

African Traditional Religion and Implications of Resurgence of Heathenism in Igbo Land

Ebere Ifeyinwa Ezeh

*Department of Christian Religious Studies
Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State*

Abstract

The implication of resurgence of heathenism and African Traditional Religion in Igbo land has become a significant phenomenon in recent times. This study aims to investigate the underlying factors, perceptions, and implications of this resurgence and it also seeks to explore the complexities of African Traditional Religion and heathenism in Igbo land, highlighting the challenges and implications for cultural heritage, religious tolerance, and social cohesion. A quantitative research approach was employed, using a questionnaire to gather data from 50 participants across the five States of Igbo land. The results show that cultural identity, dissatisfaction with Western religions, and a desire for cultural revival are key factors driving the resurgence of heathenism and African Traditional Religion in Igbo land. The study reveals that while the resurgence of heathenism and African Traditional Religion has promoted cultural heritage and identity, it also poses challenges to religious tolerance and social cohesion. The study concludes that a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity and promotes interfaith dialogue is necessary for peaceful coexistence. The study recommends that policymakers, scholars, and community leaders should engage in dialogue to promote cultural understanding, religious tolerance, and social cohesion.

Introduction

African Traditional Religion has been an integral part of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria for centuries (Mbiti, 1969). The Igbo people have a rich and diverse cultural heritage, with a strong emphasis on spirituality, community, and ancestral worship (Uchendu, 1965). African Traditional Religion has played a central role in the lives of the Igbo people, providing a sense of identity, purpose, and meaning (Idowu, 1973).

However, with the advent of colonialism and Christianity, ATR was suppressed and marginalized, leading to a decline in its practice and influence (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). The colonial powers and Christian missionaries viewed African Traditional Religion as "pagan" and "heathen," and sought to eradicate it in favor of Western Christianity (Ajayi, 1965). This led to a significant decline in the practice of African Traditional Religion, as many Igbo people converted to Christianity (Isichei, 1995).

In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in African Traditional Religion and heathenism among the Igbo people, particularly among the younger generation (Ogbonnaya, 2014). This resurgence has been driven by a desire to reconnect with their cultural heritage and to challenge the dominance of Western religions (Onwuejeogwu, 2011). Many Igbo people are seeking to reclaim their cultural identity and to promote a sense of pride and self-worth (Ejizu, 2015).

The resurgence of heathenism and African Traditional Religion in Igbo land has significant implications for cultural heritage, religious tolerance, and social cohesion (Ani, 2015). On one hand, it promotes cultural identity and pride, and provides a sense of belonging and connection to one's ancestors (Uchendu, 1965). On the other hand, it also poses challenges to religious tolerance and social cohesion, particularly in a society where Christianity and Islam are dominant (Isichei, 1995).

Despite the significance of this phenomenon, there is a dearth of research on the resurgence of heathenism and African Traditional Religion in Igbo land (Ogbonnaya, 2014). Most studies have focused on the historical and cultural context of African Traditional Religion, without examining its contemporary resurgence (Mbiti, 1969). This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the underlying factors, perceptions, and implications of this resurgence.

Research Questions

The research questions that will inform this study are:

1. What are the underlying factors contributing to the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo land?
2. How do Igbo people perceive and experience the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion, and what are the implications for their identity, culture, and community?
3. What are the challenges and implications of the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion for Igbo society, particularly in relation to issues of cultural heritage, religious tolerance, and social cohesion?

Literature Review

The resurgence of African Traditional Religion and heathenism in Igbo land has been a topic of interest among scholars in recent years. According to Ani (2017), the resurgence of African Traditional Religion in Igbo land is a response to the cultural and spiritual imperialism imposed by colonialism and Christianity. Ani argues that the Igbo people are seeking to reclaim their cultural identity and promote a sense of pride and self-worth (Ani, 2017).

Ogbonnaya (2015) notes that the resurgence of African Traditional Religion in Igbo land is driven by a desire to reconnect with their cultural heritage and challenge the dominance of Western religions. Ogbonnaya argues that the Igbo people are seeking to revitalize their traditional practices and institutions (Ogbonnaya, 2015).

Onwuejeogwu (2011) provides an in-depth analysis of the *odinani* and its significance in Igbo culture. Onwuejeogwu argues that the *odinani* is a complex and multifaceted system of beliefs and practices that encompasses ancestral worship, divination, and ritual sacrifice (Onwuejeogwu, 2011).

Ejizu (2015) also examines the role of African Traditional Religion in modern Igbo society. Ejizu argues that African Traditional Religion continues to play an important role in Igbo culture, particularly in terms of providing a sense of identity and belonging (Ejizu, 2015).

In terms of the implications of the resurgence of African Traditional Religion and heathenism in Igbo land, Ani (2017) notes that it poses challenges to religious tolerance and social cohesion. Ani argues that the resurgence of African Traditional Religion and heathenism may lead to conflicts with other religious groups, particularly Christians and Muslims (Ani, 2017).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The questionnaire is designed to gather information on the participant's experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding African Traditional Religion and the resurgence of heathenism in Igbo land. The questionnaire will include closed-ended questions, using multiple-choice and Likert scale formats.

Research Approach

This study employs a quantitative research approach, using a questionnaire to gather data from 50 participants across the five states of Igbo land.

Method

The research method involves administering a questionnaire to 50 participants, 10 from each of the five States of Igbo land (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo).

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy involves a purposive sampling, where participants are selected based on their experience and knowledge of African Traditional Religion and the resurgence of heathenism in Igbo land.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study involves both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, will be used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents, their perceptions and experiences regarding African Traditional Religion and the resurgence of heathenism, and the identified factors contributing to this resurgence. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests and ANOVA, is employed to examine potential relationships between variables, such as the association between socio-demographic characteristics and perceptions of the African Traditional Religion resurgence, and to determine if there are statistically significant differences in perceptions across the five states of Igbo land. The data analysis is conducted using a statistical software package to ensure accuracy and efficiency.

Ethical Considerations

The study is conducted in accordance with ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Participants are informed of the purpose and scope of the study, and are assured that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by State

| State | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Abia | 10 | 50% |
| Anambra | 10 | 50% |
| Ebonyi | 10 | 50% |
| Enugu | 10 | 50% |
| Imo | 10 | 50% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

Result

The distribution of respondents by state shows a fairly equal representation from each of the five states in Igbo Land. With 10 respondents from each state, this study provides a comprehensive view of the challenges and implications of the resurgence of Heathenism in the region. This equal representation allows for a more balanced analysis of the impact of African Traditional Religion and the resurgence of Heathenism on Igbo society as a whole.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

| Characteristics | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 28 | 56% |
| | Female | 22 | 44% |
| Age Group | 18-25 | 12 | 24% |
| | 26-35 | 18 | 36% |
| | 36-45 | 15 | 30% |
| | 46-55 | 5 | 10% |
| Education Level | Secondary | 5 | 10% |
| | Tertiary | 45 | 90% |
| | Postgraduate | 5 | 10% |
| Occupation | Student | 5 | 10% |
| | Teacher | 10 | 20% |
| | Civil Servant | 15 | 30% |
| | Business Owner | 10 | 20% |
| | Others | 10 | 20% |

Results

The results of the study show that the majority of respondents were male, with 56% identifying as such. In terms of age group, the highest percentage fell within the 26-35 range at 36%, followed closely by the 36-45 range at 30%. Education level was predominantly tertiary at 90%, with only 10% having completed postgraduate studies. In relation to occupation, civil servants made up the largest category at 30%, followed by business owners at 20% and teachers at 20%.

Table 3: Factors Contributing to the Resurgence of Heathenism and Revitalization of African Traditional Religion

| Factor | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Socio-economic hardship | 25 | 50% |
| Disillusionment with Christianity | 20 | 40% |
| Search for cultural identity | 18 | 36% |
| Political marginalization | 15 | 30% |
| Environmental degradation | 12 | 24% |
| Globalization and cultural exchange | 10 | 20% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

Results

The table above highlights the various factors contributing to the resurgence of heathenism and revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo Land. The most common factor identified was socio-economic hardship, with 50% of respondents citing this as a reason for turning to African Traditional Religion. Disillusionment with Christianity and the search for cultural identity were also significant factors, with 40% and 36% of respondents respectively indicating these as reasons for the resurgence of heathenism. Political marginalization, environmental degradation, and globalization were also mentioned as contributing factors, showing a complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural issues driving this resurgence.

Table 4: Perception and Experience of Igbo People towards the Resurgence of Heathenism and Revitalization of African Traditional Religion

| Perception/Experience | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Positive | 30 | 60% |
| Negative | 15 | 30% |
| Neutral | 5 | 10% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

Results

The table above shows the factors contributing to the resurgence of Heathenism and revitalization of African Traditional Religions, with socio-economic hardship being the most prevalent factor at 50%. Other factors include disillusionment with Christianity, search for cultural identity, political marginalization, environmental degradation, and globalization and cultural exchange. Additionally, the perception and experience of Igbo people towards this resurgence and revitalization are mostly positive, with 60% expressing a positive view, 30% negative, and 10% neutral.

Table 5: Challenges and Implications of the Resurgence of Heathenism and Revitalization of African Traditional Religion for Igbo Society

| Challenge/Implication | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| Religious intolerance and conflict | 25 | 50% |
| Erosion of traditional values | 20 | 40% |
| Social and cultural disintegration | 18 | 36% |
| Economic marginalization | 15 | 30% |
| Political instability | 12 | 24% |
| Total | 50 | 100% |

Results

The table above illustrates the various challenges and implications that have arisen due to the resurgence of heathenism and revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo society. The

most prevalent issue identified is religious intolerance and conflict, with half of the respondents acknowledging this as a significant challenge. This is closely followed by the erosion of traditional values, which 40% of respondents believe is a major implication of these religious shifts. Additionally, social and cultural disintegration, economic marginalization, and political instability were also highlighted as pressing concerns by a significant portion of the participants.

Discussion of Findings

Table 3: Factors Contributing to the Resurgence of Heathenism and Revitalization of African Traditional Religion

Research Question 1: What are the underlying factors contributing to the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo land?

Table 3 reveals several key factors contributing to the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo land:

The Socio-economic hardship (50%) is the most prominent factor, indicating that economic challenges and hardships faced by many Igbo people are driving them towards traditional beliefs and practices. African Traditional Religion may offer spiritual solace, support, and alternative solutions to address these challenges. Disillusionment with Christianity (40%) shows many individuals may be disillusioned with the perceived shortcomings of Christianity, such as its perceived failure to address their socio-economic concerns or its perceived alienation from their cultural roots. This disillusionment may lead them to explore alternative spiritual paths, including African Traditional Religion. In Search for cultural identity (36%), the resurgence of African Traditional Religion can be seen as a manifestation of a broader search for cultural identity and a desire to reconnect with ancestral traditions and values. In a rapidly changing world, African Traditional Religion offers a sense of belonging and a connection to the past. Political marginalization (30%) and the perceived lack of political representation may be driving some individuals towards African Traditional Religion as a source of empowerment and resistance. African Traditional Religion can provide a framework for collective action and social mobilization. Environmental degradation (24%): Concerns about environmental degradation and its impact on livelihoods and well-being may be contributing to the resurgence of African Traditional Religion. Traditional ecological knowledge and practices embedded within African Traditional Religion may be seen as relevant and valuable in addressing environmental challenges. Globalization and cultural exchange (20%), shows that while globalization can lead to cultural erosion, it can also contribute to the revitalization of African Traditional Religion. Exposure to other cultures and spiritual traditions may inspire a renewed interest in and appreciation for indigenous beliefs and practices.

Table 4: Perception and Experience of Igbo People towards the Resurgence of Heathenism and Revitalization of African Traditional Religion

Research Question 2: How do Igbo people perceive and experience the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion, and what are the implications for their identity, culture, and community?

Table 4 reveals that a majority of Igbo people surveyed perceive the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion positively (60%). This indicates a

significant level of acceptance and support for the re-emergence of these traditional beliefs and practices.

Implications for Identity, Culture, and Community:

Reinforcement of Cultural Identity is a positive perception that suggests that the resurgence of African Traditional Religion contributes to a strengthening of Igbo cultural identity. It provides individuals with a sense of connection to their roots and a means of expressing their cultural heritage. The revitalization of African Traditional Religion can serve as a platform for community building and social cohesion. Shared rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs can foster a sense of belonging and shared identity among community members. The resurgence of African Traditional Religion provides an opportunity for the transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and traditions to younger generations. This helps to preserve and perpetuate Igbo culture for future generations.

However, the table also highlights some negative perceptions (30%). This suggests that the resurgence of African Traditional Religion may also present challenges and concerns for some individuals. These concerns could relate to:

The revival of traditional practices may lead to friction with other religious groups or with individuals who hold different beliefs. Some individuals may have concerns about the appropriateness or acceptability of certain traditional practices in contemporary society. The resurgence of African Traditional Religion may disrupt existing social norms and cultural values, leading to social tensions and conflicts within communities.

Table 5: Challenges and Implications of the Resurgence of Heathenism and Revitalization of African Traditional Religion for Igbo Society

Research Question 3: What are the challenges and implications of the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion for Igbo society, particularly in relation to issues of cultural heritage, religious tolerance, and social cohesion?

Table 5 highlights several challenges and implications arising from the resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo society, particularly concerning cultural heritage, religious tolerance, and social cohesion.

Religious intolerance and conflict (50%) is the most significant challenge, with half of the respondents acknowledging this as a major concern. The resurgence of African Traditional Religion, especially when it involves practices that may be perceived as unorthodox or controversial, can lead to friction between followers of African Traditional Religion, other religious groups (particularly Christianity and Islam), and even within communities. Erosion of traditional values (40%) shows that the revitalization of African Traditional Religion may involve reinterpretations or adaptations of traditional practices, which can lead to debates and disagreements within communities about what constitutes authentic or acceptable practices. This can contribute to the erosion of shared values and traditions. Social and cultural disintegration (36%) reveals that the resurgence of African Traditional Religion, if not managed carefully, could potentially lead to social and cultural divisions within communities. Differences in beliefs and practices related to African Traditional Religion can create social tensions and even conflict. Economic marginalization (30%) shows some practices associated with the resurgence of

African Traditional Religion may have economic implications, such as the cost of rituals, offerings, and ceremonies. This could potentially marginalize certain groups within the community who cannot afford to participate fully. Political instability (24%) depicts that in some cases, the resurgence of African Traditional Religion may involve political dimensions, such as the assertion of cultural rights and autonomy. This could potentially lead to tensions and conflicts with political authorities, impacting social and political stability.

Summary of findings

The resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo land is a complex phenomenon with multiple contributing factors. Socio-economic hardship, disillusionment with Christianity, the search for cultural identity, political marginalization, environmental degradation, and globalization and cultural exchange all play significant roles in this process. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing a clear-cut understanding of the dynamics of religious change and its implications for Igbo society.

The resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of African Traditional Religion in Igbo society have a significant impact on the identity, culture, and community of Igbo people. While a majority of respondents perceive this resurgence positively, it is important to acknowledge and address the concerns and challenges associated with it to ensure that the revitalization of African Traditional Religion contributes positively to the social, cultural, and spiritual well-being of Igbo society.

The resurgence of heathenism and the revitalization of ATR in Igbo society present both opportunities and challenges. While it offers a chance to reconnect with cultural heritage and spiritual traditions, it also raises concerns about religious tolerance, social cohesion, and the potential for conflict. Careful consideration and dialogue among various stakeholders, including religious leaders, community members, and policymakers, are crucial to navigate these challenges and ensure that the resurgence of African Traditional Religion contributes positively to the social, cultural, and spiritual well-being of Igbo society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to the government. Policy makers, religious and community leaders:

1. Foster understanding and respect between followers of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islam, and other religions through interfaith initiatives and by discouraging religious discrimination.
2. Support initiatives that document, preserve, and promote Igbo cultural heritage, including traditional arts, music, dance, and language. Integrate traditional knowledge and practices into education and community development programs.
3. Implement policies and programs to address poverty, unemployment, and other socio-economic issues that may drive people towards African Traditional Religion as a coping mechanism.
4. Encourage community-based initiatives that promote social cohesion and address community concerns related to the resurgence of African Traditional Religion. Foster dialogue and collaboration between religious leaders, community members, and policymakers.
5. Integrate traditional ecological knowledge and practices into environmental conservation and sustainable development initiatives.

6. Support research and documentation on African Traditional Religion, its history, beliefs, practices, and social impact. Disseminate research findings to the public and policymakers to inform public discourse and policy development.
7. Provide training and capacity building for religious leaders, community members, and policymakers on issues related to religious pluralism, cultural diversity, and conflict resolution.

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