARMACY AND BIOALLIED SCIENCES470, 470-478 (2011).

<sup>32</sup>David Chandler, The Coronavirus: Biopolitics of the rise of 'Anthropocene Authoritarianism' 18RUSSIA IN GLOBAL AFFAIRS(Apr-Jun. 2020) <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/coronavirus-authoritarianism/>



inner motives are becoming knowable and how supervision study and surveillance has been able to shape subjectivity. Biopolitics imposes self-control and uniformity, as well as seduces individuals to embrace social ideas that they may not ordinarily have embraced.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, the attitude of the Nigerian government in this era of covid-19 pandemic has showcase the level which any government can go all in an attempt at biopolitics. The current coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak has demonstrated vividly the burden which respiratory disease can impose on an intimately connected society<sup>34</sup> like Nigeria. Consequently, an unprecedented containment and mitigation policies have been implemented by the government of Nigeria in the guise of biopolitics seeking to take charge of the life of Nigerians in the name of health and general wellbeing. The key aim and objective of such policies is to decrease the encounters between infected individuals as well as susceptible ones, so as to reduce and minimize the rate of transmission.<sup>35</sup>

The federal and state governments are taking proactive steps to curtail the spread of the novel coronavirus disease throughout the country. As the country experiences a steady increase in the number of confirmed cases,<sup>36</sup> most restrictions and lockdowns, in the name of biopolitics are being instituted to adequately respond to the pandemic.

On 29 March 2020, the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Mohamadu Buhari, address the nation on the federal government's effort to curtail the spread of COVID-19 within the country. In his speech, he directed a cessation of all movements in Lagos, Ogun and the federal capital territory, Abuja for an initial period of 14 days.<sup>37</sup> There has however been several extension of cessations in these states since the initial one.<sup>38</sup> Every other states in Nigeria soon follow the precedents laid down in Lagos, Ogun and Abuja.<sup>39</sup>

The federal and state governments in Nigeria has taken over the management of the

<sup>33</sup>Amy Borovoy & Li Zhang, *Between Biopolitical Governance and Care: Rethinking Health, Selfhood and Social Welfare in East Asia*, 36 *JOURNAL OF MEDICAL ANTHROPOLOGY* (Jan. 10, 2017) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01459740.2016.1158178> (accessed 27 July 2020).

<sup>34</sup>Bourouiba, *Supra* note 21.

<sup>35</sup>Government's COVID-19 Response Measures, (Mar. 24, 2020). <https://www.pwc.com/ng/en/covid-19/government-covid-19-response-measures.html>

<sup>36</sup>Nigeria, unfortunately confirmed its first case on 27 February 2020. By the morning of 29 March 2020, the total number of confirmed cases stands at 97 and since then, the number of confirmed cases has continue to rise. Abiola Odutola, *President Muhammadu Buhari's Full Speech on COVID-19 Pandemic*, NAIRAMETRICS (Mar. 30, 2020) <https://nairametrics.com/2020/03/29/president-muhammadu-buharis-full-speech-on-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>37</sup>*Id*

<sup>38</sup>Emmanuel A. Benson, *President Muhammadu Buhari's Full Speech on Extended COVID-19 Lockdown*, NAIRAMETRICS (Apr. 13, 2020) <https://nairametrics.com/2020/04/13/president-muhammadu-buharis-full-speech-on-extended-covid-19-lockdown/>

<sup>39</sup>*Id*

lives of the citizens and it appears biopolitics in the name of health is underway. This action is thought necessary in order to curtail the spread of coronavirus disease.<sup>40</sup> Several policies, both legal and regulatory are persistently being rolled out, all in a bid to ensure that the spread of the coronavirus is reduced to the barest minimum.<sup>41</sup>

The Lagos state governor via his powers under the State Health Law and the Federal Quarantine Act Q2 LFN 2004, issued the Lagos State Infectious Disease (Emergency Prevention) Regulation 2020. The regulation amongst others grant the governor power to restrict movement within, into or out of the state, particularly the movement of persons, vehicles, aircraft and water craft. The regulation, in addition, further grants the governor the power to restrict or prohibit the gathering of persons without the governor's consent, restrict the conduct of trade, business and commercial activities within the state and to order the closure of markets, except those selling or manufacturing essential services. Also, the regulation made provision for the temporary closure of public places like educational institutions and places of worship. It is instructive to note that all states of the federation has similar regulations in this time of COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>42</sup>

Another area where the Nigerian government has exercised some form of biopolitics is with regards to the issue of social distancing. Since clustering of people has been considered as an important phenomenon in the spread of the coronavirus, social distancing is therefore important for its control. The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), describes social distancing as a set of methods for reducing frequency of closeness and contact between people in order to decrease the risk of transmission of the disease. However, in this time of coronavirus, a redefinition of social distancing has been formulated by the CDC to include; remaining out of congregate settings, avoid mass gatherings, and maintain distance of approximately six feet or two meters from others whenever possible.<sup>43</sup>

As part of the comprehensive response to the coronavirus pandemic, another act on the part of the Nigerian government to control the lives of the populace, and thus, an act of biopolitics, the president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has announced the

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<sup>40</sup>The Federal Government of Nigeria COVID-19 Regulations, 2020, provides guidelines that put in place measures to curtail the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic activities and livelihood in Nigeria. Oshoma A. Aduku, Curative Measures and Regulations by the Nigerian Government Amid COVID-19 Outbreak vis-à-vis the Fundamental Human Rights of its Citizens and Matters Arising Therein, SSRN ELECTRONIC JOURNAL (Apr. 2020) DOI: 10.2139/ssm.3571379 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340505281\\_Curative\\_Measures\\_Regulations\\_by\\_the\\_Nigerian\\_Government\\_Amid\\_COVID-19\\_Outbreak\\_Vis\\_a\\_Vis\\_the\\_Fundamental\\_Human\\_Rights\\_of\\_Its\\_Citizen\\_and\\_Matters\\_Arising\\_Therein](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340505281_Curative_Measures_Regulations_by_the_Nigerian_Government_Amid_COVID-19_Outbreak_Vis_a_Vis_the_Fundamental_Human_Rights_of_Its_Citizen_and_Matters_Arising_Therein)

<sup>41</sup>Supra note 35.

<sup>42</sup>Many states have restricted airport and interstate travel to curtail the spread of COVID-19. Various states are under lockdown and are witnessing cessation of social and economic activities. Cheluchi Onyemelukwe, The Law and Human Rights in Nigeria's Response to COVID-19 Pandemic, BILL OF HEALTH (Jun. 4, 2020) <https://blog.petrieflom.law.harvard.edu/2020/06/04/the-law-and-human-rights-in-nigerias-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>43</sup>Ebere R. Agusi et al, The COVID-19 Pandemic and Social Distancing in Nigeria: Ignorance or Defiance, 35 PAN AFRICA MEDICAL JOURNAL. (May. 28, 2020) doi:10.11604/pamj.supp.2020.35.2.23649 <https://www.panafrican-med-journal.com/content/series/35/2/52/full/>





mandatory and compulsory wearing of face masks by anyone going out in public.<sup>44</sup> A similar policy is being implemented by all state governments in the country. The major rationale, according to the Nigerian Center for Disease and Control (NCDC), for the use of face mask is to prevent those who are infected but asymptomatic from spreading the virus.<sup>45</sup> In the name of securing health<sup>46</sup> for Nigerian citizens, the federal government even went a step further by setting out guidelines for prosecuting anyone in public without a face mask. This was announced by the secretary to the federal government, Boss Mustapha.<sup>47</sup>

An alarming sense of urgency and concern over the coronavirus pandemic at the national and international levels has thus, led to the proliferation of both medical as well as non-medical interventions into the daily lives of individuals and the population. We are faced with the biopolitical use of lifestyle to govern individual choices in order to secure the health of the population from the threat posed by the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to note that, the characterization of covid-19 as a threat to the society caused by the cumulative effect of individual lifestyles has led to the politicization of daily choices, habits and practices of the people. This has further resulted in the continued intervention witnessed today, into the lives of the generality of the populace by the government and its agencies. It is this interventions into the lives of Nigerians that has had a tremendous effect on the Nigerian traditional cultural values.

## V. NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES (NTCV)

The very need and necessity to integrate cultural activities in all spheres of life has been greatly recognized in the post-independence development of Nigeria. The general ideas

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<sup>44</sup>President FRN, 2020. CoVID-19 Regulation 2020, The Quarantine Act,(Mar. 20, 2020.), [http://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/media/files/COVID-19;REGULATION\\_2020\\_20200330214102.pdf](http://covid19.ncdc.gov.ng/media/files/COVID-19;REGULATION_2020_20200330214102.pdf).

<sup>45</sup>Nigerian Center for Disease and Control, 2020. Advisory on the use of masks by members of the public without respiratory symptoms, (Jul. 21, 2021.), [UseOfMasks\\_lBdgzHH.pdf](http://ncdc.gov.ng/UseOfMasks_lBdgzHH.pdf) (ncdc.gov.ng)

<sup>46</sup>Foucault considers and reconceived the mid-twentieth century as a state existing for the benefit of the individual in good health. Monica Greco, On Illness and Value: Biopolitics, Psychosomatics, Participating Bodies,45 *BMJ JOURNALS*.107, 110-111 (2019). <https://mh.bmj.com/content/45/2/107>

<sup>47</sup>OlufemiAtoyebi, FG to Prosecute People without Face Masks in Public,HEALTHWISE, PUNCH NP, May 1, 2020, at <http://healthwise.punchng.com/fg-to-prosecute-people-without-masks-in-public>

<sup>48</sup>CHRISTOPHER MAYERS, THE BIOPOLITICS OF LIFESTYLE: FOUCAULT, ETHICS AND HEALTH CHOICES(2015) Doi: 10.4324/9781315675503 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298994028\\_The\\_biopolitics\\_of\\_lifestyle\\_Foucault\\_ethics\\_and\\_healthy\\_choices](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298994028_The_biopolitics_of_lifestyle_Foucault_ethics_and_healthy_choices)

regarding the Nigerian development has been strongly attached to authentic cultural values.<sup>49</sup>

In Sub-Saharan Africa like Nigeria, people and culture are inseparable since there is no denial of the fact that what makes up any society is its culture.<sup>50</sup> Linton<sup>51</sup> states that the culture of a society is the way of life of its members, the collection of ideals and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation. Culture, is designed for living held by members of a particular society.<sup>52</sup> It is a society-value system, which is all embracing and can be invoked to explain any person's or group's behavior.<sup>53</sup>

Cultural practices are shared perception of how people routinely behave in a culture, while cultural values are shared ideals of a culture.<sup>54</sup> Hence, cultural practices are intertwined within cultural values (emphasis mine). Values are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. It is apt to state the centrality of the place of values in African culture as a heritage that is passed down from one generation to the other.<sup>55</sup>

Hence, the place of values in people's culture cannot be over emphasized. This is because, the value of a thing be it object or belief, is normally defined as its worth. A value can be seen as some kind of view or conviction which we can live with, live by, and even die for. This is the actual reason why value permeate every aspect of human life.<sup>56</sup> Hence, it is not surprising to see that every human person who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the culture and values of that society whether knowingly or unknowingly<sup>57</sup> during the process of social interaction.<sup>58</sup>

Many activities of members of a particular society, like Nigeria, like eating, music, dancing, occupation, education, visiting friends and families, marriages, festivals, naming and burial ceremonies, entertainment of friends and guests, greetings are found within the confines of values which falls under non-material culture. All these values as

<sup>49</sup>Adeyinka T. Ajayi, *The Preservation and Conservation of Nigerian Cultural Heritage: An Impetus for her Development*, 4*THE SOCIAL SCIENCES*.407, 407-409 (2009). <http://www.medwelljournals.com/fulltext/?doi=sscience.2009.407.410>

<sup>50</sup>Elias O. Wahab et al, *Causes and Consequences of Rapid Erosion of Cultural Values in a Traditional African Society* *JOURNAL OF ANTHROPOLOGY*. (2012).<https://www.hindawi.com/journals/janthro/2012/327061/>

<sup>51</sup>Karl Thompson, *An Introduction to Culture, Socialization and Social Norms*, *REVISE SOCIOLOGY*. (Aug. 4, 2017.), <https://revisesociology.com/2017/08/04/culture-social-norms-introduction/>

<sup>52</sup>That's Africanity, *Culture: The Meaning, Characteristics, and Functions*, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/culture/-the-meaning-characteristics-and-functions/9577>

<sup>53</sup>Michael W. Morris, *Values as the Essence of Culture: Foundation or Fallacy* *JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY*. 14, 14-18(2014).

<sup>54</sup>Michael. Frese, *Cultural Practices, Norms and Values*, *JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY*(2015)[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283895506\\_Cultural\\_Practices\\_Norms\\_and\\_Values](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283895506_Cultural_Practices_Norms_and_Values)

<sup>55</sup>Gabriel E. Idang, *African Culture and Values* *PHRONIMON*(2015) [http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S1561-40182015000200006](http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1561-40182015000200006)

<sup>56</sup>Id.

<sup>57</sup>Id.

<sup>58</sup>The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process. College of Early Childhood Educators, *Practice Guidelines*, (Oct. 2020), [https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Practice\\_Diversity\\_Culture.pdf](https://www.college-ece.ca/en/Documents/Practice_Diversity_Culture.pdf)



stated above are held in very high esteem in Nigeria and can be categorized as follows;<sup>59</sup>

### **A. SOCIAL VALUES:**

In Nigeria, these social values are beliefs practiced either routinely or occasionally. Under this caption, we have festivals, games, sports and dances. These activities are carried out in Nigeria because they are seen as necessary. In Nigeria, it might not be very easy to separate social values from religious and moral values. That is why we see that in Nigeria, festivals have some religious undertones. It is not uncommon in Nigeria to see traditional and religious carnivals that will bring several people together in happiness.<sup>60</sup> Socially in Nigeria, greetings are of utmost importance.<sup>61</sup> A handshake, hug and a long list of well wishes for a counterpart's family are expected whenever a meeting takes place.<sup>62</sup> It is considered rude not to engage in proper greetings before getting down to business. Familiarization, socialization as well as visiting one another is also an important component of Nigerian social values.<sup>63</sup>

### **B. RELIGIOUS VALUES:**

Religion is an institutionalized system of symbols, beliefs, values and practices focused on questions of ultimate being. Hence, the Nigerian religious norms and values are not human interventions or products of the society, but the fruit of religion. They exist as a result of the sanctions and demands of God. Thus, the Nigerian religious values are essential components of our socio-cultural system. This suggests that values are found in every religion.<sup>64</sup> Hence, religion in Nigeria seems to be the focal point around which every activity revolves.<sup>65</sup> Both Moslems and Christians in Nigeria that are devoted to their religion hold in very high esteem the attendance of mosque and church in congregation in order to seek favors, blessings, forgiveness, and so on, from their God and Savior.

Regardless of religion, Nigerians bury their dead.<sup>66</sup> This is customary among Moslems and Christians. The size of the funerals, especially for the Christians, depends on the social status of the deceased.<sup>67</sup> The family is expected to set aside huge sum of money that will be used to ensure a proper befitting and elaborate funeral. The Moslem funeral rites are less elaborate as the deceased is committed to the mother earth after a very brief

<sup>59</sup>Michael Ushe, Role of Traditional African Moral Values in the Development of Nigeria, *3JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, PSYCHOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY*.1, 1-4 (2011).

<sup>60</sup>Idang, Supra note 55.

<sup>61</sup>Mathias Bentina&Blessing Onyima, Salutation and Health in Nigerian Traditional Society: A Study of Selected Communities in the South East Region, *11 OGIRESI: A NEW JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES*.65, 65-70 (2015).

<sup>62</sup>Culture of Nigeria, <https://www.everyculture.com/Ma-Ni/Nigeria.html>

<sup>63</sup>Id.

<sup>64</sup>Faith N. Okobia et al, Reactivating Nigerian Norms and Values through Religious Studies for National Transformation, *12 OGIRESI: A NEW JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES*. 151, 151-156 (2016). [www.ajol.info/index.php/article/view](http://www.ajol.info/index.php/article/view) (accessed 5 August 2020).

<sup>65</sup>Idang, Supra note 55.

<sup>66</sup>Maurice O. Izunwa, Customary Right to Befitting Burial: A Jurisprudential Appraisal of Four Nigerian Cultures, *12 OGIRESI: A NEW JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES*.122, 122-125 (2016).

<sup>67</sup>Sam Awoyinfa, How the Rich Bury their Dead, (Nov. 2, 2008,), <https://www.nairaland.com/190690/how-rich-bury-dead>

prayer ceremony. In both religion however, a great number of sympathizers are expected to grace the funerals.<sup>68</sup>

### **C. POLITICAL VALUES:**

Political institutions in Nigeria start with the traditional society which has the family at the top.<sup>69</sup> Each family has a family head, each village has a village head, and then the clan too, has a head.<sup>70</sup> These various heads are often surrounded with worthy individual identified as chiefs. The head and the chiefs are saddled with the responsibilities of running the affairs of the family and the traditional society in general. They meet together regularly, most times in the house of the head to discourse the general wellbeing of their subjects. Consultation and consensus are highly valued for they are seen as an outstanding feature of political decision making.<sup>71</sup> This is the political value which is held by the people which makes them accord respect to their political institutions and leaders.<sup>72</sup>

### **D. ECONOMIC VALUES:**

Economic values of the traditional African society like Nigeria are marked by cooperation. The traditional economy which is mainly based on farming and fishing, was in a co-operative nature. Friends, families and relatives often come together to assist in doing farm or fishing work.<sup>73</sup> The traditional Nigerian societies are also well known as skilled craftsmen engaged in the production and trading of different kinds of goods.<sup>74</sup>

Having examined the various values which Nigerians are accustomed to, it appears pertinent to evaluate how these values have been affected by the biopolitics of coronavirus.

## **VI. EVALUATING THE EFFECT OF THE BIOPOLITICS OF CORONAVIRUS ON NIGERIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURAL VALUES**

The Nigerian society, through its values, is a composite one, a blending of the divine, spiritual, human, animate and inanimate beings, which constantly interact with one another. Therefore, in whatever circumstances Nigerians finds themselves, the spirit of brotherhood and communalism often stimulate the patriotic response and disposition of one towards another.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ola: Focus on Family: Nigeria, <http://olairland.ie/index.php/news-events/news/focus-family-nigeria/>

<sup>69</sup>The family is the primary unit of socio-political organization in Nigeria. Abayomi-AlliMayowa, Pre-Colonial Nigeria and the European's Fallacy, 2REVIEW OF HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE. 17, 17-20(2014).

<sup>70</sup>Idang, Supra note 55.

<sup>71</sup>Sunday Awoniyi, African Cultural Values: the Past, Present and Future, 17 JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA. 1, 1-5(2015).

<sup>72</sup>Idang, Supra note 55.

<sup>73</sup>Id.

<sup>74</sup>Kabiru I. Yankuzo, Impact of Globalization on the Traditional African Cultures, 3JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL RESEARCH. 42, 42-46(2013).

<sup>75</sup>Benson O. Igboin, Colonialism and African Cultural Values, 3AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND CULTURE. 96, 96-97(2011).



Furthermore, the value which the Nigerian society places on communalism is expressed at all times through the sharing of a common social life, commitment to the social or communal good of the entire society, appreciation of mutual obligations, caring for others, interdependence and solidarity. The claims of individuality is also recognized. However, the Nigerian culture encourages the avoidance of individuality that are in the extreme. This is seen as a potential destruction of the Nigerian cultural values.<sup>76</sup>

The biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria has however altered the above status quo, by introducing a significant change and alteration in the traditional cultural values of Nigerians. This change is a complete departure from what existed before and Nigerians are finding it very difficult to adapt to this changes. The main reason being that, it is a change which calls for a complete replacement and total abandonment of a pre-established and originally preferred mode.<sup>77</sup>

The traditional cultural values in Nigeria is all about communalism and togetherness as expressed in the sharing of a common social life, commitment to the social or common good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligation, caring for others, interdependence and solidarity. The claims of individuality is also recognized. However, Nigerian ethics urges the avoidance of extreme individualism, which is seen as potentially destructive of human values.<sup>78</sup> With the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria, the reverse seems to be the case now, as individualism is being preached and encouraged.

The Nigerian society is a composite one, a blending of the divine, spiritual, human, animate and inanimate beings, which constantly interact with one another. Therefore, in whatever circumstance, the spirit of brotherhood in Nigeria stimulate patriotic response and disposition of one towards another. However, with the biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria, all the traditional cultural values in Nigeria that binds Nigeria together are no longer in vogue.

Even with the ease of the lockdown in Nigeria, people are very skeptical about coming closer to one another. Families and friends prefer to distance away from themselves, and they find it most convenient to be on phone conversations instead of seeing face to face. The fear being harbored by various individuals, which is caused by the biopolitics of coronavirus leaves more to be desired. In Nigeria, people are afraid of one another. This is contrary to what is being preached by the Nigerian traditional cultural values.

Culture provides a blueprint or map for relating with one another.<sup>79</sup> It is this blueprint and map that is being eroded by the biopolitics of coronavirus which is preventing Nigerians from associating with one another leading to the naked life syndrome as propagated by Agamben.<sup>80</sup> The Nigerian culture is hinged on the wellbeing of a man as always dependent on his fellow men.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Awoniyi, Supra note 71

<sup>77</sup>Idang, Supra note 55.

<sup>78</sup>Awoniyi, Supra note 71

<sup>79</sup>Elias O. Wahab et al Supranote 50.

<sup>80</sup>Hull, Supra note 13.

<sup>81</sup>KwameGyekye, African Ethics,(Sept. 9. 2010, ), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/african-thics/>

If as Taylor asserts, culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, laws, values and other capabilities which are learned, shared by man as members of society and transmitted from one generation to another, any laxity, lassitude and levity exhibited by its custodians would result in rapid erosion and disappearance of the uniqueness of the people and their culture.<sup>82</sup>

## VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The biopolitics of coronavirus in Nigeria has taken over the age-long cherished traditional cultural values. This biopolitics has succeeded in spreading new forms of values to the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. The result is the systematic erosion of the Nigerian traditional cultural values. The Nigerian society is gradually moving towards a situation of rugged individualism, where the traditional cultural values will be destroyed completely. The fear being envisaged by this work is linked with the duration which the pandemic will take. No one is sure how long or how soon, suggesting that, the Nigerian traditional cultural values might have been damaged beyond repairs if the coronavirus pandemic persists for so long. It is envisaged that everyone in Nigeria, both the government and the governed are stakeholders in ensuring that the Nigerian traditional cultural values are not eroded.

Hence, it is recommended that every one in Nigeria must ensure that they maintain good relationship with one another within the confines of the biopolitics of coronavirus. This is suggestive of the fact that the traditional cultural values in Nigeria can still be sustained if Nigerians intends to uphold its tenents by sticking to brotherliness and communalism even in this pandemic times. Nigerians are advised to maintain close family and friendly ties by constant phone calls and visits while maintain social distance and using facial masks. Ceremonies can still be done by strictly adhering to the social distancing measures as well as the use of facial mask in public. This relationships created during the time of biopolitics of coronavirus will create a background and foundation to fall back on when everything comes back to normal, at the time the pandemic comes to an end.

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<sup>82</sup>Elias O. Wahab et al Supranote 50.