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## THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF *ORU EZI NA ULO* (FAMILY DELIVERANCE): AN INVESTIGATION INTO SERVICE FEES AND THE MOTIVATIONS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERS IN IGBOLAND.

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### ABSTRACT

The commercialization of *Oru ezi na ulo* (family deliverance) has become a growing concern in Igboland, where traditional spiritual practices have long held cultural and religious value. This study investigates how family deliverance, once rooted in communal healing and ancestral rites, is increasingly being treated as a paid service. The research focuses on the rising service fees charged for these rituals and explores the motivations of spiritual leaders who perform them. Both primary data such as interview and secondary data such as internet materials, journals, and textbooks were the sources of data. Descriptive research method was adopted for the study. The study was anchored on Luckmann's Theory of Social Construction of Reality because of its relatedness. Content analysis was used to analysis data collected. Through interviews and observations, the study reveals that the cost of family deliverance now varies depending on the reputation of the spiritual leader, the perceived severity of the spiritual problem, and the economic status of the family. Some families are charged exorbitant fees, making the rituals seem more like business transactions than sacred acts. Many spiritual leaders justify the fees as necessary for sustaining their spiritual work, while others appear to prioritize financial gain over genuine spiritual healing. The study also examines how this trend affects the relationship between spiritual leaders and their communities. As more people question the intentions behind these rituals, there is growing concern that spiritual practices are losing their original purpose. This shift has created a sense of distrust in some areas, especially among families who can no longer afford to access the help they need. It raises important questions about access, fairness, and the preservation of cultural identity. The study recommended that religious bodies and associations in Igboland should establish guidelines and monitoring systems to ensure that spiritual leaders do not exploit their followers financially in the name of family deliverance. This can include transparent service practices and penalties for unethical behaviour.

### INTRODUCTION

*Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland refers to a spiritual practice where individuals or families seek freedom from generational curses, ancestral

covenants, spiritual oppression, and misfortunes believed to be rooted in their lineage. It is deeply rooted in the traditional and religious beliefs of the Igbo people, who often associate family problems like delayed

marriages, barrenness, poverty, or untimely death with spiritual causes. Many Igbo families turn to spiritual leaders, prophets, or native doctors to conduct deliverance rituals aimed at breaking these supposed spiritual bonds (Okonkwo, 2018). In Igboland, the concept of spiritual inheritance plays a major role in the belief in *Oru ezi na ulo*. It is commonly believed that the sins or covenants made by ancestors can affect generations yet unborn. This idea supports the need for family-wide spiritual cleansing to reverse negative outcomes. Deliverance prayers, rituals, and sacrifices are performed to disconnect the family from ancestral spirits, evil altars, or marine forces (Eze, 2020). These practices often involve fasting, midnight prayers, and the use of holy oil or water by religious ministers.

The rise of Pentecostal Christianity in Igboland has also influenced the popularity of *Oru ezi na ulo*. Many Pentecostal churches promote deliverance as a key solution to spiritual problems. They hold deliverance services where members are encouraged to renounce family idols, confess ancestral sins, and break spiritual covenants through aggressive prayers and prophetic declarations. These sessions sometimes last for days and include personal counseling, laying of hands, and prophetic revelations (Nwoye, 2019). The pastors and prophets leading these services often claim divine authority to uproot ancestral bondage and release blessings on families.

Despite the controversies, many individuals testify to positive changes in their lives after undergoing *Oru ezi na ulo*. They claim

improvements in finances, health, marital stability, and general well-being. For these believers, *Oru ezi na ulo* is not just a religious activity but a pathway to freedom from generational struggles. It provides emotional relief and hope, especially in a society where traditional beliefs still influence everyday decisions (Umezinwa, 2017).

The commercialization of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland has become a growing concern in recent times. Traditionally, deliverance was seen as a spiritual and communal act meant to cleanse families of ancestral curses and spiritual bondage. However, in many contemporary religious settings, especially within Pentecostal churches, the practice has shifted towards a profit-driven model. Spiritual leaders now charge various fees for deliverance sessions, ranging from consultation fees to offerings for "spiritual materials" like anointing oil and holy water (Eze, 2020). This trend raises questions about whether deliverance is still a sacred duty or has become a business venture. Many religious leaders justify these charges by claiming they need resources to maintain their ministries and spiritual programs. Nonetheless, critics argue that this system exploits the vulnerability of desperate individuals seeking solutions to their family problems. People are often told that without deliverance, they will continue to face poverty, illness, or misfortune. These fear-based messages pressure families into paying large sums, sometimes beyond their means, just to gain access to what is promised to be a spiritual breakthrough (Okonkwo, 2018). This pattern has led to accusations of spiritual

manipulation and deception among some church leaders.

One major issue in *Oru ezi na ulo* practices in Igboland is the increasing demand for service fees by spiritual leaders. What used to be considered a spiritual duty is now often tied to financial contributions. Many spiritual leaders require individuals and families to pay for counseling sessions, prayer appointments, special deliverance programs, and spiritual items such as olive oil, water, and prayer garments (Eze, 2020). These fees can be quite high, especially for poor families who are desperate for solutions to their problems. This shift from voluntary giving to fixed payments has raised concerns about the true intention behind the practice of deliverance. The motivations of some spiritual leaders also appear questionable. While some genuinely believe they are offering a divine service, others may be more focused on the financial gains involved. In some cases, spiritual leaders promise immediate miracles in exchange for payment, creating false hope among their followers. This behavior has led to accusations of exploitation and manipulation, as people are pressured to pay large sums in fear of remaining in bondage or spiritual danger (Chukwu, 2021). Such actions not only undermine trust in religious institutions but also commercialize sacred beliefs.

Despite these problems, many spiritual leaders argue that service fees help sustain their ministries and meet operational costs. They claim that full-time ministry requires financial support to be effective and impactful. However, Ukah (2019) has argued

that when profit becomes the main focus, the spiritual value of deliverance is lost. The present study, hence, tries to examine *Oru ezi na ulo* and its commercialization in Igboland.

### Statement of the Problem

In recent times, the practice of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland has increasingly taken a commercial turn, raising serious concerns. Originally, *Oru ezi na ulo* was a sacred and spiritual act carried out to free individuals or families from generational curses, evil patterns, or spiritual attacks. It was done with sincerity, prayer, fasting, and faith. However, what used to be a sacred spiritual exercise has gradually turned into a business opportunity for some religious leaders. This shift has created doubt and mistrust among people who now question the true intentions behind these spiritual activities.

A major concern in this trend is the introduction of service fees for deliverance sessions. Families are now required to pay money before they can receive prayers or spiritual help. These fees cover various items such as prayer consultations, anointing oil, special candles, and sometimes even fasting sessions. In some cases, pastors demand large sums of money, claiming it is necessary to break curses or destroy spiritual barriers. This commercial approach makes spiritual help inaccessible to those who are financially challenged, especially poor families who genuinely need support. As a result, it creates a system where only the rich can afford deliverance, while the poor are left helpless.

Another troubling aspect is the changing motivation of some spiritual leaders. Instead

of being focused on helping people and serving God, many now seem driven by a desire for personal wealth and fame. Some pastors use fear-based messages to manipulate people into paying for repeated deliverance sessions, making them believe that they are constantly in danger without ongoing spiritual intervention. This behavior turns spiritual service into a profit-making scheme, where the focus shifts from healing and restoration to money and material gain. This therefore raises the following questions:

1. How does the practice of *Oru ezi na ulo* relate to commercialization in Igboland, particularly regarding the service fees and the driving motives of the spiritual leaders?
2. In what ways do *Oru ezi na ulo* rituals influence the spiritual and physical well-being of individuals and families within Igbo communities?

### Purpose of the Study

The main of this study is to examine *Oru ezi na ulo* (family deliverance) and its commercialization in Igboland, highlighting service fees and the motivations of spiritual leaders. Specifically, the study sought:

1. To investigate the relationship between *Oru ezi na ulo* phenomenon and commercialization, including the fees charged for the services and the motivations of the spiritual leaders involved.

2. To assess the impact of *Oru ezi na ulo* practices on the spiritual and physical well-being of individuals and families in Igboland.

### Significance of the Study

The study will be useful to Christians in Igboland, the church, students of religion, future religious researchers, Igbo traditional religionists, and the libraries.

To Christians in Igboland, the study will provide insights on the practice of *Oru ezi na ulo* phenomenon and its compatibility with biblical teachings and Christian values. This will help Christians in Igboland to make informed decisions about whether to engage in *Oru ezi na ulo* practices or not. It will also provide recommendations on how to reconcile the practice with Christian faith and practices.

The Church will also benefit from the study in that it will provide valuable information to church leaders and spiritual advisors on the challenges and opportunities presented by *Oru ezi na ulo* practices in Igboland. This can help them to better understand the needs and concerns of their congregations and provide appropriate guidance on spiritual matters.

Students of religion will find the study immensely useful as it will contribute to the academic discourse on the relationship between traditional African religious practices and Christianity. It will also provide insights on the cultural and historical roots of family deliverance practices in Igboland, which can be useful for students studying African religions and cultures.

To future researchers, the study will provide a foundation for further research on the phenomenon of *Oru ezi na uloin* Igboland and its implications for Christians in the region. Future researchers can build on this study to explore related topics, such as the impact of *Oru ezi na ulo* practices on mental health and well-being in Igboland.

### Research Methodology

The data will be gathered from primary and secondary sources. The primary data will be gathered from interviews, participant observations, and personal experiences. These will be supplemented with materials gathered from secondary sources which include library materials, biblical materials such as Bible dictionaries, bible commentaries, and extra-biblical materials like lexicons and various journals, books, related publications and internet materials. Qualitative descriptive analysis will be used to analyze the data generated in the course of this study. Qualitative descriptive analysis is an approach used in qualitative research to analyze and interpret data in a descriptive and systematic manner. It involves the detailed examination and interpretation of qualitative data to identify and describe patterns, themes, and meanings within the data set (Adebisi, 2015). In view of the fact that this study is mainly on a culture-area, the culture-area approach of analysis was also employed in order to ascertain how examine *Oru ezi na ulo* has been commercialized in Igboland and the attendant implications.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

### Deliverance Ministry

Deliverance ministry refers to a specific form of spiritual practice within various Christian traditions aimed at freeing individuals from spiritual bondages, afflictions, and demonic influences (Spencer, 2018). It involves the belief in the existence of spiritual forces of evil and the application of prayer, intercession, and spiritual warfare to bring about liberation and healing (Enegho and Jesutunwase, 2018). Ross (2014) noted that deliverance ministry finds its basis in biblical accounts of Jesus and the apostles casting out demons and healing the afflicted. This practice has seen varying levels of acceptance and emphasis across different denominations and movements within Christianity. The primary focus of deliverance ministry is on addressing spiritual strongholds and areas of oppression in a person's life. Proponents of this ministry often attribute physical, emotional, and psychological issues to spiritual causes, as discussed by Martin (2015). Thus, the purpose of deliverance is to seek spiritual healing and freedom, leading to overall well-being and a closer relationship with God.

Deliverance ministry operates on the belief that certain individuals possess a gift of discernment and authority to engage in spiritual warfare. These deliverance ministers, as mentioned by Fisher (2016), are believed to have the ability to identify and confront spiritual forces that may be negatively impacting a person's life. Through prayer, repentance, and the invoking of the power of Christ, deliverance ministers seek to

release individuals from the influence of these malevolent forces.

Another definition of Deliverance Ministry highlights its focus on inner healing and emotional well-being (Pagani, 2018). In this context, deliverance refers to the liberation from emotional wounds, trauma, and psychological burdens. Practitioners of this approach combine psychological insights with spiritual principles to help individuals achieve healing and wholeness. This definition acknowledges the importance of addressing not only external spiritual influences but also internal emotional struggles that can affect one's spiritual journey (Hecker, 2019). From a broader perspective, Deliverance Ministry can be seen as a multifaceted endeavor encompassing elements of counseling, pastoral care, and spiritual guidance (Ross, 2014). This view emphasizes the ministry's role in providing holistic support to individuals facing various challenges. Practitioners under this definition work to guide individuals through a process of self-discovery, spiritual growth, and personal empowerment. They may employ a range of techniques, including prayer, meditation, and emotional healing practices, to facilitate deliverance from physical, emotional, and spiritual difficulties (Pagan, 2018).

### Commercialization

Commercialization refers to the process of turning goods, services, ideas, or activities into commercial products that can be bought and sold for profit. It involves introducing

something into the market with the goal of generating income. This concept plays a vital role in modern economies where businesses aim to meet consumer needs while also making profit. Although commercialization can encourage innovation and economic growth, it can also lead to the loss of original values, especially when applied to sensitive areas such as religion, education, or culture (Okafor, 2019). The basic idea of commercialization is to create value from a product or service by making it available to consumers in exchange for money. For example, when a new invention is created, commercialization includes marketing, distributing, and selling it to the public. This process helps industries to grow and allows people to benefit from new ideas. However, when the main goal becomes money rather than service or impact, the quality and purpose of the product or service may suffer (Johnson, 2020).

In many developing societies, commercialization is spreading into areas that were once handled with care and sincerity, such as healthcare, education, and spirituality. In these areas, the push for profit can lead to exploitation. For instance, when health or religious services are commercialized, people may have to pay more than they can afford for services that should be provided with compassion and care (Adebayo, 2021). This can create inequality where only the rich have access to essential services, leaving the poor behind. One of the problems with excessive commercialization is that it shifts focus from people's needs to financial gain. In the past, many services

were seen as acts of service to the community. Today, even in places of worship or schools, there is growing concern that profit is becoming more important than purpose. When commercialization enters these spaces, the original mission may be ignored or forgotten, which weakens the trust people have in institutions (Eze, 2022).

Despite its challenges, commercialization has benefits when done properly. It can help small businesses grow, create jobs, and increase access to valuable goods and services. For example, when agriculture is commercialized, farmers can sell their products in larger markets and improve their incomes. Similarly, educational tools made available commercially can help students learn more effectively when prices are fair and the aim is to improve learning outcomes (Nnaji, 2020). The problem arises only when the drive for profit overpowers the desire to serve the public.

### Service fee

Service fee is a charge that a customer pays in exchange for a specific service provided by an individual, business, or institution. It is a common practice in many sectors such as banking, hospitality, healthcare, and even religion. These fees help cover the cost of labor, materials, or other resources used to deliver the service. The main idea is that the customer is not paying for a physical product, but for the value of the service given (Okoye, 2020). While this can help businesses survive and grow, it can also be misused when the fees are too high or not clearly explained. In many cases, service fees are necessary for

operations. For instance, banks charge service fees to maintain accounts, process transactions, or provide customer support. Similarly, in the health sector, hospitals charge patients for consultation, diagnosis, or treatment as service fees. These charges help pay workers and maintain facilities. When service fees are reasonable and openly communicated, people do not usually have a problem with them (Adeyemi, 2019). Problems arise when the fees are hidden or when the service does not match the amount charged.

One major issue with service fees is lack of transparency. Sometimes customers are not told in advance that they will be charged extra. This can lead to mistrust and frustration. For example, someone may attend a seminar or religious service believing it is free, only to be asked to pay a fee for materials or prayers afterward. Such practices damage the credibility of the provider and make people feel cheated (Eze, 2021). A fair system should clearly state what services cost and why those charges are necessary.

Another concern is when service fees are set too high, especially in situations where people have no choice but to pay. This often happens in places where services like water, electricity, or education are limited. Because people need these services, providers may use the opportunity to charge more than necessary. In some cases, even religious leaders now demand high fees before offering spiritual services like deliverance or counseling. This can lead to exploitation,

especially of the poor and vulnerable (Ifeanyi, 2022).

### Spiritual Leaders

Spiritual leaders are individuals who guide others in matters of faith, morals, and religious practices. They are often seen as role models who help people understand spiritual truths and live according to their religious beliefs. In many societies, spiritual leaders are respected for their wisdom, discipline, and ability to connect people with a higher power. They include priests, pastors, imams, rabbis, traditional spiritualists, and other religious figures who provide direction in both personal and communal life (Okonkwo, 2019). One of the major roles of spiritual leaders is to provide guidance and comfort during difficult times. People often turn to them for prayers, counseling, and advice when they are facing challenges such as sickness, loss, or confusion. They are expected to listen with care, offer hope, and speak words that uplift and strengthen the faith of others. In this way, spiritual leaders serve not only as religious figures but also as emotional and psychological support systems (Adebola, 2021).

However, there are growing concerns about the conduct of some spiritual leaders, especially when their actions are guided more by personal gain than by genuine service. In some cases, spiritual leaders demand high fees for prayers, healing, or deliverance. This has led to accusations of commercialization of spiritual services. When leaders focus more on collecting money than helping people, their true purpose is questioned, and

trust is broken (Ibrahim, 2022). This shift in motivation can negatively affect the spiritual well-being of followers who depend on them for sincere help. Despite these challenges, many spiritual leaders still serve with honesty, humility, and love. They sacrifice their time and energy to pray, teach, and care for others without expecting anything in return. Such leaders help people grow in their faith and build stronger, healthier communities. When spiritual leaders are sincere, they become a source of light, inspiration, and moral strength for society (Nwachukwu, 2023).

### *Oru ezi na ulo*

*Oru ezi na ulo* is a form of spiritual ministry that focuses on addressing spiritual strongholds, generational curses, and negative patterns within a family unit (Nwoye, 2011). It is rooted in the belief that spiritual influences can impact not only individuals but also entire families, leading to recurring patterns of dysfunction, emotional struggles, and other challenges (Okoroafor et al., 2019). This practice draws upon biblical principles of spiritual authority and the power of Christ to set individuals and families free from spiritual bondages (Achebe, 1975). *Oru ezi na ulo* involves prayer, intercession, and spiritual warfare to identify and confront these influences. Through repentance, breaking of generational curses, and seeking God's intervention, deliverance ministers aim to bring healing and restoration to the family unit (Okoli, 2019). According to Ezeanya (2014) *Oru ezi na ulo* is a profound and multifaceted concept deeply rooted in Igbo culture and spirituality. It refers to the

process of liberating a family from various forms of afflictions, challenges, and negative influences that hinder its well-being and harmony. This term is central to the Igbo worldview, where the family is regarded as the cornerstone of society, and the overall welfare of the family unit is of paramount importance.

In his own view, Adejumo (2014) explained that,

*Oru ezi na ulo* is a spiritual practice commonly undertaken by churches to address and resolve various forms of spiritual bondage or oppression within families. It involves seeking divine intervention through prayer, worship, and other spiritual tools to overcome challenges affecting family dynamics and relationships. The concept of *Oru ezi na ulo* acknowledges the belief that families can be influenced by negative spiritual forces, such as generational curses or unresolved ancestral issues, which impact their overall well-being.

However, skeptics and critics question the scientific validity of *Oru ezi na ulo* and its reliance on supernatural explanations. They argue that the perceived changes and improvements may be attributed to placebo effects, natural processes of personal growth, or the power of suggestion (Obasi, 2020). They emphasize the importance of evidence-based approaches, such as psychological interventions and evidence-based therapies, in addressing complex familial issues. It is essential to note that the practice of *Oru ezi na ulo* can vary significantly across different churches and religious communities. Some

may employ extreme or questionable methods that raise ethical concerns or can potentially harm individuals and families (Okonkwo, 2019). It is crucial for churches and religious leaders to approach *Oru ezi na ulo* with wisdom, discernment, and a commitment to the well-being of those involved.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory of Social Construction of Reality was developed by Berger and Luckmann (1966). It examines how society and social institutions shape individuals' perceptions and interpretations of reality. According to Berger and Luckmann, reality is not an objective or fixed entity. Instead, it is a product of human interactions and social processes. They argued that individuals collectively construct and maintain shared meanings, norms, and beliefs through ongoing social interactions. Through these interactions, individuals internalize societal values and norms, which then shape their subjective understanding of reality.

One of the key ideas in this theory is that knowledge is built through everyday communication. People learn how to act, what to believe, and how to think about the world by talking with others. For example, children are taught what is right and wrong, what is considered normal, and what is valued in their culture. Over time, they begin to accept these ideas as "truths." These shared beliefs then become part of a common understanding that influences the behavior of everyone in the group. Another important point in the theory is that social institutions

like family, religion, education, and media play a major role in shaping reality. These institutions pass on values, norms, and expectations that guide how people think and act. Through repeated exposure to these structures, individuals start to see them as natural or unchangeable. In reality, they are human-made systems that continue to exist because people accept and follow them.

This theory highlights the power of language in shaping our view of the world. Words help people organize and explain their experiences. Through language, people label things, describe events, and express values. Over time, these words form a shared vocabulary that helps people make sense of reality. Because of this, changes in language can also lead to changes in how people think about the world.

Relating the *Theory of Social Construction of Reality* to the topic "*The Commercialization of Oru Ezi na Ulo (Family Deliverance): An Investigation into Service Fees and the Motivations of Spiritual Leaders in Igboland*" provides a deeper understanding of how spiritual practices are shaped by collective beliefs and how they can evolve over time based on societal influence. In the context of Igboland, the practice of family deliverance, once viewed as a purely spiritual activity rooted in traditional and religious beliefs, has increasingly become shaped by social, economic, and cultural factors. This transformation illustrates how communities collectively construct the meaning and value of spiritual practices through interaction, interpretation, and repetition.

According to Berger and Luckmann, reality is built through communication and social agreement. In the case of *oru ezi na ulo*, spiritual leaders and members of the community continuously communicate certain ideas about spiritual attacks, ancestral curses, and the need for deliverance. These ideas become widely accepted as part of the community's "reality." As more people believe in the necessity of deliverance, they support and participate in these practices. Over time, the perception that family deliverance is not only necessary but also effective becomes institutionalized, turning it into a normalized aspect of community life.

Language and symbols play a vital role in reinforcing the commercialized form of deliverance. The use of specific religious language, testimonies, and symbolic items like holy water or anointing oil helps build credibility around the service. These tools create a spiritual atmosphere that convinces participants of the seriousness and effectiveness of the ritual. As these symbols become part of the deliverance experience, they further construct a reality where payment and ritual are closely linked, making it difficult for people to separate faith from finances. The *Theory of Social Construction of Reality* explains how *oru ezi na ulo* has shifted from a purely spiritual practice to a commodified religious service. Through repeated social interactions, institutional support, language, and evolving motivations, both spiritual leaders and followers have constructed a new version of reality where paying for deliverance is not only accepted but expected. This theoretical lens reveals

how deeply cultural practices are shaped by human agreement, and how they can be transformed over time by social and economic influences.

## EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Orji (2019) in his work: *"Deliverance Ministry in Igbo Pentecostalism: Dynamics of Power and Spirituality"* explores the core tenets of religious movement within the Igbo community. The research sheds light on the intricate relationship between power dynamics and spirituality within the context of deliverance ministry. By examining various aspects of Igbo Pentecostalism, Orji provides valuable insights into its fundamental principles and practices. The study highlights the belief in the reality of spiritual warfare. Igbo Pentecostalism sees the world as a battleground between forces of good and evil, where deliverance ministry is seen as a crucial means to combat spiritual oppression. Followers are encouraged to engage in intense spiritual warfare through prayer, fasting, and the invocation of divine intervention to overcome demonic forces and secure personal liberation.

Orji emphasizes the central role of spiritual power and authority in deliverance ministry. He argues that Igbo Pentecostalism places great emphasis on the authority of the clergy and the anointing bestowed upon them. Pastors and spiritual leaders are regarded as conduits of divine power, with the ability to cast out demons and perform miraculous healings. This authority is often attributed to the spiritual gifts received through baptism in the Holy Spirit. The study went further to

highlight the significance of confession and repentance. Deliverance ministry in Igbo Pentecostalism involves a process of self-examination, confession of sins, and renunciation of evil practices. The act of confession is believed to bring about spiritual cleansing and pave the way for personal transformation and deliverance from demonic influence. Also, Orji highlights the practice of spiritual mapping. Igbo Pentecostalism places importance on identifying specific spiritual strongholds or territorial spirits that are believed to exert influence over certain regions or communities. Through spiritual mapping, deliverance ministers seek to engage in strategic prayers and intercession to break the power of these spiritual forces and establish God's dominion in a particular area.

While Orji's research provides valuable insights into the broader dynamics of deliverance ministry within Igbo Pentecostalism, it primarily focuses on the individual's experience of deliverance and the associated power dynamics. However, it did not delve into the specific phenomenon of family deliverance. The gap lies in the lack of comprehensive exploration of how deliverance ministry within Igbo Pentecostalism specifically addresses and affects familial relationships and dynamics. The present work intends to fill this gap.

Okorie (2014), in his work: *"Family Deliverance and Spiritual Warfare in Igbo Pentecostalism"* highlights the phenomenon of family deliverance. The research provides insights into the spiritual warfare and power dynamics that are believed to impact familial

relationships. The study highlights the belief in the spiritual realm and the existence of evil forces that can influence families. Okorie explains that Igbo Pentecostalism perceives the family unit as a battleground for spiritual warfare, where demonic forces seek to disrupt harmony and sow discord. Family deliverance practices aim to identify and confront these spiritual influences to restore peace and unity within the family. He also emphasizes the role of the head of the family in spiritual leadership and warfare. The father or patriarch is regarded as the spiritual authority responsible for interceding on behalf of the family. This role includes leading prayers, engaging in spiritual battles, and standing against spiritual attacks targeting the family unit.

Also, the study delves into the significance of ancestral ties and generational curses within the context of family deliverance. Igbo Pentecostalism believes that negative spiritual influences and generational curses can be passed down through family lineages. Family deliverance practices involve identifying and breaking these generational curses through prayer, confession, and spiritual cleansing to ensure spiritual freedom and blessings for future generations. Furthermore, the study explores the practice of spiritual fortification and protection of the family. Igbo Pentecostalism encourages families to engage in spiritual practices such as regular prayer, fasting, Bible study, and the use of spiritual weapons like anointing oil and holy water. These practices are believed to strengthen the family spiritually and create a protective shield against spiritual attacks.

Okorie also highlights the significance of deliverance rituals and ceremonies within the family context. He asserts that these rituals often involve collective prayers, anointing, and the casting out of evil spirits from family members. Family members actively participate in these rituals, seeking deliverance from spiritual bondage and experiencing the power of God's intervention within their familial relationships.

While Okorie's research provides insights into the tenets of family deliverance and spiritual warfare within Igbo Pentecostalism, it did not extensively explore the broader phenomenon of family deliverance among the Igbo community. The gap lies in the limited scope of the study, which focuses primarily on the spiritual aspects of family deliverance within the context of Igbo Pentecostalism. In contrast, the present study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

## **ORIGIN OF IGBO**

### **Outside Origin Hypothesis**

The Igbo are one of Nigeria's major ethnic groups, mainly living in the southeastern region. According to oral stories passed down over generations, the Igbo trace their roots to a man named Eri. It is believed that Eri came from the Nile region and settled in what is now southeastern Nigeria around the 9th century AD. His descendants are said to be the early ancestors of the Igbo people. Long before colonialism, the Igbo lived in self-governed communities that had no central authority. Each village had its own council of elders, and the people survived through

farming, trade, and handcrafts. Igbo life was centered around large family groups, and kinship ties were highly respected.

Scholars have examined different forms of evidence—such as history, language, and archaeology—to understand the Igbo's roots. Afigbo (2014) notes that while some older theories linked the Igbo to the ancient Nok culture, there is little solid proof for this claim. Instead, more recent studies offer new ideas. Emenanjo (2015), using language analysis, places the Igbo language in the Niger-Congo family, specifically within the Kwa subgroup. This supports the idea that the Igbo might have come from Bantu-speaking people who migrated from present-day Cameroon. Onwuejeogwu (2016) agrees, stating that early Bantu migrations into southeastern Nigeria likely played a role in the formation of the Igbo ethnic identity.

In addition to stories and artifacts, science has helped too. Genetic studies show that the Igbo share DNA with other African groups, especially in West Africa. Salawu et al. (2019) suggest that this supports the theory of long-standing movements and interactions among African peoples, which helped shape different ethnic groups, including the Igbo.

Migration has been another important factor in their origin. Okafor (2021) explains that Igbo migration wasn't a single event but happened over a long time. Changes in climate, the search for better living conditions, and conflicts with other groups may have pushed the Igbo to move from place to place. His research shows that the Igbo were flexible and often interacted with

other communities, leading to the rich cultural variety seen in the region today.

### Internal Origin Hypothesis

From the Igbo people's own perspective, they have always belonged to the southeastern part of Nigeria. This belief is passed down through oral stories, traditional beliefs, and daily cultural practices that confirm their deep roots in the region (Ohanaka, 2015). The land is not just where they live; it holds spiritual, cultural, and historical meaning (Nwankwo, 2008). Many see the land as sacred and closely connected to their identity and values. Over time, the Igbo have developed unique languages, customs, and practices. Ekechukwu (1999) explains that these cultural traits are seen as coming directly from their ancestors who lived in the region for centuries.

Oral history is very important in keeping their internal origin story alive. Isichei (1976) explains that through storytelling, songs, and wise sayings, the Igbo share their history with each generation. These stories describe how their ancestors settled in the land, the challenges they faced, and how they built their communities. These shared memories strengthen the belief that the Igbo have always been part of the southeastern area.

This idea of being originally from the region also speaks to their strength and ability to survive difficult times. Even in the face of colonialism, wars, and modern political changes, the Igbo have continued to value their heritage. Isichei (1983) believes that this deep connection to their homeland gives the

Igbo the strength to adapt while holding on to their traditions and way of life.

The belief in an internal origin also creates a strong bond among Igbo people. It helps them feel united and proud of their shared history and cultural achievements. Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2005) adds that this sense of unity helps the Igbo keep their traditions alive, even when faced with pressure from outside influences. This belief in being indigenous to their land is not just about where they come from, but also about who they are today.

### **Cosmological Basis of *Oru ezi na ulo***

In Igbo culture, *Oru ezi na ulo* holds deep-rooted significance, and its foundations are intricately tied to cosmological beliefs that span generations. Central to Igbo cosmology is the belief in a pantheon of deities and spirits that govern various aspects of life. Okonkwo (2014) emphasizes the role of the ancestors, as they are thought to serve as intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Deity, *Chukwu*. The ancestors are revered for their ability to influence family well-being and deliverance, and thus, rituals and sacrifices are performed to appease them (Smith, 2015). These practices seek to maintain harmony within the family and ensure protection from malevolent forces. Furthermore, Igbo cosmology highlights the significance of *chi*, a personal deity that guides an individual's destiny. According to Ezeigbo (2016), the concept of *chi* is integral to understanding the family's deliverance. It is believed that the collective alignment of each family member's *chi* influences the overall prosperity and well-being of the

family unit. Therefore, in times of crisis or when seeking deliverance, individuals often consult diviners to decipher the will of their *chi* and make necessary amends (Azubike, 2018).

The cosmological basis of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igbo land also involve the concept of *Ogbanje* or "abiku," which refers to a child believed to be spiritually destined to die and reincarnate multiple times. Okoye (2017) argues that delivering a family from the afflictions of *Ogbanje* involves complex rituals and sacrifices to break the cycle of reincarnation. These practices aim to secure the child's life and ensure the family's liberation from the burden of recurrent loss. Moreover, Igbo worldview involves a deep reverence for the natural environment. Adiele (2019) asserts that the health and fertility of the land are vital for the prosperity of the family. Rituals and ceremonies are performed to honor and appease earth deities, fostering a harmonious relationship between the community, their land, and their ancestors. The belief in the interconnectedness of the living, the dead, and the divine is also foundational to the cosmological bases of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igbo land. Mgbafor (2020) describes the Igbo view that *Oru ezi na ulo* is not solely about individual actions but is deeply intertwined with the collective well-being of the entire community. Consequently, communal efforts are often employed in addressing family challenges and seeking deliverance. Furthermore, traditional healing practices play a significant role in *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igbo culture. As discussed by Nwachukwu

(2021), traditional healers, often called *dibia* or medicine men, are believed to possess special knowledge and communication with spirits. These healers are consulted for guidance, healing, and deliverance from various family afflictions, both physical and spiritual.

Despite the ongoing evolution and adaptation, the cosmological bases of *Oru ezi na ulo* continue to be an essential pillar of Igbo cultural identity. As a source of guidance, strength, and resilience, these beliefs and practices forge a sense of unity among Igbo families and communities. The continuity of these cosmological foundations is crucial not only for maintaining cultural heritage but also for providing a source of comfort and solace in times of adversity. These cosmological foundations are anchored in Igbo traditional beliefs and practices as presented below.

### **OLU EZI NA ULO IN PRAXIS**

#### ***Oru ezi na ulo* Practices, Rituals and Commercialization**

The commercialization of family deliverance in Igboland has become a growing concern among scholars and religious observers. Traditionally, family deliverance was a spiritual activity carried out to seek divine intervention in breaking generational curses, healing family-related misfortunes, or removing spiritual hindrances. However, in

recent times, this practice has taken a different turn as it has become a source of income for many pastors and spiritual leaders. These religious figures often present deliverance as a solution to all forms of hardship, manipulating people's fear to gain financial benefits (Okeke, 2020). The sacred nature of spiritual healing is now often overshadowed by material demands.

In Igboland, the practice of *Oru ezi na ulo* is deeply rooted in the cultural and religious fabric of the communities. *Oru ezi na ulo* revolves around the belief in spiritual warfare and the casting out of evil spirits or forces that are believed to afflict individuals or communities. Within this context, various practices and rituals are employed to combat spiritual oppression and bring about liberation.

Central to *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland is the role of the spiritual leader or practitioner, often referred to as a "spiritual father" or "prophet." These individuals are believed to have a special anointing or spiritual authority to intercede on behalf of those seeking deliverance. They are typically sought out by individuals experiencing spiritual afflictions or seeking protection from malevolent forces.

The following concrete observations in the cause of our field work go to buttress the impact of spiritual fathers in the *Oru ezi na ulo* practice.

### Case Study I: Kachi Michael's *Oru ezi na ulo*



*A prophet carrying out Oru ezi na ulo at Mr. Kachi Michael's house in Okpuno at Atani in Ogbaru LGA, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2024.*

The researcher visited the family of Michael Kachi at Atani in Ogbaru LGA of Anambra state, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2024, where *Oru ezi na ulo* was conducted for the family. The major materials used for the *Oru ezi na ulo* include Holy water, salt, cross, bell, Bible, candles, incense, and oil. In an interaction, Kachi (personal communication, 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2024) explained that carrying out *Oru ezi na ulo* in his home is a deeply personal and spiritual decision driven by various reasons which include constant ill health his daughter was having and his business that has not been flourishing. He has this to say:

*"it's about breaking free from generational curses or spiritual afflictions that may have plagued my family for years. These*

*afflictions could manifest as recurring patterns of negativity, dysfunction, or suffering. By engaging in deliverance rituals, I aim to sever these negative ties and create a new spiritual foundation for myself and my family. Also, I seek to protect my household from negative spiritual influences that have been threatening our well-being. I believe in the existence of malevolent forces that can infiltrate our lives and cause harm if left unchecked. Through Oru ezi na ulo, I create a spiritual shield around my loved ones, safeguarding them from harm and ensuring a peaceful and harmonious environment within our home. Moreover, Oru ezi na ulo is a form of spiritual cleansing and renewal for me and my family. Just as we clean our physical spaces to rid them of dirt and clutter, we need to cleanse*

*our spiritual environment to remove negative energies and obstacles. By purifying our home through deliverance practices, we create a space that is conducive to spiritual growth, positivity, and divine blessings.”*

The researcher also interacted with the prophet, Elijah Chukwuka, who conducted the family cleansing. During the interactions, he explained that rituals and practices in *Oru ezi na ulo* often involve a combination of prayers, fasting, anointing with oil, and the use of spiritual implements such as candles, holy water, and incense. These rituals are intended to invoke the presence and power of God while simultaneously repelling evil spirits. The use of symbolic gestures and sacred objects holds significant cultural and religious significance within the Igbo worldview.

Prophet Elijah Chukwuka further explained that *Oru ezi na ulo* practices and rituals in Igboland are deeply rooted in the cultural, spiritual and social fabric of the community. These rituals serve as a means of addressing spiritual afflictions, restoring balance and harmony within the family unit, and safeguarding against negative influences from the spiritual realm. Central to these practices is the belief in the interconnectedness of the living and the ancestral spirits, with families seeking divine intervention and guidance to navigate life's challenges.

M. Kachi (personal communication, March 11, 2024) further explained that *Oru ezi na ulo* rituals and ceremonies in Igboland

encompass a range of practices aimed at addressing perceived spiritual challenges and restoring harmony within the family unit. These rituals draw upon both traditional Igbo spiritual beliefs and Christian faith traditions, reflecting the syncretic nature of spirituality in the region. One common type of ritual is the ancestral appeasement ceremony, which seeks to honor and placate the spirits of deceased ancestors believed to wield influence over the family's fortunes. This is always done by the *dibia* who has knowledge of how this type of ritual is done. These ceremonies involve intricate rituals and offerings to honor and appease the ancestors. The ceremony often takes place in a designated sacred space within the family compound, where ancestral shrines or altars are set up to facilitate communication with the spirit realm. During the ancestral appeasement ceremony, the priest invokes the names of the ancestors, calling upon their spirits to participate in the proceedings. Offerings such as kola nuts, palm wine, cooked yams, and other traditional delicacies are presented as symbols of respect and gratitude to the ancestors. These offerings serve to nourish and satisfy the spirits, fostering goodwill and favor towards the living descendants. Additionally, prayers and incantations are recited to seek blessings for the family, protection from harm, and guidance in navigating life's challenges.

The atmosphere during the ceremony is often infused with solemnity and reverence, as family members gather to pay homage to their forebears. Through songs, dances, and rituals, the living seek to establish a profound

connection with the ancestral realm, acknowledging the role of the ancestors as guardians and benefactors. The ceremony culminates in a communal feast, where the offerings are shared among the participants, symbolizing the communion between the living and the dead.

In most cases, the *Dibia* collects all the required items he needs for the *Oru ezi na ulo* and take them to his shrine where he will prepare the rituals.

#### 4.2 The Role of Priests and Practitioners

In the realm of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland, the roles and engagements of priests and practitioners are pivotal in navigating the intricate web of spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. Priests, often revered as custodians of sacred knowledge and spiritual authority, play a central role in facilitating rituals and ceremonies aimed at addressing spiritual

afflictions within families. Drawing upon their expertise in indigenous spiritualism, priests act as mediators between the physical and spiritual realms, guiding families through the process of spiritual cleansing and protection. C. Okoye, an indigene of Okpuna Ezinifite Awka South LGA, (personal communication, April 11, 2024) noted that;

practitioners, including diviners, herbalists, and traditional healers, contribute specialized skills and insights to the practice of *Oru ezi na ulo*. Diviners possess the ability to communicate with ancestral spirits and divine the underlying causes of spiritual disturbances within families. Through divination methods such as casting of lots or consulting oracle systems like the Igbo divination tool "Ikenga," practitioners uncover hidden truths and prescribe remedies to restore balance and harmony within the family unit.

#### Case Study II: Chidozie Okoye's Family *Oru ezi na ulo*



*An Interview with a traditionalist, C. Okoye, an indigene of Okpuna Ezinifite, Awka South LGA, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, 2024.*

C. Okoye (personal communication, 11<sup>th</sup> of April, 2024) maintains that herbalists and traditional healers harness the healing properties of plants, roots, and natural substances to concoct potions, charms, and protective amulets used in *Oru ezi na ulo* rituals. They use traditional materials such as Ojã, Nzu, Ofo, Ogu, Calabash and Animal parts such as bones, feathers, or shells. Their knowledge of medicinal plants and traditional healing methods is instrumental in addressing physical and spiritual ailments afflicting family members. These practitioners often work in tandem with priests, incorporating their remedies and treatments into the broader framework of deliverance ceremonies to promote holistic well-being and spiritual renewal.

Okoye (personal communication, 11<sup>th</sup> of April, 2024) further notes that priests and practitioners also serve as spiritual counselors and guides, offering support and guidance to families grappling with spiritual challenges. Beyond performing rituals, they provide counsel on matters of morality, ethics, and interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the importance of harmony and unity within the family. Their wisdom and counsel are sought not only during times of crisis but also in everyday life, as families navigate the complexities of existence in the physical and spiritual realms.

Illustrating an example of the roles and engagements of priests and practitioners in *Oru ezi na ulo*, C. Okoye (personal communication, 11<sup>th</sup> of April, 2024) highlighted a recent incident that happened in the community on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, in which

the family of Mr Ekene Chukwunke has been grappling with recurring misfortunes and ill health. Upon consulting a diviner, the family were told that their ancestral lineage is afflicted by a malevolent spirit seeking vengeance for past transgressions. The diviner, in collaboration with a priest, carries out a series of rituals to appease the offended spirit, including offerings of sacrifices and libations to honor the ancestors and seek their intercession. Few weeks after this, there was a turn of event as the family did not experience any form of ill health again. Meanwhile, a herbalist prepares herbal remedies and protective charms to fortify the family against further spiritual attacks. Throughout the process, the priest offers prayers and invocations, invoking the blessings of the gods and seeking divine intervention to cleanse the family of negative energies. Through their combined efforts, the priests and practitioners guide the family towards reconciliation with their ancestors and restoration of spiritual equilibrium, laying the foundation for healing and prosperity to flourish once more. As the rituals are going on, the priests and practitioners continue to provide spiritual guidance and support to the family, reinforcing the importance of maintaining spiritual purity and adherence to traditional values. They counsel the family members on ways to cultivate harmony within their relationships, promote forgiveness, and uphold ancestral traditions. Through their collective expertise and spiritual leadership, the priests and practitioners empower the family to reclaim their spiritual sovereignty and navigate the challenges of life with

resilience and faith (personal communication, 11<sup>th</sup> of April, 2024).

Furthermore, priests and practitioners often serve as mediators between the spiritual and mundane realms, bridging the gap between the physical and metaphysical aspects of existence. They assist families in interpreting signs and omens, navigating dreams and visions, and discerning the will of the spirits. By offering insights into the spiritual significance of everyday occurrences, they help families make informed decisions and align their actions with divine guidance (Onwuejeogwu, 2017).

In times of crisis or uncertainty, the presence of priests and practitioners provides a source of reassurance and solace for families, offering prayers, blessings, and spiritual interventions to alleviate suffering and restore hope. Their unwavering commitment to serving the spiritual needs of the community underscores the profound impact of their work in fostering resilience, faith, and unity within Igbo families. Through their dedication and devotion, priests and practitioners uphold the sacred traditions of *Oru ezi na ulo*, ensuring that the spiritual legacy of the Igbo people endures for generations to come (Onuoha, 2023).

### **Acceptability of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland**

The acceptability of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland is deeply ingrained in the cultural, religious, and social fabric of the community. Across generations, the practice has been widely embraced and normalized as an essential aspect of spiritual well-being and family harmony. Rooted in indigenous

beliefs and traditions, *Oru ezi na ulo* rituals hold a revered place in Igbo society, with many individuals and families actively seeking the services of priests and practitioners to address spiritual afflictions and promote holistic flourishing within their households. In a discussion with G. Igwenagu (personal communication, 19<sup>th</sup> of May, 2024) an indigene of Nkwelle Ezunanka, it was observed that one of the key factors contributing to the acceptability of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland is its historical and cultural significance. Igwenagu (2024) noted that,

*For centuries, Igbo people have upheld ancestral veneration and indigenous spiritual practices as integral components of their identity and worldview. Oru ezi na ulo rituals are viewed as sacred rites passed down through generations, preserving ancestral wisdom and fostering a deep connection to the spiritual realm. As such, these rituals are met with respect and reverence, with communities actively participating in and supporting their enactment.*

Moreover, the acceptability of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland is reinforced by the widespread belief in the efficacy of these rituals in addressing spiritual afflictions and promoting well-being. Countless anecdotes and testimonies attest to the transformative power of deliverance ceremonies in resolving family disputes, healing illnesses, and restoring prosperity; such as the one from Mr Chukwudi Ugochukwu of Unateze Nkanu, in Enugu state, whose child was delivered of convulsion believed to be a spiritual attack.

Also, the family Jude Anawalu in Ohita, Ogbaru LGA of Anambra state which have a long history of financial difficulties, after *Oru ezi na ulo*, have seen changes as two sons of the family are building houses, while another one bought a car. These tangible manifestations of spiritual intervention serve to validate the importance of *Oru ezi na ulo* in the eyes of believers, further solidifying its acceptability within the community.

Furthermore, the acceptability of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland is bolstered by its adaptability and syncretism with Christianity. While rooted in indigenous beliefs, many deliverance rituals have evolved to incorporate Christian elements, such as prayers, hymns, and biblical teachings. This syncretic approach to spirituality reflects the dynamic nature of Igbo religious practices, accommodating diverse belief systems and appealing to a wide range of followers. As a result, *Oru ezi na ulo* rituals enjoy broad acceptance across religious denominations, transcending sectarian divides. In this regards, G. Chidioka (personal communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> of June, 2024), an indigene of Agu-Awka, Awka Anambra state, explained that,

*The effectiveness of Oru ezi na ulo rituals in addressing perceived spiritual problems also contributes to their acceptability in Igboland. When families witness positive outcomes, such as improved health, restored relationships, or financial stability, through participation in deliverance ceremonies, they are more likely to continue engaging in such practices and to view them as valid means of addressing their needs.*

Chidioka's view has earlier been maintained by Uchendu (2020) who asserted that, the acceptability of *Oru ezi na ulo* in Igboland is sustained by the social norms and expectations surrounding family and communal responsibilities. Within Igbo culture, the family unit is regarded as the cornerstone of society, and maintaining familial harmony and prosperity is considered a collective endeavor. *Oru ezi na ulo* rituals, therefore, are seen as essential rites of passage for ensuring the well-being and continuity of the family lineage, garnering widespread support and participation from relatives, neighbors, and community leaders.

### Summary

The commercialization of *Oru Ezi na Ulo*, or family deliverance, in Igboland has become a major concern due to the way spiritual leaders now demand service fees for prayers and rituals. This practice, which was once sacred and done for the spiritual well-being of families, is now treated like a business. Many families are pressured into paying money before they can receive deliverance prayers, which raises questions about the true intentions of those who offer the service. Traditionally, family deliverance was performed out of spiritual responsibility, with the goal of freeing families from generational curses, misfortunes, or spiritual attacks. However, today, people are charged consultation fees and asked to buy spiritual items like anointing oils, water, and clothes before prayers can begin. This shift from spiritual calling to commercial gain has led many to see these activities as a form of

exploitation, especially among poor and desperate families who seek help.

The investigation revealed that some spiritual leaders use fear and emotional manipulation to convince people that only expensive deliverance services can solve their problems. They often claim that failure to carry out the rituals will lead to death, family failure, or poverty. This tactic increases their income while creating fear and panic among followers. As a result, people feel trapped and end up paying for services they can barely afford.

### Recommendations

#### **Enforce Religious Accountability:**

Religious bodies and associations in Igboland should establish guidelines and monitoring systems to ensure that spiritual leaders do not exploit their followers financially in the name of family deliverance. This can include transparent service practices and penalties for unethical behavior.

**Promote Public Awareness:** Community education programs should be organized to enlighten people about genuine spiritual practices and the dangers of commercialization. This will help reduce fear-driven participation and empower

families to seek help responsibly without being manipulated.

### Conclusion

The growing trend of commercializing *Oru Ezi na Ulo* (family deliverance) in Igboland has raised serious concerns about the sincerity and purpose of spiritual practices. What was once a sacred tradition meant to heal families and restore peace has now become a financial burden for many. Spiritual leaders, driven by profit, have turned deliverance into a market-like activity where families must pay to access prayers and rituals. This shift not only undermines the spiritual value of the practice but also creates fear, guilt, and confusion among believers. This investigation has shown that the motivations behind many deliverance services are no longer rooted in faith, but in money-making. People are often manipulated to believe that without paying for special sessions, their families will remain under curses or suffer endless misfortunes. Such practices not only exploit vulnerable individuals but also damage the trust between religious leaders and their communities. The emotional and financial toll on families proves that commercialization does more harm than good.

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