Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS), Vol.6 No.2 June, 2023; p.g. 17 – 25; ISSN: 2695-2319 (Print); ISSN: 2695-2327 (Online)

MAJOR AND MINOR PILLARS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AMONG AKPO PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Many interpretations have surfaced as a result of the Akpo people's traditional religious system not receiving the attention it deserves. The aim of the study was to compare the intricacies such as the patterns of traditional worship system and other religions mode of worships that coexisted with them. For data analysis, the study uses a qualitative phenomenological research design and a descriptive approach. Personal interviews are the major source of data collection, where as library materials are the secondary source. The study reveals some of the aspects of the people's traditional worship such as during rites of passage, marriage, death etc. the study also recommends that some pre-existing misunderstandings can be managed or corrected. Documentary evidence has once again been made available. It would inspire and direct future research.

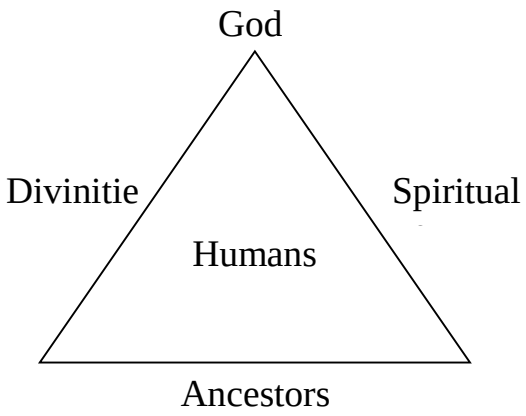
Keywords: Religion, African Traditional Religion, Major Pillars, Minor Pillars, *Akpo* Community.

Introduction

Humans, as intellectual beings, have always questioned the universe's origin, sustenance, and existence. Similarly, these innumerable queries about life's mysteries led to the discovery of religion. Unlike other religions with documented founders (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), African traditional religion (ATR) has no known founder. According to the Bible's Acts of Apostles chapter 11:26, Antioch is the place of origin of the word Christian. In other words, in Antioch, Jesus Christ was the founder, and the disciples were the first to be called Christians. Mohammed, in the case of Islam, was the one who founded it. Africans, on the other hand, have no known founders or initiators of their indigenous faiths. According to Okwueze (1998), Moses is credited with founding Judaism. Traditional African religion has existed since before the continent of Africa was formed. This has greatly influenced the nature of the religion, resulting in a wide range of religious practices across the continent. As a result, there are numerous differences between each of Africa's tiniest indivisible societies. Isichei (1977) makes the following argument:

> The importance of traditional religion should not be overlooked... The highest Supreme Being is kind, but remains out of human affairs, according to West African faith. As a result, it is thought that worshippers should devote the most of their devotion to a large number of minor spirits... Because they did not write, their wisdom and knowledge passed on to the next generation (p.10).

All things being equal, the ATR notion of the divine ultimate or transcendent being revolves around belief in the Supreme Being, divinities, spirits, ancestors, magic, and medicine, according to Ugwu &Ugwueye (2004). The foregoing can be used to comprehend the belief patterns of different African nations or societies, regardless of their languages and cultures - such as the Igbo country or society, as well as other sub-regions or divisions within the Igbo community (the Akpo people of Anambra state, Nigeria for example).According to Ogugua (2005), there is a zone inhabited by spirits between the Supreme Being and humanity. Onunwa (2005) depicts ATR as a triangular shape, with human beings at the center, God (the Supreme Being) at the apex, divinities and spiritual forces on the four sides of the triangle, and ancestors at the bottom. In the diagram below, this is represented.



The belief in a Supreme Being (chukwu) and gods (Arusi/Agbara) such as the sun god (Anyanwu), earth goddess (Ala), god of medicine and healing (Agwu), Ahiajioku (god of yam), and Ikenga exist in Igbo religious symbols as chi (reality) (god of achievement and success in life). He never abandoned his believe in ancestors (Ndi-iche). Ifesieh (1989), while discussing the Igbo vision of the cosmos, relates the people's belief in celestial/semi-celestial spheres such as the sky (igwe), star (kpakpando), sun (anyanwu), and others as the dwelling of Supreme God (chineke) (mother of fertility). They said that the land was given to them as a gift from Chineke.Trees (such as the ofo and ogbu trees), mountains (ugwu), rivers, and irrational animals such as mmuookuko (spirit of poultry), mmuoanuofia (spirit of wild animals), and the spirit of family/kingship are all given spiritual significance (mmuo Uno). All of these spirits are referred to as Igbo four-arch spirits, and the individual spirits are referred to as Ancestors (Nna-Anyifa). Onah (1992) divides them into four categories: believe in a supreme God, belief in minor deities (the sun god, Anyanwu, the sky god, Igwe or Amandiioha, and the Earth goddess, Ala), ancestral devotion, and belief in bad spirits and forces (Arusi).

Madu (1997:5) divides Igbo spiritual beings into five categories depending on their vital ranks:

> The Supreme Being (chukwu or chineke), the creator, comes first. Second, there are the deities (muo), which include: (a) Anyanwu-lord of light and life, (b) the earth goddess (Ala-) mother of life, the queen of morality, (c) Amadioha –God's orderly and agent of instant justice, (d) Muo-mmiri the divinely appointed temptress, (e) Ahiajioku-lord of agriculture, and (f) Agwu-nsi The spirit powers (Arusi/Alusi) are the third, the Ancestors (Ndi-ichie) are the fourth, and medicine is the fifth (ogwu) (p.15).

After seeing these Igbo belief patterns, we should be able to recognize how the traditional Akpo people, as members of the Igbo people, have paid reverence to some or all of those spiritual entities in the form of worship from the past to the present in this work. This is because the focus of this study is on the nomenclature used to describe the devotion that the Igbo people of Akpo have shown for supernatural entities who have been the subject of worship since time immemorial. Traditionalists in Akpo are sometimes mistaken as believing in archaic, satanic, and heathen practices.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design and descriptive method of data analysis. Personal interviews form the primary sources of data collection while library materials are the secondary sources. For the primary sources, 5 informants chosen at random for the interview. They were given code names which range from informants 1 to 5. These informants were diverse in terms of distribution of five states of Igbo land, gender, occupation, and religious affiliation with particular regards to Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The interview questions were semi-structured. This allowed the researcher to follow up on similar groups of interview questions based on the respondent's responses. All relevant issues guiding the conduct of interview were followed. It was made known to the informants that the information gotten from them will be solely used for this research. The period of the research was from 2017 to 2020 when field work was conducted for the research.

Some Major and Minor Pillars of African Traditional Religion among Akpo People of Nigeria

Use of Symbols and Images

In Igbo religion and social life, the letter f is particularly important. The Ofo comes from a tree called "Detarium Senegalense" in the botanical world. When the tree is completely developed, its branches naturally flow down from the main trunk. Machetes aren't used to cut it. According to Ejizu (1986), the Ofo is between four and twelve inches long with a diameter of half an inch. The Akpo people demonstrate what Ofo means to them through their daily activities and words. They always advise or say, jide Ofo (do justice). They frequently inquire: ijikwaofo? (Have you done your job properly) or ojikwa Ofo? (Has he/she done or is going to do justice to what he/she is doing or about to do?) There are numerous types of. These are the following: The personal, lineage, professional, and institutional aspects of a person. Regardless of the type of ofo, they are all obtained in the same way and serve the same goal. The researcher is particularly interested in the most well-known lineage kind of ofo. Along least once a year, the ritual consecration of ofo is performed by smearing blood and light feather at the edge of one of the ends.

In Traditional Religion, Igbo people hold Ofọ in high esteem. The lineage Ofọ is regarded to be the sign of solidarity. It is normally held by the family's most senior member (okpara). Its presence denotes the existence of the forefathers and mothers. It validates and supports the elders' and "umunna's" decisions. Without the Ofo in place, no umunna assembly is considered formal. According to Boston (1959), the Igbo believe that no rite is authentic until an Ofo is utilized. As a result, Ofo is regarded as a single ritual symbolic object whose ethos is profoundly central in Igbo life and hence guides it. It is a sign of truth, justice, equity, transparency, accountability, and transparency. Regardless of who is involved, the bearer of the Ofo will not distort justice in any way. This is because the Ofo is struck several times on the ground before any case is attempted, urging it to slay whoever will distort justice, When the Okpara (first born male child) arbitrates disagreements in the umunna circle, he uses this staff of judgment. According to Edeh (1985), Ofo is used as a law and order enforcement agency and acts as a symbol of power and authority. The Ofo is a sine qua non in the sphere of religious devotion. One of the elements of divination is this. Uchendu (1965) stated that if Ofo is required in a ceremony, it is hammered four times on the ground on the day of the occasion. The Ofo is used to make petitions to the gods and deities. It's also a way of praying to God or gods, as well as to ancestors. “The diviner (Nwa Dibia) utilizes Ofo as one of the devices of divination, as it is usually thought that the ancestors whose spirits the Ofo represents are always helpful in determining a successful result of a certain subject for which a customer seeks divination,” Ilogu (1974) noted.

Kola nut (*Ọji*)

Kolanut is revered as one of the most important symbols in Igbo traditional life. It's a tropical tree that's been nurtured for centuries to fulfill social and ritual requirements. Its presentation to a visitor is a symbol of hospitality. The Igbo people have a treasured culture and tradition of first presenting kolanut to a guest before giving them anything else. It is extremely important in the Akpo people's social and religious lives. There are two sorts of ji: kola "acuminate" (also known as ojiIgbo) and kola "ntitda," also known as gworo by the Igbo people. There is a distinct difference between the two. The ojiIgbo, which is employed for social-ritualistic purposes, is greatly revered by the Igbo. The oji Igbo comes in two colors: red and white. “Jiugo” is the name for the white kind. Both are employed for tourist amusement as well as rituals. The gift of kolanut to a guest denotes that the guest is warmly welcomed into his host's home. A guest's interpretation of his host's state of mind, whether pleasant or not, is based on the offer of kolanut. “He who carries kola nut provides life” (onye wetara oji wetara ndu), according to Uchendu (1965:86) on the function of kolanut among the Igbo. For the sake of amusement, if a guest is given a kolanut by accident or intentionally, and the kolanut turns out to be white (ojiugo), it implies that the individual is warmly greeted. It demonstrates how valued and significant the individual is.

For ritual purposes, “oji aka ano” (a four cotyledon kolanut) is the most sought after in social and religious occasions. It is a four cotyledon kolanut that is utilized for divination in Igbo country and some regions of Nigeria. Because of their four-day week calendar, the number four is significant to the Igbo people. The number represents "spiritual and material worlds in business on Igbo market days (Ahiaan) which are Orie, Afor, Nkwo, and Eke," according to Ekwunife (1990:51). Still emphasizing the significance of the four cotyledon kola nut, Uchendu believes that Ofo will be hit four times on the ground in any rite in which it is required, as well as in the majority of Akpo communities. It is not surprise that oji-akaano has such a high

ritual value in Igbo traditional society. In terms of kolanut presentation, breaking, and distribution, the presenter (host) makes the kolanut presentation through the next ranking male in his group. As the kolanut reaches the principal guest, he completes his own presentation to his own group before returning the kolanut to the host and saying a prayer. For ritual reasons, women are forbidden this privilege. The kolanut has its own set of processes for cracking it.

Separation of the kolanut into its numerous cotyledons is part of the technique. Kolanut cracking patterns can be found among the Igbo. It is the host's or the eldest person's reserved right in the northern Igbo. Because it is considered as a sale of one's older status, this privilege should not be assigned to a junior. The reserve is the case in the southern Igbo. The cracking of kolanut is considered a form of service, and as such, it could be performed by a junior individual under the supervision of his or her senior or host. The Akpo community serves as an example. The host takes the kolanut first to demonstrate that it is poison-free, then the guest and his group take their shares, and finally each member of the host's party receives a share based on seniority. The breaking and eating of the kolanut together is viewed as a form of service, and as such, it could be performed by a subordinate individual under the supervision of his senior or host. Akpo community is a good example. The kolanut is broken and eaten jointly, establishing a friendly link between man and man, as well as between man and the Supreme Being.

Native Chalk (*Nzu*)

Nzu is one of the most important parts of Igbo culture. It's the clay and sticky part of the sand that's collected from the stream and dried before being used for whatever purpose the Nzu serves. In Igbo country, Nzu fulfills a variety of functions. Nzu is an Akpo object that depicts a warm greeting to a home where a new born infant has arrived. Nzu also denotes purity in Akpo. It serves as a welcoming sign when presented to a guest to massage on his wrist or foot. A plate of Nzu is usually kept in a strategic location by the mother of a newly born baby so that any visitor who enters the house to greet the baby and the mother can dip his or her hand into the plate of Nzu kept either at the entrance (door) or in the center of the room and apply some to the neck or face. This indicates that the visitor had no malice toward the new baby and his or her mother. When the word Nzu is used during a new baby's birth, it means tranquility. Its application signifies that anyone who pays a visit to a new newborn and applies the object (Nzu) has come to greet and welcome the child into the world. Although, in today's world, modernity has replaced the Nzu object with powder. The mother of the young infant also gives powder for the visitors who have come to welcome her and her baby for the same reason. Female guests from the same linage arrive in a group, singing excitedly and dancing around in celebration of the baby's safe delivery.

Furthermore, traditionalists make significant use of Nzu. Before interacting with spirits or oracles, diviners, local doctors (Dibia), and priests of oracles apply nzu to their eye lids. It is a symbol that ensures their protection from the spirits as well as the outcome of the subject they seek. Nzu has a unique way of identifying himself. When one sees Nzu rubbed on one's eyes or face, either on the right or left eye, one immediately recognizes the person as an oracle's representative. This means that Nzu gives everyone of its users a unique identity. In addition, "Nzu," like its counterpart "omunkwu," serves as a symbol of peace restoration in Akpo. When one community issues a lump of Nzu (local chalk) to the other, it means the village from

whom the Nzu was issued has come to seek peace and put down violence. One can see from the aforementioned functions of Nzu that it is an important part of the Igbo and Akpo traditions.

Festivals

Festivals, according to Informants 4 (Personal Communications, September 3, 2020), are annual meetings where the entire community gathers to celebrate and thank God, the divinities, and the ancestors. Traditional Akpo celebrations are agricultural festivities that commemorate the conclusion of one agricultural year and the start of another. It is a time to thank God's intermediaries, the divinities and ancestors, for a prosperous agricultural year, and to pray and hope for another magnificent year. The most important agricultural crop honored at this time, according to Okpala, is yam or rice; in certain situations, the festival is viewed as the divinity's birthday or a day to commemorate an incident in his mythology. To determine the exact day of the festival, the oracle or traditional priest and their aides are contacted. People are then informed of the final date so that they can make the appropriate preparations. Cows, sheep, and rams are available, as well as yams (typically the farm's first crop), rice, and other items. People go to the celebration, which can run anywhere from a week to one or two months. They dress up and offer sacrifices and prayers in their finest attire. Some of them are present for the main shrine's butchering of the sacrificial animals, which takes place early in the morning to signal the start of the entire rite.

The Akpo festivities, he continued, demonstrate African belief in life after death, as well as the ancestors' proximity to their living descendants and their sense of dependence on them. The inhabitants of Akpo commemorate their forefathers and pray for their assistance and protection, as well as plenty of food, good health, and prosperity, through their festivals. This reliance on the ancestors stems from the belief that they serve as intermediaries between living community members and supreme beings/divinities. The Akpo festival is also a time for the living and the deceased to reestablish their bonds. It can also be utilized as a propitiatory ceremony for ancestors in areas when disaster has struck. New friendships and relationships are formed. Marriage proposals are made in some instances. Those visiting from the cities for festivals may take advantage of the opportunity to form welfare associations in partnership with local residents in order to propose development initiatives that will improve the community's living conditions. Akpo celebrations promote a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and identity.

Findings of the Research

Traditional religious rituals in Akpo X-ray the country's synergy between traditional and other religions such as Christianity and Islam. The goal of this study project is to bring the historic religious traditions of the Akpo people to the surface, from ancient to present times. In other words, this is done to help people better comprehend their beliefs, to touch on some parts of Igbo/Akpo traditional religions, and to explain the relevance and usefulness of traditional religious rituals in divine knowledge. To some, it reveals Akpo's religious and cultural heritage, which would assist students in gaining some essential academic knowledge such as in humanities and other culturally linked disciplines from secondary to higher levels. Traditional believers will be able to appreciate their religious faith after digesting the contents of this. It is instructive in the sense that they might be well advised on how to evangelize the traditional settings of Akpo and the surrounding areas.

Recommendations

Traditional Akpo religious experts must rise to the occasion and prepare a liturgical and global consistency of traditional Akpo religious belief systems, which should be contained in doctrinal books that can function as religious holy books. A general celebration season must be established for at least the Akpo nation's communities. Festivals such as the Iwa/Ihuji, for example, can be assigned a certain date across Akpo country. Similarly to the Christian Association of Nigeria, the traditional worshiping community/communities should form organizations (CAN).At the very least, well-defined worship days should be planned out for each community. In the same way as Muslims worship mostly on Friday and Christians worship on Sunday. Finally, Akpo Traditional Religion must be incorporated into the educational system in order for pupils to gain a better understanding of their culture, particularly in terms of religion. Its religious specialists must be active in the field, not only lecturing in classrooms and seminars. The campaign must be based on fieldwork. Programs should be developed in which Akpo professors, students, or researchers visit rural areas to meet and interact with traditionalists.

Conclusion

Traditional religious rituals, according to contemporary society, are dying and will soon be forgotten. The truth shown by this survey is that: first, people continue to study the course in higher education institutions. Second, in Igbo cosmology, religion and its beliefs practices are always the last recourse when other methods of resolving human issues have failed. The study also examines the relationship between traditional worship and other religions such as Christianity and Islam, which are currently practiced in the country. Again, the text presents an intellectual account of the significance of traditional beliefs and practices, highlighting their underpinnings. Finally, the study allows for objective surveys and evaluations of the principles of some of the Akpo community's traditional beliefs and practices, as well as the structure and traditions from the past to the present.

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Interviews

S/N	Names	Sex	Occupation	Age	Date	Place	Interviewed by
1.	Informants 1	M	Farmer	76	9/3/20	Agbaelu	Researcher
2.	Informants 2	M	Teacher/Farmer	70	4/5/20	Agbaelu	Researcher
3.	Informants 3	M	Teacher	68	18/5/20	Amaife	Researcher
4.	Informants 4	M	Native doctor	74	15/6/20	Ogbo	Researcher
5.	Informants 5	M	Teacher	71	22/6/20	Ogbo	Researcher