
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIAN RELIGION AND THE CULTURE AND TRADITIONS OF THE CENTRAL SUBCULTURAL AREA OF IGBOLAND, REGARDING BURIAL CEREMONY

By

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Abstract

The disagreement between Christianity and the traditional culture of the Central subcultural area of Igboland has become a major issue, especially during burial ceremonies. This clash has led to confusion within families and communities, especially when deciding how to bury their loved ones. Many Christians in the region find it difficult to fully participate in traditional rites without feeling they are going against their faith. The present study therefore examined how this religious and cultural disagreements affect burial ceremonies in the Central Igbo region. The aim of the study is to examine the traditional burial practices of the central subcultural area of Igboland and their cultural significance; investigate the Christian doctrines and practices concerning burial ceremonies in the same region; and identify the areas of conflict between Christian burial practices and traditional Igbo burial customs. 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 Social Identity Theory, propounded by Henri Tajfel. The findings of the study showed that many Christian converts in the Central Igbo area face pressure to abandon traditional burial rites such as second burials, ancestral worship, and ritual sacrifices, which are seen by churches as unchristian and idolatrous; also, disagreements over burial practices have led to tension among family members, with some insisting on traditional customs while others demand a strictly Christian burial, sometimes resulting in strained relationships or exclusion from family rites. The study concluded that the clash between Christianity and traditional burial practices in the Central subcultural area of Igboland continues to create confusion and division among families and communities. This has led to emotional stress, broken relationships, and spiritual conflict for many individuals. The study recommended that there should be regular meetings and conversations between Christian clergy and traditional elders to foster understanding and find ways to respectfully blend both practices during burial ceremonies; workshops and seminars should be organized which will explain the meanings and values of Christian burial rites alongside Igbo traditional customs, helping families appreciate the importance of both and reduce misunderstandings.

Introduction

A burial ceremony is an important cultural and religious practice that marks the end of a person's life on earth. It is a formal way of saying goodbye to the deceased and showing respect to their memory. Burial ceremonies are deeply rooted in tradition and serve both spiritual and social functions. They are often guided by beliefs about life after death and the proper way to send off a loved one (Uzor, 2019). The burial ceremony helps family members and friends express their grief and cope with the loss. It provides a structured process for mourning, which is essential for emotional healing. During the ceremony, people come together to share their sorrow and support one another. This collective expression of grief helps individuals to feel less alone in their pain and strengthens communal bonds (Nwoye, 2020). In many cultures, the burial ceremony is believed to ensure the peaceful transition of the soul to the afterlife. Performing the proper rites is seen as a way to protect the living from spiritual harm. The ceremony may involve specific prayers, chants, or rituals believed to guide the spirit safely. These practices reflect the community's spiritual beliefs and highlight the connection between the living and the dead (Adegbulu, 2018). Burial ceremonies also serve as a way of preserving cultural identity. They reflect the customs, values, and traditions of a people, which are passed down from generation to generation. The ceremony becomes a teaching tool for younger members of the community, helping them understand and respect their heritage. It reinforces the social roles and responsibilities

expected during times of loss (Obiechina, 2019).

Burial ceremony in Igboland is a deeply respected cultural practice that reflects the people's beliefs about life, death, and the afterlife. It is not just a time of mourning but a sacred duty to honor the dead and ensure their peaceful journey to the ancestral world. In Igbo tradition, death is seen as a passage to another existence, and the burial ceremony is performed with great care to show reverence and respect for the deceased (Okonkwo, 2018). The burial ceremony among the Igbo is guided by age, status, and social roles of the deceased. Elders, titled men, and respected individuals are often given elaborate rites, while younger or unmarried persons receive simpler ceremonies. These differences highlight the importance the Igbo place on achievements and societal roles during one's lifetime. The ceremony reflects how the community values the individual and maintains order in honoring the dead (Umeasiegbu, 2020). Rituals are central to Igbo burial ceremonies. These rituals involve traditional prayers, libations, and music that communicate with the spiritual world. The Igbo believe that if the correct rites are not performed, the spirit of the dead may not rest in peace and could trouble the living. Therefore, each step of the burial is done with strict attention to cultural norms to avoid spiritual problems for the family and the community (Nwoye, 2019). The burial ceremony also brings together extended families and the entire village. It becomes a time for unity, support, and social reinforcement. People travel from far places

to attend and offer sympathy to the bereaved. This gathering is not only for mourning but also for strengthening family bonds and reaffirming communal values. It shows the strong role that collective support plays in Igbo society (Eze, 2021).

In Igboland, the burial ceremony is also connected to ancestral worship. The deceased, especially elders, are believed to join the ancestors who watch over the living. As such, the burial is not the end but a transformation into a new role in the spiritual world. This belief guides the careful performance of burial rites to ensure that the deceased is accepted among the ancestors (Obiechina, 2020). Modern influences have begun to affect the way burial ceremonies are done in Igboland. Urbanization, economic challenges, and especially religious influences have led to modifications in traditional practices. In Igboland, burial ceremonies are deeply rooted in traditional beliefs, and this sometimes causes conflict with Christian practices. Traditionally, burial rites are seen as essential for ensuring the peaceful transition of the dead into the spirit world. These customs involve elaborate ceremonies that reflect the social status and achievements of the deceased. On the other hand, Christianity teaches a simpler approach to burial, focusing on spiritual preparation and the hope of resurrection (Eze, 2020). The difference in these beliefs has caused tension between the followers of traditional religion and Christians.

One major issue is the length and cost of traditional burial ceremonies. In many Igbo

communities, the traditional rites can last for several days and involve costly items, feasts, and rituals. Christian teachings often discourage such elaborate practices, promoting modest and spiritually focused ceremonies (Okafor, 2018). Families that want to follow Christian ways may be pressured by community members to carry out the traditional rites, leading to disagreement and sometimes division. Another source of conflict is the performance of traditional rituals that contradict Christian beliefs. Some of these rituals involve libations, ancestral invocations, and other practices that the church views as idolatrous (Nwoye, 2019). Christians may refuse to participate in these aspects of the burial, which could be seen as disrespectful by traditionalists. This refusal sometimes results in accusations that the Christian relatives are dishonoring the dead and their culture. Furthermore, church authorities may object to some traditional practices being included in church services or church grounds. This can lead to families being denied access to church venues or clergy support if they insist on incorporating traditional elements (Ilogu, 2021). On the other hand, traditional leaders may accuse Christians of abandoning communal values and weakening the unity of the community by refusing to comply with cultural expectations during burials. These problems have continued to exist between the Christians and tradition and cultural practices of the people. The present study is, therefore, set to examine the conflict between Christian religion and the culture and traditions of the central subcultural area of Igboland, regarding burial ceremony.

Statement of the Problem

In Igboland, the burial ceremony is a significant cultural event that symbolizes respect for the dead and unity within the community. Traditionally, it involves elaborate rites and customs passed down from generation to generation. These include rituals, entertainment, and public display of wealth as a way to honour the deceased. The ceremony often takes many days and is marked by strong communal participation. However, these traditional practices have increasingly come into conflict with Christian beliefs, leading to tension between culture and religion. Christianity, which has grown strongly among the Igbo people, teaches a more modest and spiritually focused approach to burial. Christians believe that death should be seen as a transition to eternal life and should be treated with solemnity and moderation. They often discourage lavish celebrations, traditional rituals, and ancestral invocations associated with Igbo burials. This spiritual perspective creates a serious disagreement between Christians and cultural custodians who see traditional burial rites as sacred and necessary.

The conflict is more visible when Christian families reject certain traditional practices during burial. In some cases, Christian relatives avoid rituals such as traditional cleansing, second burials, or masquerade displays, which are seen as central to cultural identity. This refusal is sometimes

interpreted as disrespect to elders and the community. It causes tension and division within families and villages, especially when older members insist on following cultural customs. Church leaders also play a major role in this conflict. Many churches instruct their members not to participate in traditional burial rites, warning them that such practices go against biblical teachings. Some churches even refuse to conduct funeral services for members who combine Christian and traditional rites. This strict stance further deepens the divide between the two belief systems and creates confusion among the people who wish to honour both their faith and cultural heritage.

This growing disagreement between Christian beliefs and traditional customs over burial ceremonies in Igboland has become a source of social conflict. It challenges the people's ability to maintain both their cultural identity and religious beliefs. Although both sides aim to show respect to the dead, their different approaches often create misunderstanding. Unless a peaceful middle ground is found, this problem will continue to cause division among the Igbo people.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to examine the conflict between Christian religion and the culture and traditions of the central subcultural area of Igboland, regarding burial ceremony. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the traditional burial practices of the central subcultural area of Igboland and their cultural significance.
2. investigate the Christian doctrines and practices concerning burial ceremonies in the same region.
3. identify the areas of conflict between Christian burial practices and traditional Igbo burial customs.

Research Methodology

The data were gathered from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered from interviews, participant observations, and personal experiences. These were supplemented with materials gathered from secondary sources which include library materials, various journals, books, related publications and internet materials. Qualitative descriptive analysis was 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.

Literature Review

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is generally seen as a situation where there is a disagreement between two or more individuals or groups. It often arises when people have different opinions, needs, interests, or values. In social sciences,

conflict is commonly described as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and resources, in which the opposing parties aim to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals (Galtung, 2017). This shows that conflict goes beyond physical confrontations and can include emotional or psychological battles. From a psychological point of view, conflict is regarded as a mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, or wishes within an individual or between people (Baron, 2018). It involves emotional responses that may affect decision-making, relationships, and behavior. This definition helps to explain how inner tensions or interpersonal frictions can result in visible disputes or even long-lasting resentment between people or groups.

In sociology, conflict is defined as a social process in which individuals or groups struggle to achieve goals that cannot be achieved together (Collins, 2019). This definition highlights the competitive aspect of conflict, where the success of one party often leads to the failure of the other. It explains why conflict is common in settings where resources or opportunities are limited and where different interests clash. Political scientists describe conflict as a contest or struggle between individuals or groups that seek to gain political power, recognition, or control over a system or territory (Deutsch, 2020). In this view, conflict is linked to governance, authority, and legitimacy, and it reflects the challenges that arise when different people or groups try to influence political decisions or outcomes. This

definition is often used to understand civil unrest, wars, and policy disagreements.

From a communication perspective, conflict is seen as a breakdown in the process of sharing information, where misunderstandings or poor interactions lead to tension and opposition (Littlejohn & Foss, 2018). Here, the focus is on how messages are sent, received, and interpreted. Miscommunication or lack of dialogue can increase tension and create distance between individuals or groups, even when their goals may not necessarily oppose each other. In the field of peace and conflict studies, conflict is viewed as a natural and sometimes necessary part of social life that can lead to change, depending on how it is handled (Francis, 2018). This view acknowledges that conflict is not always negative but can be constructive if managed properly. It promotes the idea of conflict transformation rather than simply conflict resolution, encouraging approaches that address the root causes and promote long-term peace.

Concept of Christian Religion

Christian religion is often defined as a monotheistic faith based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is centered on the belief in one God and the message of salvation through Jesus. According to Okafor (2018), Christianity is a spiritual path that teaches love, forgiveness, and eternal life through a relationship with Jesus Christ. This definition emphasizes the central figure of Jesus and the spiritual purpose of the religion. In theological terms,

the Christian religion is seen as a covenant relationship between God and humanity, made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus. Omoregbe (2019) explains that Christianity involves the acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God and following His teachings as a guide for moral and spiritual living. This perspective focuses on the divine connection and the moral responsibility that comes with being a Christian.

Sociologists define the Christian religion as an organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals that shape the behavior and values of its followers. Nmah (2020) describes Christianity as a social institution that influences individuals and communities through worship, doctrines, and community life. This definition presents Christianity not only as a belief system but also as a structure that affects culture and social organization. From a historical perspective, Christianity is understood as a religious tradition that began in the first century and has grown into one of the world's major religions. Eze (2021) defines the Christian religion as a historical movement that emerged from Judaism and developed its own doctrines, scriptures, and identity over time. This view highlights the origin, growth, and spread of Christianity throughout different societies.

Concept Culture and Traditions

Culture and traditions are often defined as the shared beliefs, values, customs, and behaviors that shape how a group of people live and relate with one another. According to Nwaorgu (2018), culture and traditions

represent the lifestyle of a people, including their language, norms, and social practices passed from one generation to another. This definition shows that culture and traditions give identity and meaning to a community. In anthropology, culture and traditions are seen as the total way of life of a people, including their material and non-material aspects. Okonkwo (2020) explains that culture involves both the physical objects created by a society and the symbolic systems like religion, values, and moral codes. Traditions, in this context, are the repeated practices that keep cultural knowledge alive. This highlights the deep link between culture and daily life activities.

From a sociological perspective, culture and traditions are the foundation of social order, guiding behavior and shaping group interaction. Ede (2019) states that culture is a system of learned behaviors and symbols, while traditions are the inherited customs that provide continuity and unity within a group. This definition emphasizes how culture and traditions help maintain social harmony and identity. In education, culture and traditions are described as tools that influence learning, values, and worldviews. According to Adebayo (2021), culture affects how people think, learn, and communicate, while traditions serve as informal educational systems that transmit wisdom and norms. This view shows that both culture and traditions are essential in shaping the mindsets and attitudes of individuals in a society. Philosophers view culture and traditions as expressions of human creativity, knowledge, and belief systems. Umezinwa

(2017) defines culture as a product of human reasoning and creativity, and traditions as the patterns through which people preserve their moral and spiritual values. This definition points to the intellectual and reflective nature of culture and its preservation through traditions.

Concept of Igboland

Igboland is commonly defined as the geographical and cultural region inhabited by the Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria. According to Nwankwo (2019), Igboland refers to the homeland of the Igbo ethnic group, marked by shared language, customs, and ancestral heritage. This definition emphasizes the ethnic identity and cultural unity of the people within the region. From a geographical perspective, Igboland is described as a defined area in southeastern Nigeria that includes several states such as Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, and Ebonyi. Ezeani (2020) notes that Igboland is a physical territory where the Igbo population is concentrated, with distinct boundaries and a unique cultural landscape. This view highlights the physical location and environmental features of the region.

In historical studies, Igboland is defined as a region with a long history of indigenous civilization, known for its traditional governance and economic systems. Nwachukwu (2017) explains that Igboland has existed for centuries with rich oral history, religious beliefs, and communal life that reflect its past development. This perspective shows that the identity of

Igboland is rooted in its historical evolution. From a sociological angle, Igboland is seen as a community built on kinship, social order, and collective responsibility. Okeke (2021) describes Igboland as a society organized around family, village, and community structures, where customs and social norms shape behavior. This definition points to the social organization and communal values of the Igbo people.

In cultural studies, Igboland is defined as a center of Igbo cultural expressions such as language, festivals, music, dress, and beliefs. Uzochukwu (2018) identifies Igboland as the cultural heart of the Igbo ethnic group, where traditions and values are preserved and transmitted across generations. This view underscores the role of Igboland in sustaining Igbo identity. Politically, Igboland is seen as a region with a unique voice and interest in the Nigerian federation. As stated by Ogbodo (2022), Igboland represents a socio-political bloc within Nigeria that seeks recognition, development, and justice for its people. This definition reflects the political concerns and aspirations of the Igbo within the national context.

Concept of Burial Ceremony

Burial ceremony is generally defined as a formal event organized to honor and lay a dead person to rest. According to Okonkwo (2019), a burial ceremony involves rituals and practices that reflect the cultural and spiritual beliefs of a community about death and the afterlife. This definition shows that burial is not just a physical act but also a

cultural and spiritual event. From an anthropological point of view, burial ceremony is seen as a rite of passage that marks the transition of a person from the world of the living to the world of the ancestors. Eze (2020) explains that such ceremonies help the living to accept death and maintain a connection with their ancestors. This view shows the deep link between burial practices and the belief system of a people.

As explained by Nwosu (2018), burial ceremonies serve as a way to express emotions, share grief, and reinforce social bonds within a community. This definition highlights the role of burial in strengthening community unity. In religious studies, burial ceremony is described as a sacred event performed according to the religious teachings of the deceased's faith. According to Adeyemi (2021), burial ceremonies are guided by religious beliefs about the soul, resurrection, and eternal life. This definition emphasizes the importance of spiritual guidance in funeral practices. From a cultural perspective, burial ceremony is understood as a traditional practice that reflects the values, customs, and identity of a people. Opara (2017) defines it as a cultural expression that includes music, attire, and symbolic acts that communicate honor and respect. This view points to the way burial ceremonies help preserve cultural heritage.

In legal and administrative contexts, burial ceremony is seen as an event that must follow certain regulations and procedures. As noted by Chibueze (2022), burial ceremonies often

require official documentation, permits, and compliance with local laws. This definition focuses on the legal and formal aspects involved in organizing and carrying out a burial.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory was propounded by Henri Tajfel (1970). It is a psychological theory that explains how people understand themselves based on the groups they belong to. The theory says that individuals create a part of their identity from the social groups they are part of, such as nationality, religion, or sports teams. This group membership helps people feel a sense of belonging and self-worth. According to the theory, people naturally categorize themselves and others into groups. These groups are called "in-groups" when they include oneself and "out-groups" when they do not. This categorization simplifies the social world and helps individuals know where they fit in. However, it can also lead to biases because people tend to favor their own in-group over out-groups. Social Identity Theory also highlights that people try to maintain a positive image of their groups. When their group is viewed positively, it improves their self-esteem. If the group's image is negative, individuals may try to leave the group or change how they see it. This process shows how important group membership is to a person's sense of self.

Social Identity Theory can help explain the conflict between Christian religion and the culture and traditions of the central subcultural area of Igboland regarding burial ceremonies. Both the Christian religion and the Igbo cultural traditions represent important social groups to the people involved. Each group provides its members with a sense of identity, belonging, and pride. When these groups hold different beliefs and practices about burial, the clash is not just about customs but also about preserving and defending one's social identity. People who strongly identify with the Christian religion may see their burial practices as a vital part of their group identity, which reflects their values and worldview. Similarly, those who hold to Igbo cultural traditions view their burial ceremonies as essential to their heritage and social identity. Because these identities are deeply connected to self-esteem and community belonging, challenges to either set of practices can be perceived as threats to the group's positive image and cohesion.

This conflict can cause in-group favoritism and out-group bias, where members of each group view their own practices as superior and may reject or criticize the other's customs. The desire to maintain a positive social identity can make compromise difficult, as changing burial practices might feel like losing part of what defines the group. As a result, tension arises between preserving traditional Igbo culture and embracing Christian religious norms. In this way, Social Identity Theory shows that the conflict over burial ceremonies is not just about religious

or cultural differences but also about how people protect their sense of identity linked to their groups. Understanding this helps explain why the dispute can be intense and why both groups strongly defend their beliefs and practices.

Empirical Review

Mokohathi (2021) in his article *African Christianity: Intersections Between Culture And Identity Among Amaxhosa*, ascertained that African Christianity among the amaXhosa people shows a deep link between religion, culture, and identity. When Christianity was introduced by missionaries, it brought new beliefs and ways of life that affected traditional amaXhosa customs. This blending created a unique form of Christianity that reflects both African identity and spiritual belief. However, Mokohathi noted that the influence of Western Christianity also led some people to reject or forget parts of their cultural heritage, which has caused tension within the community. One of the main challenges facing African Christianity among the amaXhosa is the clash between Christian values and traditional practices. Some churches view customs like ancestral worship, initiation rites, and traditional healing as sinful or unchristian. This creates confusion and conflict among believers who want to respect both their faith and their heritage. As a result, younger generations feel lost between these two worlds, not fully accepting either. Also, some Christian leaders reject cultural practices without understanding their meaning. This led to numerous issues among the traditional

believers and Christian believers. Based on this, Mokohathi recommended that it is important to teach pastors and church members about the cultural importance of these traditions and encourage open conversations. Churches should work with cultural leaders to find a balance that respects both Christian beliefs and Xhosa customs. Nevertheless, the gap here is that research focused only on religion or culture separately, without showing how the two shape how people see themselves. The present study will attempt to cover this gap by explaining how this conflict influences their choices, relationships, and sense of belonging. By understanding this, we can find better ways to help people practice their faith without losing their cultural roots.

2.3.4 Onwuzulike (2008) in his article “*African Crossroads: Conflicts between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*” explores the struggle many African communities face in trying to balance their cultural beliefs with the teachings of Christianity. He ascertained that African Traditional Religion (ATR) is deeply rooted in the people's way of life, guiding their customs, values, and social order. However, the arrival of Christianity brought a new set of beliefs that often clashed with traditional practices. Onwuzulike noted that this conflict has led to confusion and identity crises among Africans, especially when they are forced to choose between their ancestral customs and Christian doctrines. The study highlights that this has caused challenges such as the rejection of traditional festivals, burial rites, and ancestral worship by

Christians who see them as ungodly. This has led to divisions in families and communities, disrespect for elders, and a gradual loss of cultural heritage. The paper also notes the psychological stress individuals face when torn between their faith and their culture. To solve these problems, Onwuzulike recommended mutual respect, open dialogue, and cultural education. He suggested that religious leaders should avoid condemning traditional practices and instead work to understand their meanings and values, while cultural custodians should also be open to positive changes. However, the gap in the study is the lack of in-depth research on how Christianity can adapt to African cultural contexts without destroying them. Onwuzulike's study, just like many other studies, have focused on religious doctrine without considering the value of traditional customs. The present study will help fill this gap by exploring how the Christian faith can coexist with cultural values in a respectful and balanced way. This new study will focus on practical ways both religions can learn from each other and work together to promote unity and preserve African identity.

Igbo Sub-Cultural Zones

The Igbo ethnic group, indigenous to southeastern Nigeria, represents one of the largest and most culturally rich communities in West Africa. The Igbo homeland is traditionally divided into distinct sub-cultural zones, each characterized by unique dialects, customs, and historical experiences. These zones include the Central, Northern, Eastern, and Southern Igbo sub-cultural areas. Despite

differences in expression, these zones are united by shared values, beliefs, and kinship systems that form the foundation of Igbo identity.

The Central sub-cultural zone comprises towns such as Ihiala, Awka, and Onitsha. This region is particularly noted for its religious and cultural dynamism, making it a focal point for traditional rituals like *Oru ezi na ulo*. Other zones include the Eastern zone (Owerri, Orlu, Okigwe), the Southeastern zone (Aba, Umuahia, Ohafia/Arochukwu), and the Northern zone (Nsukka, Enugu, Abakaliki/Afikpo). Each of these regions exhibits distinctive social structures and ritual practices that reflect localized histories and environmental influences.

This study focuses on the Central sub-cultural zone due to its unique interplay of tradition, modernization, and religious diversity. The region serves as a valuable case study for examining how rituals such as *Oru ezi na ulo* are interpreted, practiced, and adapted in contemporary Igbo society. By concentrating on this zone, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the ritual's cultural functions and its implications for family and community well-being.

Central Sub-Cultural Zone of Igboland

The central sub-cultural zone of Igboland stands out for its historical depth, vibrant socio-cultural traditions, and economic dynamism. This region, which includes communities such as Awka, Onitsha, and Ihiala, is recognized for its pivotal role in commerce, traditional values, education, and

spiritual life. Positioned at a geographically strategic point, it fosters interconnection among various Igbo subgroups, creating a confluence where heritage and contemporary influences meet. The central zone exemplifies the entrepreneurial ethos of the Igbo people, as seen in the prominence of commercial centers such as the Onitsha Main Market. Uzochukwu (2020) highlights that the fusion of economic activities and cultural traditions in this region has significantly contributed to defining the broader Igbo identity.

What makes this zone especially remarkable is its capacity to merge longstanding traditions with the demands of a modernizing society. Festivals, indigenous governance systems, and religious observances continue to flourish, even as the communities embrace education, urban growth, and innovation.

Awka: Cultural Capital of the Central Zone

Awka, situated in Nigeria's southeastern corridor, is a central sub-cultural hub within Igboland, celebrated for its deep cultural roots and historical contributions. Known traditionally for its blacksmithing skills, Awka gained regional prestige for its metal craftsmanship, which had wide-reaching impact throughout pre-colonial West Africa. This metallurgical expertise enabled Awka to supply agricultural and defensive tools to surrounding areas, thus enhancing its socio-economic standing. Uzochukwu (2018) asserts that the blacksmiths of Awka played a foundational role in sustaining Igbo

communities by supporting farming and security needs.

Spiritually and culturally, Awka remains an epicenter of Igbo traditional life. It continues to practice ancestral veneration and observe age-old religious rites that are interwoven with Igbo cosmological beliefs. Its local governance, grounded in egalitarian ideals, relies on the involvement of age-grade systems and councils of elders. As Okoye (2020) notes, these indigenous governance frameworks serve as vehicles for participatory decision-making and social harmony. Awka's ability to preserve its traditions while progressing in areas such as education and civic development underscores its unique position as a center of both heritage and innovation in Igboland.

Onitsha: The Commercial Heartbeat of Igboland

Onitsha, one of southeastern Nigeria's most prominent cities, holds a critical place within the central sub-cultural zone due to its historical, economic, and cultural importance. The city's location on the banks of the River Niger made it a strategic center for regional and international trade, linking Igboland with other West African communities. According to Okonkwo (2018), Onitsha's function as a major trading post elevated its stature and enabled it to become a confluence of cultures and ideas.

Today, Onitsha continues to thrive economically with its iconic Onitsha Main Market, one of the largest in West Africa. This market supports commercial activity on

local, national, and international scales. Ikenna (2022) emphasizes that the market's vibrancy reflects the Igbo people's reputation for business acumen, with Onitsha nurturing generations of successful entrepreneurs. Culturally, Onitsha also hosts numerous festivals and supports the arts, education, and religious life, all of which contribute to its rich identity. Its dual role as a cultural anchor and economic engine demonstrates the multifaceted significance of Onitsha within Igboland.

Ihiala: Cultural Heritage and Agricultural Strength

Located in southeastern Nigeria, Ihiala is another key community in the central sub-cultural zone of Igboland, renowned for its strong cultural traditions, spiritual diversity, and agricultural expertise. Historically, Ihiala has maintained communal cohesion through its traditional governance mechanisms, which include councils of elders and age-grade organizations. These institutions help in maintaining order and upholding cultural values. Obiefuna (2018) points out that such traditional structures have been critical in sustaining the social fabric of the community.

Ihiala's spiritual life illustrates a blend of traditional Igbo religion and Christianity. The people continue to honor ancestral spirits and sacred spaces while also embracing Christian practices introduced during colonial times. Okafor (2020) observes that this duality creates a rich spiritual environment where both traditional and modern religious beliefs coexist. The community's economic strength, largely derived from agriculture and small-

scale industries, and its intellectual contributions further cement its role as an important part of the Igbo cultural landscape.

Traditional burial practices in Igboland and their cultural significance

The traditional burial practices of the central sub-cultural area of Igboland are deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Igbo people. These practices reflect the community's respect for ancestors and the afterlife, emphasizing the continuity between the living and the dead. Burial ceremonies are not merely acts of disposing of the dead but are significant rites that ensure the deceased's peaceful transition to the ancestral realm and maintain social harmony among the living (Okoye, 2018). Such rituals underscore the importance of lineage and communal identity in Igbo society. In the central Igbo cultural context, the burial process involves elaborate ceremonies that are often communal events. The preparation for burial begins with mourning and the observance of various rites designed to honor the dead. These rites typically include specific rituals aimed at cleansing the spirit of the deceased and preparing them for their journey to the spirit world (Nwankwo, 2020). The community's involvement in these rites reflects the collective responsibility to uphold tradition and support the bereaved family emotionally and spiritually.

The materials and methods used in traditional burials are symbolic and hold cultural meaning. The use of specific clothing, the arrangement of the body, and the items

buried alongside the deceased are intended to provide comfort and protection in the afterlife (Eze, 2019). These elements are closely tied to Igbo cosmology, which views death as a transition rather than an end, and the burial practices serve as a bridge connecting the earthly existence with the spiritual realm.

Burial ceremonies in the central subcultural area of Igboland also serve important social functions. They act as moments of reaffirmation of family ties and community solidarity. The event allows for the expression of collective grief, the reinforcement of social hierarchies, and the celebration of the deceased's life and contributions to the community (Ibe, 2017). Through these practices, the society not only honors the dead but also educates the younger generation about cultural values and responsibilities. Moreover, traditional burial practices have a spiritual significance that affects the perceived well-being of both the living and the dead. Proper burial is believed to ensure the deceased's peaceful rest and to prevent spiritual unrest that could bring misfortune to the living family members (Obi, 2021). This belief highlights the Igbo understanding of the interconnectedness of life and death, where the ancestors continue to influence and protect the community.

Furthermore, the economic dimensions of burial ceremonies reflect both cultural priorities and social obligations. While these events may require significant resources, the community's willingness to contribute underscores the value placed on honoring the

deceased properly (Nwoga, 2021). This collective support system not only alleviates the burden on the bereaved family but also strengthens social bonds and mutual assistance networks within the community. Overall, the traditional burial practices in central Igboland are a profound expression of cultural identity, social cohesion, spiritual belief, and ethical continuity. They encapsulate the values and worldview of the Igbo people, ensuring that both the living and the dead remain connected through shared rituals and communal responsibility. This cultural heritage is vital not only for the community itself but also as a significant contribution to the broader understanding of African indigenous practices.

Christian doctrines and practices concerning burial ceremonies in Igboland

Christian doctrines and practices concerning burial ceremonies in Igboland reflect the theological beliefs and liturgical traditions brought by Christianity, which have significantly influenced the way death and burial are perceived and conducted among Igbo Christians. Central to Christian burial is the belief in the resurrection of the dead and eternal life, which shapes the rituals and prayers performed during the funeral rites (Okeke, 2019). This doctrine reassures the bereaved that death is not the end but a transition to a new life with God, providing comfort and hope during mourning.

The Christian burial ceremony in Igboland is marked by liturgical observances that follow specific church guidelines. These ceremonies

typically include a vigil, a funeral mass or service, and the interment of the body. The liturgical prayers, hymns, and scripture readings during these services emphasize salvation through Jesus Christ and the promise of resurrection (Nwafor, 2020). Such practices serve not only to honor the deceased but also to strengthen the faith of the living by reminding them of Christian teachings on life after death. Christian burial practices in Igboland also emphasize the community's role in supporting the grieving family through prayer and fellowship. The church community often gathers to offer condolences, share prayers, and provide emotional support, highlighting the communal aspect of Christian mourning (Eze, 2017). This collective participation aligns with Christian values of compassion and solidarity, reinforcing social bonds within the church family.

Moreover, Christian doctrines generally discourage certain traditional Igbo burial customs that are perceived to conflict with Christian beliefs. Practices such as excessive ritual sacrifices, invocation of ancestral spirits, and elaborate rites considered pagan are often rejected by Christian authorities (Udeh, 2018). This has led to a transformation in burial ceremonies where many Igbo Christians seek to harmonize their cultural heritage with Christian teachings, often adapting traditional elements to fit within acceptable religious frameworks.

The symbolism used in Christian burials in Igboland often reflects universal Christian motifs such as the cross, white garments

symbolizing purity, and the use of holy water and incense. These symbols serve to express faith in Christ's victory over death and the hope of eternal life (Obi, 2021). The emphasis on symbolic acts during the funeral underscores the spiritual dimension of the rite, focusing on redemption and the soul's journey rather than solely on cultural expressions. Building further on the influence of Christian doctrines in Igboland burial ceremonies, it is important to highlight how these practices contribute to moral and spiritual education within the community. The funeral services often serve as moments for clergy to preach on themes of repentance, salvation, and the transient nature of earthly life (Chukwuma, 2020). This didactic function reinforces Christian ethical teachings and encourages attendees to reflect on their own spiritual journeys, thereby integrating the burial ceremony into broader faith formation.

Additionally, the role of the church hierarchy and ordained ministers in Christian burials in Igboland is pivotal. Priests or pastors typically officiate the rites, guiding the congregation through prescribed liturgies and sacraments such as the final commendation and commendatio animae, which commend the soul of the deceased to God's mercy (Ibekwe, 2019). Their leadership ensures that the ceremonies remain faithful to Christian doctrine and provide spiritual comfort to the bereaved.

The Christian approach to burial in Igboland also emphasizes simplicity and humility, contrasting with some traditional practices

that may be elaborate and costly. Many churches encourage families to avoid extravagant spending on funerals, promoting instead the spiritual significance of the rite over material display (Onwuchekwa, 2021). This perspective aims to align the funeral practices with Christian values of stewardship, humility, and community support. Christian burial practices also foster a strong sense of hope in resurrection and reunion with loved ones beyond death, which shapes the grieving process among Igbo Christians. This hope helps mitigate the finality of death and provides emotional solace by focusing on the promise of eternal life (Okonkwo, 2023). It encourages believers to view death within the context of God's greater plan and divine justice.

Furthermore, Christian burial rites often include memorial services or anniversaries that continue to honor the deceased within the church community. These commemorations serve as opportunities for collective remembrance and prayer, reinforcing the belief in the communion of saints and the ongoing spiritual connection between the living and the departed (Nwosu, 2018). Such practices extend the impact of the burial beyond the immediate event, nurturing a sustained spiritual relationship. Overall, Christian doctrines and practices regarding burial ceremonies in Igboland not only provide structured and theologically grounded rites for dealing with death but also shape communal attitudes toward mortality, afterlife, and ethical living. They represent a synthesis of faith and culture that continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic interaction

between Christianity and indigenous Igbo traditions (Iroanya, 2022). This interplay enriches the religious life of the community while offering meaningful ways to cope with loss and celebrate life.

The areas of conflict between Christian burial practices and traditional Igbo burial customs

The areas of conflict between Christian burial practices and traditional Igbo burial customs stem primarily from differing worldviews and religious doctrines regarding death, the afterlife, and ritual observances. Christianity emphasizes monotheism, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment, which contrasts sharply with traditional Igbo beliefs in ancestral spirits, reincarnation, and elaborate ritual performances (Okafor, 2017). These fundamental differences create tension in burial practices as each system promotes distinct interpretations of the meaning and purpose of death rites. One major conflict arises in the types of rituals performed during burial ceremonies. Traditional Igbo customs often include sacrifices, libations, and communication with ancestral spirits to ensure the peaceful transition and acceptance of the deceased into the ancestral realm (Nwankwo, 2019). Christian doctrines reject these practices, viewing them as incompatible with biblical teachings that condemn spirit worship and sacrifices. This theological divergence leads to disputes over which rituals are acceptable and which are considered pagan or superstitious.

Another point of contention is the role of elaborate funeral ceremonies. Traditional Igbo burials tend to be extensive affairs involving large community participation, cultural displays, and sometimes protracted mourning periods (Eze, 2018). In contrast, many Christian churches advocate for simplicity and discourage ostentation, emphasizing spiritual preparation over material demonstration (Udeh, 2020). The conflicting attitudes toward funeral scale and expenditure often cause disagreement within families and communities where both belief systems coexist. The question of ancestral veneration also generates conflict. In Igbo tradition, ancestors are revered and believed to have a continuing influence on the living, necessitating rituals that honor them regularly (Ibe, 2017). Christianity, however, teaches worship of one God alone and discourages the veneration of ancestors, labeling such practices as idolatrous. This clash affects not only burial rites but also post-burial ceremonies and commemorations, where differing expectations about ancestor worship create tension.

Disputes also occur over burial timing and procedures. Traditional Igbo customs may require specific timings and elaborate preparations before burial to ensure proper rites are observed, sometimes delaying the interment (Obi, 2019). Christian practices typically prefer prompt burial following standard ecclesiastical guidelines to respect health and legal considerations. This difference in timing and procedure often leads to misunderstandings and conflicts

between families adhering to each tradition. Additionally, the interaction between church authorities and traditional elders in burial matters often highlights power struggles. Christian clergy may insist on exclusive adherence to church-sanctioned rites, while traditional leaders emphasize the preservation of ancestral customs (Ibekwe, 2021). This contest for ritual authority can marginalize certain voices and exacerbate tensions within the community, especially when one side perceives the other as undermining their cultural or religious legitimacy.

The conflict also extends to the perception of spiritual efficacy and the afterlife. Traditional Igbo belief holds that improper burial rites can lead to spiritual misfortune or restless ancestors affecting the living (Onyema, 2018). Christian doctrine, conversely, teaches that salvation through Christ alone secures eternal life, regardless of cultural rituals. This divergence influences attitudes toward burial rites and often results in contrasting priorities between ensuring ritual correctness versus spiritual salvation.

The conflict also affects how grief and mourning are expressed. Traditional Igbo funerals often involve extended periods of communal mourning with music, dance, and public displays of emotion, which serve social and psychological functions (Anyanwu, 2019). Christian funerals, however, tend to emphasize solemnity and scriptural consolation, sometimes discouraging outward emotional expression. This divergence can create

misunderstandings and emotional challenges for families navigating mixed expectations. Furthermore, generational differences within families contribute to these conflicts. Younger Igbo Christians, influenced by formal religious teachings and global Christianity, may reject traditional burial customs as superstitious or obsolete (Ifeanyi, 2022). Older family members, on the other hand, may insist on preserving ancestral rites as essential for honoring the dead and ensuring spiritual continuity. These differing perspectives can lead to familial tensions during the planning and execution of burial ceremonies.

In addition, economic factors intersect with the conflicts between burial practices. Traditional Igbo burials often require substantial financial investment to fulfill ritual obligations and communal feasting, while Christian funerals may advocate for more modest expenditures (Nwafor, 2021). Disagreements over funeral costs and appropriate displays of respect for the deceased frequently reflect underlying conflicts between cultural expectations and religious principles.

Summary

The conflict between Christian religion and the culture and traditions of the central subcultural area of Igboland regarding burial ceremonies arises mainly because both have different beliefs and practices about death and honoring the dead. Traditional Igbo burial customs often involve elaborate rituals, including paying respects to ancestors

and performing ceremonies that connect the living with the spiritual world. On the other hand, Christian burial practices focus more on simplicity, prayers, and the belief in eternal life through Jesus Christ. This difference sometimes causes tension as many Igbo people try to balance respecting their culture while following Christian teachings.

Conclusion

The conflict between Christian religion and traditional Igbo burial practices highlights the broader challenge of reconciling modern religious beliefs with long-standing cultural customs. While both systems have deep meaning and significance for the people of the central subcultural area of Igboland, their differing views on death and afterlife create friction that affects families and communities during important ceremonies. This tension reflects the struggle many societies face when trying to balance respect for heritage with the adoption of new religious ideologies. Moving forward, lasting harmony can be achieved by promoting mutual respect and open communication between religious leaders and cultural custodians.

Recommendations

1. There should be regular meetings and conversations between Christian clergy and traditional elders to foster understanding and find ways to respectfully blend both practices during burial ceremonies.
2. Workshops and seminars should be organized which will explain the

meanings and values of Christian burial rites alongside Igbo traditional customs, helping families appreciate the importance of both and reduce misunderstandings.

3. Communities in Igboland should create burial protocols that

incorporate key elements from both Christianity and Igbo traditions, allowing families to honor their faith and cultural heritage in a balanced way.

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