

Reawakening the ancestral flame: A journey into Igbo traditional African spirituality

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Abstract

The Igbo people of South-eastern Nigeria, view spirituality as central to their pursuit of a meaningful and holistic existence, forming the core of their understanding of life's continuum. This perception is anchored on the people's cosmology, culture, and religious values embedded in their traditional worldview. There is currently a growing interest among the people to reconnect with their ancestral roots and rediscover the wisdom inherent in their traditional belief systems, which were blurred by their historical experiences. This research explores contemporary Igbo spirituality through an examination of ancestral knowledge, rituals, and beliefs to assess their continued relevance and enduring significance. The study combines the survey design with a qualitative descriptive analysis of documentary data. It employed in-depth interview to elicit insights from respondents who practice traditional spirituality on the revival of ancient practices and its relevance in the contemporary time. The results revealed a deeper understanding of the intersection between tradition and spirituality, highlighting Igbo traditional spirituality as a rich source of ancestral wisdom. It provided insights into relationships between humans, nature, community unity, and overall well-being. This study documents and validates Igbo traditional African spirituality while also contributing to the preservation of indigenous practices in efforts to safeguard and promote Igbo cultural heritage.

Keywords: spirituality, Igbo traditional spirituality, traditional Igbo thought, Igbo cosmology, cultural heritage, religious values

Introduction

The Africa continent is known for its cultural diversity, with centuries-old traditions, languages, and beliefs. Among these diverse cultures, is a unique traditional spirituality. African spirituality is influenced by new political philosophies and theologies, which place emphasis on the human person, relationships, and values (Agha, 2013). It involves the recognition of the feeling, sense, and belief that there is something greater than oneself; something more to being human than sensory experiences, and that the greater whole of which humans are part is cosmic or divine (Spencer, 2012; Anchor, n.d.). Spirituality can be experienced in and outside of a specific religious context (Benson et al. 2003). It involves the experiencing of a sense of connection with a higher state or a sense of interconnectedness with the rest of humanity and nature (Scott, 2018). Simonova (2020) views spirituality as a non-religious experience related to connecting with nature, art, yoga, meditation, among others. Spirituality is functionalised as the human desire for transcendence, introspection, interconnectedness, and the quest for meaning in life (King & Boyatzis, 2015).

Before colonialism and the proliferation of Christianity and Islam, African societies were dominated by traditional religious beliefs, which influenced the people's thinking and actions, such that spirituality was a subdomain of their religion (Mbiti, 1990). Agha (2013, p. 237) sees African spirituality as "part of a conscious movement on the part of the African intelligentsia to return to their roots and to create neo-African culture, and it is one of the great priorities of contemporary Africa." Madu (2004) refers to contemporary African spirituality as a form of spirituality that combines Western culture with religion, effectively eradicating traditional religious beliefs by excluding them from modernity. Western culture and religion have significantly influenced the indigenous cultures and ways of life of the Igbo people in Africa.

Within the African cosmology, philosophy, and traditional religion, the Supreme Being holds the most elevated status as the 'Lord of Creation.'. Humans are placed at the focal point of divine creation (Ilogu, 1974; Metuh, 1985 & 1986; Ifesieh, 1989; Debo, 1990; Ekwunife, 2003; Adibe, 2009). This ancient belief system has long guided the Igbo people in the realm of African traditional spirituality. Hence, spirituality

includes diverse spiritual experiences, each offering its unique set of benefits. The Igbo traditional spirituality elaborated this web of beliefs, rituals, and practices that have shaped Igbo culture for ages. Personal encounters and experiences with supernatural forces could be differently interpreted in line with people's unique worldviews, philosophies, cultures, and religions.

Despite the inherent differences noted above, current research on spirituality have inadequately addressed the functioning of Igbo spirituality as an existential continuum, linking past, present, and future, as well as the extent to which the Igbo spirituality as a framework sustains cultural identity and addresses modern existential challenges. This research delves into the depths of Igbo traditional spirituality, embarking on a profound exploration of ancestral knowledge, practices, and beliefs, and their cultural relevance in the contemporary world. It recognises the wisdom of Igbo ancestors and affirms the lasting relevance of indigenous belief systems in a rapid changing world.

The Concept of Spirituality

Etymologically, the word spirituality is derived from 'spiritus,' a Latin word that means 'breath,' signifying life (Dyben,

2019). Parrinder (1973, p. 26) argues that "spirits must exist because nature is composite and exists for use." It is the life-giving force that stems from God which transforms man-to-man relationships (Agha, 2013). Spirituality is considered a belief system that guides the welfare of a society and its people eradicating sources of unhappiness occasioned by forces of evil (Olupuna, 2015 as cited in Chiorazzi, 2015). This system is a continuous experience of living communion with God, who is known as the creator of humanity.

Spirituality is conceptualised as the search for meaning in life; a personal search for connection with transcendent realities, and interconnectedness with humanity (Zinnbauer et al., 1999; Benson & Roehlkepartain, 2008; Worthington et al., 2011). According to Puchalski et al. (2009, p. 887), "Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and the significant or sacred."

Abrams (n.d) defines spirituality as a holy longing, a yearning to know the meaning of our lives, to have a connection with

the transpersonal (as cited in Brussat & Brussat, 2023). For Spencer (2012, p.1):

Spirituality means knowing that our lives have significance in a context beyond a mundane everyday existence at the level of biological needs that drive selfishness and aggression. It means knowing that we are a significant part of a purposeful unfolding of life in our universe.

Boff (1995) calls spirituality an attitude that puts life at the centre, defending and promoting it against all the mechanisms of death, desiccation, or stagnation. For Sasson (2023):

Spirituality is the process of awakening from ordinary consciousness, rising above the ego, and awakening to a wider consciousness. It can mean expanding the mind beyond limitations, thoughts, and limited viewpoints about life and the universe.

Spirituality can also mean the process of making the mind free from fears, worries, and nonstop thinking and experiencing inner peace and

bliss in one's everyday life (n.p.).

Spirituality is a belief in something beyond the self. It may involve religious traditions centred on a higher power or a more holistic sense of connection to others and the world as a whole (Scott, 2023). To have a spiritual experience has to do with connecting to the divine through personal experience. It is centred on discovering one's true spiritual nature and embodying it (Sol, 2019; Luna & Sol, 2016).

A spiritual practice typically involves belief in a higher intelligence or consciousness that governs the universe as well as in the existence of life after death. It exists to satisfy the deep human thirst for meaning, peace, mystery, and truth (Dienstmann, 2015). The significance of spirituality lies not only in its reference to the unseen but also in its reflection of the totality of human experience (Umeagudosu, 1992).

Goldrack (2013) identified areas in which spirituality guides humans in the exploration and unfolding of their being, namely: purpose, meaning, connectedness, experience, and existence. These areas enable human beings to develop their spirituality and live in a

social context. Spirituality is natural and integral to the human life and needs to grow and flourish. However, it leans more toward 'self-referral' or the internalisation of one's awareness of one's soul. It is an inward journey that involves a shift in awareness rather than some form of external activity (Brady, 2020). Therefore, spirituality is an essential part of the human nature.

African spirituality, then, encompasses the various ways in which African people and culture relate to the spiritual, including the philosophies, beliefs, practices and rituals that express this relationship (Yema, 2018). According to Olupona (2015) as cited in Chiorazzi (2015), African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices influence every facet of human life; and therefore, African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane experience of life.

Olupona (2015) as cited in Chiorazzi (2015) elaborated that African spirituality is truly holistic. For instance, sickness in the indigenous African worldview is seen not only as a physical imbalance but also a social one, often linked to a breakdown in kinship ties, family relations or one's relationship with the ancestors (Chiorazzi, 2015). African spirituality can

be explained as a part of humanism that is against materialism on the one hand and shallow religiosity on the other hand. It is purely against an internal religion—one that is inward-looking and not obvious to the community, being a new creativity that has its roots in the African past (Agha, 2013).

African spirituality encompasses diverse forms that reflect the continent's rich cultural heritage, such as the African Traditional Spirituality, based on communal living and ancestral veneration (Olupona, 2000), and various forms of Christian and Islamic religious spiritualities (Adogame et al., 2012). Within the Igbo context, the practice of spirituality is predominantly based on ancestral veneration and divination (Garba, 2020). Scholars have proposed different frameworks for understanding spirituality, such as religious, New Age, and humanistic approaches (Twigg & Parayitam, 2006). The integration of Christianity with African traditions has led to the development of unique Christological models that resonate with African cultural contexts (Garba, 2020). The study of African religions in academic settings faces significant challenges, but it also presents valuable opportunities for exploring African indigenous thought and spirituality (Adogame et al., 2012). In all,

African spirituality is characterised by its diversity, complexity, and deep interconnection with culture, history, and community life (Olupona, 2000; Adogame et al., 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the theoretical framework of Symbolic Interactionism, a sociological approach that centres on the symbolic meanings individuals and groups attribute to objects, actions, and symbols in their social interactions (Carter & Fuller, 2015). According to Nickerson (2023) symbolic interactionism is linked to the works of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) and Max Weber (1864–1920). Mead describes symbolic interactionism as the use of language and gestures in an ongoing conversation based on the anticipation of how the other will react (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). This framework focuses on how individuals in spiritual traditions assign personal and collective meanings to symbols, rituals, and sacred objects, to influence their interactions with the spiritual realm and in their daily lives (Ali et al., 2022). Emphasising that rituals serve as symbolic expressions of shared values and beliefs, the framework underscores the role of rituals in fostering a sense of community and identity.

Symbolic interactionism examines the function of spiritual beliefs and rituals in providing individuals with a sense of purpose, belonging, and continuity, particularly in the face of contemporary challenges to cultural identity (Mach, 1993). The framework considers how spiritual interactions contribute to maintaining community bonds and transmission of cultural values, recognising the dynamic nature of African traditional spirituality in response to changing social contexts (Griswold, 2012).

In application, symbolic interactionism aids the practical development of personal worldview through which individuals can articulate and express their spirituality, hence, playing a crucial role in spiritual growth. This worldview is typically unspoken and instinctual, often explored through personal and subjective spiritual contemplations about the origins, meaning, importance, and essence of human existence. The symbolic meanings embedded in spiritual practices, rituals, and symbols are defined through symbolic interactionism. It also represents the internalised perspective of the universe and humanity's role within it, which enables individuals to interpret their essence, ultimately shaping their viewpoint on spirituality.

In this framework, the cosmological beliefs, rituals, and ancestral practices of the Igbo people function as dynamic symbols, continuously shaped by social interactions. Historical disruptions, such as colonialism and Western religious influence, altered the shared meanings attached to these symbols, leading to a partial erosion of traditional spiritual practices. However, the current resurgence being witnessed, represents a collective renegotiation of these meanings, driven by a renewed interest in ancestral wisdom. Through community dialogues, ritual reenactments, and scholarly inquiry, the Igbo people are redefining their spiritual symbols, reinforcing their relevance in contemporary contexts, and re-establishing their identity within the existential continuum. This symbolic interactionist approach underscores the interplay between historical experiences, social interactions, and evolving spiritual meanings in the ongoing reawakening of the Igbo and African spirituality.

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design to comprehensively explore the Igbo traditional spirituality. The research design employs a qualitative method to allow a holistic description of Igbo spirituality and its contemporary

relevance. For the data collection, in-depth interviews (IDI) were purposively conducted with traditional custodians, such as priests, diviners, and elders, who possess deep knowledge of rituals, cosmology, and ancestral practices, as well as practitioners, who are actively involved in the Igbo traditional spirituality. The interview involved fifteen participants drawn from different geographical areas of the five states that make up the Southeast geopolitical region and homeland of Igbos in Nigeria. These include Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo States. The participants were selected based on their in-depth knowledge, experiences, and activeness in the practice of Igbo traditional spirituality. The interviews provide firsthand insights into the beliefs, practices, and reviving of traditions. Secondary data were collected from existing literature encompassing academic sources, ethnographic studies, historical documents, cultural records, and internet materials related to Igbo traditional spirituality. The analysis was done based on the qualitative descriptive method.

Brief overview of Igbo traditional spirituality

Spirituality and religion have long served as sources of comfort and liberation for

many people. People have used different religious paths to seek God and have spiritual interaction. Research has shown that individuals who are more religious or spiritual – and who draw on their spirituality to cope with life's challenges – tend to experience many benefits in their health and general well-being (Akbari & Hossaini, 2018). N. Ikeobi (personal communication, September 2, 2023) observed that "traditional healers and diviners play important roles in Igbo spirituality as they use herbal remedies, incantations, and divination methods to address physical, spiritual, and psychological ailments." In line with this, N. Eziah notes that "understanding spirituality is to embark on a journey into the heart of Igbo identity and heritage" (personal communication, September 2, 2023).

Scholars have examined the subject of spirits and spiritual agency through a variety of approaches (Stephen, 2021). Traditionally, supernatural concepts are associated with phenomena that extend beyond the earthly realm, both in terms of their origins and influence on the universe as a whole, thereby bringing into existence the African communal understanding of relationship. Cosmology plays a pivotal role in shaping belief in spiritual realities within the Igbo

traditional religion, and it is reflected in a commensurably-orientated attitudinal approach to African-Igbo traditional spirituality. This perspective interprets Igbo spirituality from the practical religious values of Igbo communal life, which are rooted in the people's cosmology and traditional Igbo thought.

In a contemporary African thought, spirituality encompasses profound human values manifested through attitudes and actions (Marumo & Chakale, 2018). At the heart of Igbo spirituality are Chukwu or Chineke, spirits and deities, and ancestors. The veneration of ancestors holds an essential position in Igbo spirituality (I. Aniekeokwu (personal communication, September 5, 2023). This aligns with the views of I. Maakolu (personal communication, September 5, 2023) that "Igbo spirituality is centred on ancestor veneration ceremonies that include offerings, libations, and prayers." U. Udekwe also concurs that "ancestors exist in the spirit world but continue playing roles in their descendants' lives" (personal communication, September 8, 2023).

Igbo spirituality has faced challenges and transformations in the face of external influences like Westernisation, missionary activities, and modernization. O.

Igwemma asserts that, "these factors have contributed to disconnecting the younger generations and their ancestral beliefs" (personal communication, September 5, 2023). There is an emergent and renewed interest to preserve the Igbo traditional spirituality, driven by the desire to document and showcase its diverse aspects. This movement extends beyond mere documentation to bridging the gap between traditional and modern perspectives on spirituality. In doing so, the movement facilitates a deeper understanding and appreciation of Igbo traditional spirituality as a distinct cultural heritage in the contemporary times. This study reveals the interconnectedness among humans, between humans and nature, and between humans and the divine.

Traditional-Igbo thought: A basis for Igbo traditional spirituality

Igbo traditional thoughts contribute significantly to deeper insight into spiritual realities. Thought, as articulated by Nwala (1985), includes the intricate process of shaping ideas, concepts, judgements, and ultimately, the formation of beliefs and opinions about the truth and essence of various subjects. The foundations of Igbo traditional thought provide a strong framework for the development of Igbo spirituality.

Okoro (2020) avers that Igbo traditional thought is rooted in contemplation of the external world. It encapsulates the foundational elements of various facets of human experience, including religion, ethics, and philosophy, among others. These thoughts constitute the very essence of Igbo traditional life, permeating communities with a world view centred on the universe, life, and existence (Okoro, 2020). Human beings possess a profound awareness of existence, not only about themselves but also in acknowledgement of the existence of other entities. This awareness stems from their ability to perceive the world beyond themselves and gain knowledge through various empirical sources.

Igbo traditional African spirituality entails a reconnection with the traditional worldview, an appreciation of the inherent value and reverence for the natural order, and guidance towards spiritual excellence. O. Ogugua (personal communication, September 9, 2023) and N. Okere (personal communication, September 8, 2023) aver that a person setting out on a spiritual quest must recognise the 'journey of self-exploration,' guided by an inner summons to establish a connection with the spiritual realm. In this way, spirituality appears like a rebellious act of going solo

and leaving one's tribe, in tandem with the view of Ralph Waldo Emerson when he said; 'To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment' (Brady, 2020, n.p.).

Humans are aware that they coexist with other natural phenomena in the world and are not isolated from external aspects of nature. The external elements of nature can either assist humanity (resulting in a harmonious alignment of desires and emotions) or oppose it (resulting in anxiety and fear concerning desires and emotions). In nature, humanity encounters forces that either support or threaten its survival. To ensure its continued existence, "humanity endeavours to devise methods to strengthen the forces that contribute to its well-being while managing those that are detrimental. All these are done to attain a balance or harmony with the external nature" (O. Agha, personal communication, September 11, 2023).

A. Obaji confirms that, "the journey of spirituality typically initiates with deep contemplations regarding the meaning of life and the steps necessary to conquer fear, attain happiness, and find inner peace, among other reflections" (personal communication, September 11, 2023).

These contemplations prompt individuals to search for their true selves and discern the purpose behind their existence. The above stance is of great relevance to the current discourse. It supports the fundamental framework on which the discussion of spirituality is hinged in this study.

According to A. Nweke (personal communication, September 9, 2023) and U. Udekwu (personal communication, September 8, 2023), it is believed in the Igbo traditional thought that there is a physical part of the world and a non-physical part which are interconnected. This is in tandem with the position of Yema (2018) that within us and the world, there exists both a tangible, material dimension and an intangible, unseen one, with the latter possessing significantly, greater magnitude and importance than the physical part, because it is from it that physical life springs, grows, and flourishes. Therefore, the spiritual world is seen as a force that supports life here in the physical world. Shorter (2001, p. 9) avers that "the rural dweller is open to the spiritual dimension of life because he is less attached to and less dependent on material things." For Brady (2020), spiritual growth is an evolutionary process as it embraces

change and the evolution of consciousness.

In spiritual practice, ideas and interpretations change as individuals, societies, and the world move forward (Brady, 2020). It is worth noting that the development of spirituality in the Igbo traditional society emerges through the interplay of beliefs and concepts deeply rooted in the collective traditional consciousness of the people (I. Makolu, personal communication, September 5, 2023; E. Uduaku, personal communication, September 8, 2023). Spirituality, in essence, liberates people from the constraints and inflexible frameworks linked with traditional religion; hence, the import of venturing into the basic components of Igbo cosmology to explore Igbo traditional African spirituality.

The cosmology of Igbo traditional African spirituality

In the words of K. Mbah, "spirituality is inherent in human life and eminent in human practices" (personal communication, September 8, 2023). Just as religions such as Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, poses spiritual dimension, so does the Igbo traditional religion, which is the focus of this study. Many scholars perceive religion and spirituality

as universal phenomena present in various cultures. Hence, they employ these terms as analytical and ethical categories to describe, categorise, and elucidate a wide range of relevant human social behaviours (Huss, 2014). In Igbo traditional African religion, the concept of spirituality is explored specifically from traditional religious and cosmological points of view. Thus, spirituality in this context embraces a consciousness-based on the worldview that all human beings are on their path to seeking awakening in unconditional love and kindness. Their choices and behaviours are guided not by fear of punishment but rather by a desire to end suffering and create a peaceful and loving world for all (Brady, 2020).

According to Madu (2004), except for a proclivity towards pantheism found in the Orient belief systems, all worldviews, cosmologies, and religions generally adhere to a similar structural framework. Similarly, Huss (2014, p.51) affirms that:

The idea that religion is a universal, *sui generis* phenomenon is still very prevalent and underlines the academic disciplines and sub-disciplines that study religion as an eminent feature of human culture, such as

religious studies, history, sociology, and psychology of religion.

Many religions, along with religious scholars agree that the cosmological order places the Supreme Being at the highest point of authority (Ejizu, 1985; Wambutda, 1986; Metuh, 1987).

An Igbo African community is celebrated for its unwavering belief in Chukwu, the divine being responsible for granting and reclaiming life, and being regarded as the source of human existence (Madu, 1997; Arinze, 2008). This belief instills in members of the community a desire to maintain harmony with their Creator, and to seek a purposeful existence. To achieve this purpose, spirituality must be engaged as a means of connecting with supernatural entities. Hence, "the traditional Igbo belief system follows a hierarchical order in connection to Igbo spirituality" (I. Maakolu, personal communication, September 5, 2023); where Chukwu (holds the highest position), → followed by intermediary forces (divinities, gods/goddesses, deities, spirits), → ancestors (who are the departed forefathers), → and human beings.

Religion permeates everything in the traditional African society, including politics, art, marriage, health, diet, dress, the economy, and death. This is not to say that indigenous African spirituality represents a form of theocracy or religious totalitarianism (Olupona. 2015 as cited in Chiorazzi, 2015). In the Igbo traditional worldview, ancestors form an important component of spiritual practice. Thus, they occupy a higher level of existence than the living and are able to bestow either blessings or curses upon their living descendants (Chiorazzi, 2015). From this perspective, spirituality fosters inclusivity by recognising the pure spirit as a universal unifying force.

The cosmology of Igbo traditional spirituality highlights the interconnectedness of all beings within a unified cosmic order, where humans are considered vital participants who reflect or embody the presence of multiple deities in various forms. This holistic perspective embraces the multiplicity of spiritual expressions and emphasises that no single entity holds exclusive ownership of spiritual truth (Brady, 2020). Instead, all are equally valued and encompassed within the divine order, reflecting a profound inclusivity in the eyes of God. This cosmological framework fosters a worldview rooted in unity,

balance, and respect for the diversity of spiritual manifestations.

Towards an Igbo traditional African spirituality

Man is known to possess both body and soul. The body is the physical part of man, while the soul is the spiritual part. The soul (the spiritual part) is the link that connects man to both the physical and the invisible world. A spirit is an element of humanity that might drive people to act in certain unexpected ways or to adopt a certain intellectual or moral attitude that can be exercised in making decisions (Wotogbe-Weneka, 2001; Stephen, 2021). Being spiritual is associated with the private realm of thought and experience of an individual. It is the spiritual aspects of man that brought about spirituality, which is a belief in the spiritual.

The Igbo traditional African spirituality is a belief that connects the Igbo man to the unseen reality and non-physical part of the Universe. According to O. Ojuguo, "this connection involves supernatural interactions with forces outside the physical realm following most of the traditional rites, like rituals and sacrifices, among others" (personal communication, September 9, 2023). In the pre-missionary and pre-colonial Africa, the

Igbo traditional African spirituality was both privately and publicly accepted by virtually everyone in every community of the Igbo society.

In contemporary times, the practice of Igbo traditional African spirituality has come to be associated with deep fear and shame. This is because of the negative stereotypes in modern society that have discouraged many in this generation from embracing their cultural roots. These stereotypes were caused by the interference of missionaries, Western colonialism, and their Euro-Christian cosmology, which radically changed the African people's mindset (Madu, 2004). The stereotyping usually manifests in claims that Igbo traditional African spirituality traps people in archaic life of superstition and ignorance. These negative views create a social stigma, discouraging people from embracing or exploring their cultural roots. The drawback is a depth of depletion in the Igbo culture. It creates a disconnection which weakens the cultural foundation and diminishes the profound messages embedded in the Igbo African spirituality. As a result, individuals become distanced from their traditional spiritual heritage, which serves as a vital source of identity and guidance, leading to a loss of its richness and profound meaning. The

efforts to demonise and associate Igbo African spirituality with backwardness have created a stigma that prevails till today.

In the process of evangelisation, Igbo communities were severed from their source of spiritual comfort and strength. The missionaries established dominance and exerted control over the minds of the people. The first set of Europeans, missionaries, and Western colonialists maligned African spirituality, misconstruing its practice as allegiance to malevolent forces, because they did not understand the people and their religious practices. They criticised and devalued every facet of the African culture (Achebe, 2008), including their religious beliefs and spirituality.

The repercussions of this historical violence against the Igbo traditional African spirituality have persisted through generations, shaping the people both through cultural transmission and socialization. I. Aniekeokwu observed that, "this was orchestrated to prevent them from being labelled as non-believers in the newly introduced Western religion" (personal communication, September 5, 2023). Consequently, individuals have distanced themselves from their spiritual traditions,

and severed the connection to their authentic selves, exposing their descendants to the risk of losing their genuine identity. Furthermore, a conflicting relationship exists between the Igbo African cosmology and Euro-Christians cosmology. For instance, the African Igbo, who firmly adheres to the belief in ancestors and reincarnation, finds it challenging to reconcile this belief with the Euro-Christians notion of heaven and eternal punishment (Madu, 2004).

The Igbo African spirituality today is often a watered-down version of its authentic form, resembling generic spiritual practices found in other cultures. This oversimplification threatens to erase the distinctive characteristics and profound cultural significance of Igbo spirituality. A spiritual entity, according to Wotogbe-Weneka (2001, p. 20), is believed to "exercise an important influence on religions and philosophies; it affects human conduct and galvanises actions." Igbo traditional African spirituality has began to assume a different position.

Many people today who yearn for spiritual connection are indeed returning to the ancestral spiritual homes (N. Okere, personal communication,

September 8, 2023; W. Ogbazu personal communication, September 11, 2023; N. Okoroafo, personal communication, September 2, 2023). In this way, they are relating to the spirit world to heal the personal and collective spiritual state of the Igbo traditional African society. In this aspect, Lewis (1971, p. 205) portrays spirits as "hypotheses which, for those who believe in them, afford a philosophy of final causes and a theory of social tensions and power relations."

The conflict between Igbo African cosmology and Euro-Christian cosmology highlights the rationale behind the current reawakening of Igbo traditional African spirituality. This revival signifies a profound attempt to reclaim the dignity of the Igbo people by reconnecting them with their ancestral heritage, which holds immense potential for shaping a meaningful future for the present and future generation. A central reason for this resurgence is the recognition of the potential of Igbo traditional African spirituality, rooted in the cosmological and cultural frameworks of the Igbo people. By embracing these foundational aspects of their spirituality, the Igbo people would not only restore their identity and cultural pride but also contribute valuable insights to the broader tapestry of humanity.

Conclusion and recommendation

The Igbo traditional African spirituality, deeply rooted in cosmology, culture, and philosophy, represents a significant and enduring aspect of Africa's cultural heritage. Despite the disruptions caused by colonialism and the dominance of Western religions, the core tenets of Igbo spirituality continue to exist as a vital link between the past, present, and future. This spiritual framework, which emphasises the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the divine, has shaped the cultural identity of the Igbo people for generations, offering profound insights into existence and addressing existential challenges.

The recent resurgence of interest in the Igbo African spirituality is part of a broader movement to reclaim cultural pride and authenticity across Africa in response to the forces of global modernization. This resurgence underscores the enduring relevance of ancestral knowledge and practices in addressing contemporary concerns, such as the quest for meaning, interconnectedness, and cultural sustainability. Through a thorough exploration of traditions, this research highlights the significance of Igbo African spirituality as a reservoir of wisdom, a guide for ethical living, and a bridge

between traditional and modern worldviews.

To ensure the preservation of this invaluable heritage (the Igbo African spirituality), future initiatives must focus on education, documentation, environmental preservation, and intergenerational engagement. Elders and spiritual leaders can play a crucial role in transmitting ancestral wisdom through structured workshops and programmes, to safeguard the vitality of Igbo traditions and prevent cultural erosion. Communities must foster tolerance, support traditional practitioners, and engage younger generations in rituals and educational activities that bridge generational divides. Furthermore,

collaboration between spiritual leaders and conservationists is essential to protect sacred lands, ecosystems, and cultural heritage, with physical and digital archives serving as key tools in doing so.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on the significance of indigenous spiritual systems by emphasising universal principles such as harmony, interconnectedness, and respect inherent in the Igbo traditions. It calls for a unified global effort to honour and integrate these timeless insights into the evolving cultural and spiritual landscape, thereby fostering a more sustainable and spiritually enriched future for all.

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List of Informants

S/N	Name	Sex	Age	Status	Place	Date	Interviewer
1	Alo Obaji	M	84	Shrine Priest	Ebonyi	11/09/23	C.P. Onuorah
2	Aneke Nweke	M	76	Titled Man	Enugu	9/09/23	„
3	Ezego Uduaku	M	73	Titled Man	Imo	8/09/23	„
4	Igbago Maakolu	F	66	Diviner	Anambra	5/09/23	„
5	Ikwu Aniekeokwu	M	58	Farmer	Anambra	5/09/23	„
6	Kwado Mba	M	71	Herbalist	Enugu	8/09/23	„
7	Ndu Okoroafo	M	54	Titled man	Abia	2/09/23	„
8	Nwachi Ikeobi	M	60	Family Head	Abia	2/09/23	„
9	Nwube Okere	F	81	Priestess	Imo	8/09/23	„
10	Nwude Eziaha	M	55	Herbalist	Abia	2/09/23	„
11	Obinna Agha	M	74	Elder/Farmer	Ebonyi	11/09/23	„
12	Odii Ogugua	F	65	Titled woman	Enugu	9/09/23	„
13	Odu Igwemma	M	70	Chief priest	Anambra	5/09/23	„
14	Uchenna Udekwu	M	68	Native doctor	Imo	8/09/23	„
15	Wike Ogbeazu	M	62	Chief	Ebonyi	11/09/23	„