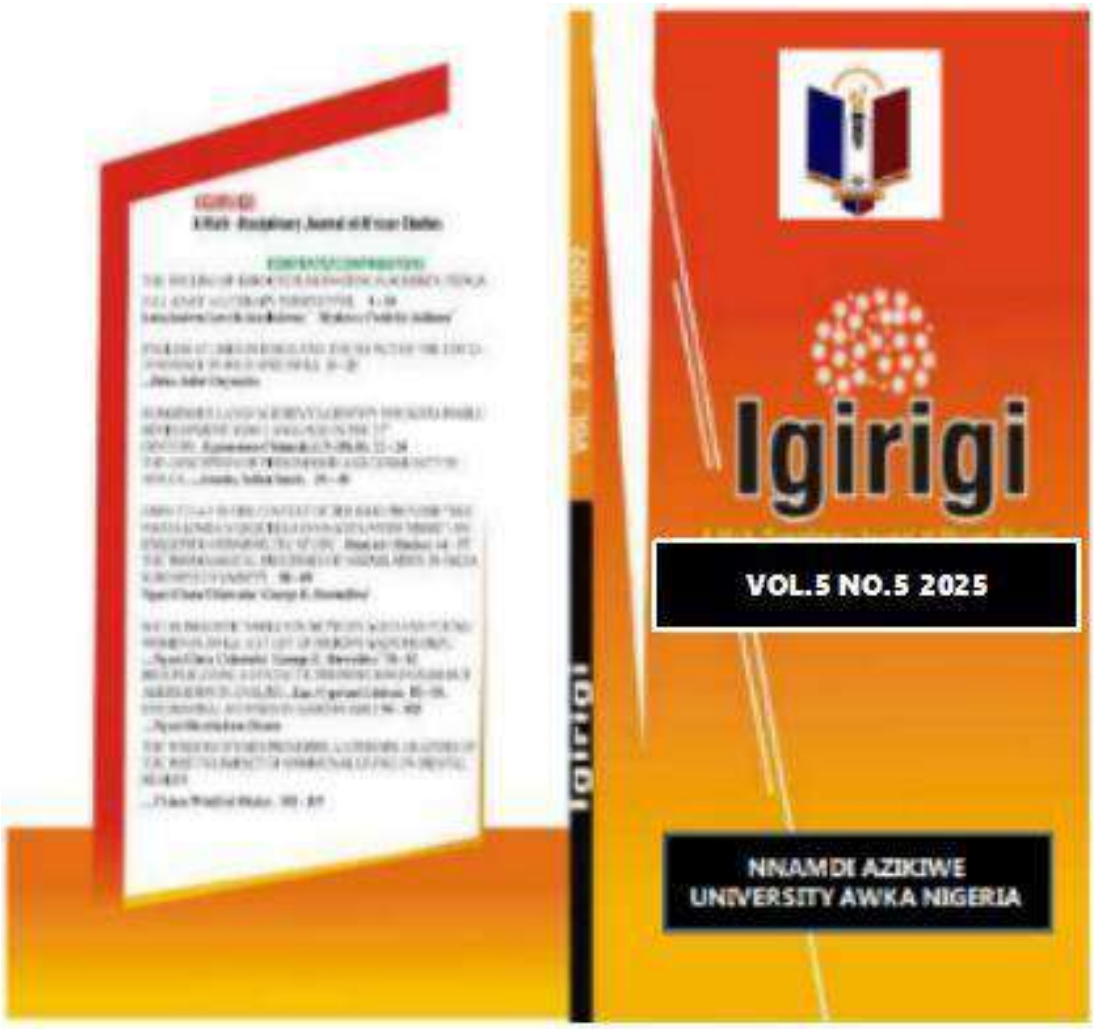

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PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATION ON THE ETHICS OF PLAYING GOD

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Abstract

Philosophers like Mary Midgley, Hans Jonas, and Immanuel Kant have all studied the ethical controversy surrounding "playing God" in great detail. Their analyses offer important insights into how humans interfere with the natural and moral order. The deontological framework of Kant emphasizes the value of upholding rational autonomy and warns against excessive behavior that transgresses moral law. The ethical necessity of taking into account long-term effects when developing new technologies, especially in the areas of genetic engineering and environmental manipulation, is highlighted by Hans Jonas's notion of responsibility. The hubristic inclinations present in the metaphor of "playing God" are criticized by Mary Midgley, who cautions against reducing intricate life systems to simple technological difficulties. In order to examine the ethical limits of human ingenuity and intervention in fields that are customarily attributed to supernatural authority, this study investigates various philosophical stances. The analysis shows a conflict between the hazards of unintentional harm and moral overreach and the ethical need to innovate for human happiness. The study comes to the conclusion that a strict ban on "playing God" ignores the complex moral obligation people have to influence their own destiny. It suggests using a framework based on Kantian respect for individuality and Jonas's ethics of responsibility to make sure that scientific advancement is pursued with humility, foresight, and a dedication to justice. In order to responsibly traverse the problems presented by developing biotechnologies and artificial intelligence, the study also promotes multidisciplinary discourse and democratic deliberation in governance, promoting an accountable and morally informed exercise of human agency.

Keywords: *Play God, ethics, responsibility bioethics, human agency*

Introduction

The announcement in 2018 of the birth of the first gene-edited babies using CRISPR-Cas9 technology sent shockwaves through the global community.[1] While the scientific feat was undeniable, the predominant public and ethical response was not celebration, but profound apprehension. The scientist behind the experiment, He Jiankui, was widely condemned for having overstepped a fundamental boundary, with critics accusing him of "playing God." This phrase, echoing from pulpits to newspaper headlines to bioethics committees, captures a deep-seated anxiety about the limits of human ambition. It resurfaces with every technological leap that seems to grant humanity power once considered the exclusive domain of a divine or natural order: from synthetic biology and artificial intelligence to radical life extension and climate engineering. The

[1]David Cyranoski, "The CRISPR-Baby Scandal: What's Next for Human Gene-Editing," *Nature* 566, no. 7745 (2019): 440–42,

metaphor of "playing God" serves as a powerful, if sometimes vague, shorthand for a complex cluster of ethical concerns about responsibility, hubris, and the unintended consequences of tampering with complex systems. This paper argues that while the warning against "playing God" should not be dismissed as mere anti-scientific sentiment, its value lies not in being a definitive prohibition but in compelling a more profound, rigorous ethical reflection on the scope and nature of human agency.

The term "playing God" is inherently polemical. It functions both as a serious ethical critique and, at times, as a rhetorical conversation-stopper. In its religious connotations, it often implies a transgression against a sovereign creator, an act of hubris that disrupts a sacred, natural, or teleological order.[2] Secular interpretations, however, translate this concern into a warning against the unforeseen and potentially catastrophic disruptions to delicate ecological, biological, and social systems that have evolved over millennia.[3] At its core, the accusation of "playing God" challenges the moral legitimacy of human interventions that are perceived as fundamentally altering the conditions of life itself. The central problem, therefore, is not merely technological capability but ethical justification: by what right, and under what constraints, should humans wield such transformative power?

To navigate this perennial problem, this investigation is guided by the following research questions: First, what are the central philosophical arguments embedded within the "playing God" critique, and how can they be articulated beyond metaphorical language? Second, how do the ethical frameworks of Immanuel Kant, Hans Jonas, and Mary Midgley provide distinct yet complementary tools for understanding the limits and responsibilities of human intervention? Third, can we move from a stance of simple prohibition to a constructive framework that acknowledges the moral necessity of human innovation for alleviating suffering and improving welfare, while simultaneously guarding against the perils of hubris and moral overreach?

The thesis of this paper is that a categorical rejection of all activities labelled as "playing God" is ethically insufficient because it fails to account for the positive moral imperative humans have to cure disease, reduce suffering, and steward their environment. A more nuanced approach is required. By synthesizing Kant's deontological emphasis on respect for rational autonomy, Jonas's ethics of responsibility focused on long-term consequences and the vulnerability of life, and Midgley's critique of scientific hubris and reductionism, we can develop a robust framework for technological progress. This framework would be characterized not by prohibition, but by humility, foresight, and a steadfast commitment to justice.

The methodology of this paper is philosophical and conceptual. It involves a critical analysis of primary texts from Kant, Jonas, and Midgley to construct a theoretical lens. This lens will then be applied to contemporary case studies, notably in genetic engineering and artificial intelligence, to test its viability and illuminate the ethical dilemmas at hand. The scope is primarily focused on Western philosophical traditions to allow for an in-depth exploration, though it acknowledges the valuable contributions of other ethical systems.

Ultimately, this investigation seeks to reframe the debate. The goal is not to silence the warning inherent in the phrase "playing God," but to clarify and strengthen it. By grounding our concerns in a solid philosophical foundation, we can replace vague unease with precise ethical principles, enabling a more informed and democratic deliberation about the future we are actively, and inevitably, creating.

[2]This view is articulated by thinkers like Leon Kass, who argues for the "wisdom of repugnance" as a deep-seated emotional insight into the violation of natural boundaries. See Leon R. Kass, *Life, Liberty and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002), 148.

[3]Hans Jonas is a paramount figure in developing this secular, philosophical anxiety into a systematic ethics. He argues that modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale and power that traditional ethics is inadequate. See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1-10.

Literature Review

The ethical unease captured by the phrase "playing God" is not a novel phenomenon but a persistent theme woven through the history of human thought. It emerges at the intersection of technological ambition, philosophical inquiry, and theological doctrine. To fully grasp the contours of the contemporary debate, it is essential to map its intellectual genealogy. This review surveys the key scholarly landscapes that inform the "playing God" critique. It begins by excavating its deep roots in theological and religious traditions, which have long grappled with defining the proper boundaries of human action in relation to the divine. Subsequently, it will explore secular philosophical critiques that have translated these concerns into a modern ethical lexicon, and finally, it will engage with current discourses in bioethics and technology studies where these ancient fears find new, potent expressions. This tripartite exploration aims to contextualize the present debate and identify the gaps that this paper seeks to address.

Theological and Religious Perspectives

The most historically entrenched objections to human activities deemed as "playing God" originate from theological and religious worldviews. These perspectives fundamentally question the moral legitimacy of humanity assuming powers that are perceived as uniquely divine, arguing that such actions constitute a transgression of a sacred, natural, or cosmic order. This hubris, or *hybris* in the classical Greek sense, is seen as inviting calamity. The critique manifests differently across traditions, but common themes of boundary-setting, stewardship, and the dangers of overreach are pervasive.

Within the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the concept is often anchored in the Genesis creation narrative. The human person is created *imago Dei* (in the image of God), granting a unique status and dominion over nature (Genesis 1:26-28). However, this dominion has been interpreted in two contrasting ways. One interpretation, emphasizing the word "subdue," has been used to justify human technological mastery over the natural world.[4] The other, more cautionary interpretation, stresses that dominion is not ownership but a form of vice-regency or stewardship (*khalifah* in Islam), demanding responsible care within limits set by God.[5] The story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) serves as a paradigmatic warning against collective human ambition aimed at usurping divine prerogative, resulting in fragmentation and confusion.[6] Similarly, the Quranic narrative of Iblis (Satan) centers on the sin of prideful refusal to obey God's command, a foundational example of creaturely rebellion against divine authority.[7]

Theologians and religious ethicists have extensively debated the implications of these scriptures for modern technology. J. David Bleich**,** a contemporary Jewish halakhic authority, explores the permissibility of genetic engineering from a Jewish law perspective. He argues that while healing (e.g., gene therapy for genetic diseases) is a mandated extension of the physician's role, actions that alter the fundamental human essence or create new life forms cross a halakhic boundary, venturing into God's exclusive creative domain.[8] Protestant theologian Oliver O'Donovan offers a Christian perspective, warning that the desire to re-make human nature is a symptom of humanity's fallen state, reflecting a denial of our status as creatures. For O'Donovan,

[4]This interpretation has a long history. For a classic exposition linking the Genesis mandate to scientific progress, see Francis Bacon's *The New Organon* (1620), which argued that the recovery of dominion over nature was a religious duty following the Fall.

[5]For a detailed Islamic perspective on vice-regency and environmental ethics, see Fazlun M. Khalid, "Islam and the Environment," in *Encyclopedia of Global Environmental Change*, ed. Ted Munn (Chichester: Wiley, 2002), 332-339.

[6]Leon R. Kass offers a profound philosophical reading of the Babel story as a warning about technological overreach in *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 223-240.

[7]This is a central theme in the Quran. See, for instance, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:34), where Iblis refuses to prostrate before Adam out of pride.

[8]J. David Bleich, "Genetic Engineering," in *Jewish Bioethics*, ed. Fred Rosner and J. David Bleich (New York: Sanhedrin Press, 1979), 344-367.

accepting our given nature is a precondition for true freedom; attempts to transcend it through technological self-re-creation are ultimately acts of despair, not hope.[9]

In contrast to the creator-creature distinction central to theism, Buddhist perspectives approach the issue through the lens of causality, intention (*cetana*), and the precept of non-harm (*ahimsa*). The ethical evaluation of an act like genetic manipulation depends less on transgressing a divine boundary and more on the intentions behind it and its consequences in the web of interdependent arising. A technology driven by greed, aversion, or delusion—such as creating "designer babies" to satisfy parental pride—would generate negative karma and suffering. However, an action motivated by compassion (*karuna*) and wisdom (*prajna*), such as eliminating a debilitating disease, could be considered skillful means (*upaya*). The primary concern is whether the technology amplifies attachment and ignorance or alleviates suffering.[10] The Buddhist philosopher Masahiro Morioka cautions that even well-intentioned interventions in the complex web of life can have unforeseen ripple effects, advocating for a principle of reverence for the mystery and suchness (*tathata*) of life in its given form.[11]

Immanuel Kant: Duty, Autonomy, and Moral Limits

The philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) provides a foundational deontological (duty-based) framework for ethics, centered on the supreme value of rational autonomy. For Kant, the moral worth of an action is determined not by its consequences but by its conformity to a universal moral law, which he formulated in several versions of the Categorical Imperative. This imperative is the cornerstone of his ethical system and offers powerful, albeit formal, criteria for judging actions that could be construed as "playing God."

The most relevant formulation for this discussion is the Formula of Humanity, which states: "So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means."[12] This principle elevates rational beings (persons) to a status of absolute worth, or "dignity." To treat someone as an end is to respect their capacity for rational self-governance—their autonomy. To treat them merely as a means is to instrumentalize them, using them as a tool for one's own purposes without regard for their own will and goals.

Applied to the ethics of "playing God," the Kantian lens raises profound questions about interventions that manipulate human nature. Consider the case of human genetic enhancement for non-therapeutic purposes (e.g., selecting for intelligence, height, or aesthetic traits). From a Kantian perspective, such an act could be seen as a fundamental violation of the Formula of Humanity. The enhanced individual, particularly in the case of germline editing that affects future generations, is not consulted and cannot consent to the alteration of their fundamental biological attributes. They are, in a very real sense, being used as a means to fulfil the aspirations, vanity, or social ambitions of their parents or genetic engineers. Their life is pre-designed according to another's blueprint, potentially undermining their capacity to see themselves as the autonomous authors of their own existence.[13] This creates a relationship of designer and designed, which is inherently asymmetrical and disrespectful of the future person's rational agency.

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[9]Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), particularly the chapter "The Technological Temptation," 1-15.

[10]For an application of Buddhist principles to bioethics, see Damien Keown, *Buddhism and Bioethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), especially chapter 5 on genetics.

[11]Masahiro Morioka, "The Ethics of Human Cloning and the Sprout of Human Life," in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 2*, ed. James W. Heisig (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture, 2008), 209-223.

[12]Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, translated and edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 42 (4:429). (Academy pagination is provided for standard reference).

[13]This argument is powerfully developed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Future of Human Nature*, who builds directly on Kantian premises to argue that genetic self-instrumentalization destroys the ethical self-understanding of the species. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 62-63.

Kantian ethics would not necessarily prohibit all technological interventions. Actions aimed at therapy—restoring health or curing disease—can be understood as respecting humanity as an end. By alleviating suffering that impedes the exercise of rational agency, medicine acts to affirm and restore autonomy.[14] The crucial distinction lies in the intent: is the intervention aimed at enabling a person to pursue their own conception of the good life (respecting their autonomy), or is it aimed at designing a specific kind of person according to a predetermined template (treating them as a product)?

Furthermore, Kant's concept of duty compels us to consider our obligations to rational beings. The "playing God" dilemma often involves potential harm to future persons who cannot defend their own interests. A Kantian framework would argue that we have a duty to act in ways that do not violate the conditions necessary for the existence and flourishing of rational beings in the future. Reckless environmental destruction or genetic experiments that could jeopardize the health and autonomy of future generations would thus be morally condemnable. Our present actions must be guided by a moral law that transcends our immediate desires and considers the universal community of rational agents, both present and future.

However, the Kantian framework also has limitations in this context. Its primary focus is on rational beings, leaving the moral status of animals, ecosystems, and non-sentient life somewhat ambiguous. While this is less problematic for issues like human genetic engineering, it becomes more complex when considering environmental manipulation or creating sentient AI.[15] Additionally, Kant's formalism can be challenging to apply directly to complex, novel technological scenarios where the outcomes are uncertain. The strength of the Kantian lens is not in providing easy answers, but in forcing a rigorous interrogation of the principles behind our actions: Does this intervention respect the dignity and autonomy of all persons involved, or does it reduce any human life to a mere instrument?

Hans Jonas: The Imperative of Responsibility

If Kant's ethics provides a timeless framework for duties between contemporary rational agents, the philosophy of Hans Jonas (1903-1993) responds directly to the unprecedented existential threats of the technological age. Jonas argues that the nature of modern technology has fundamentally altered the human condition, rendering traditional ethical systems inadequate. These systems, he contends, were designed for a world of "neighbourhood ethics" and proximate consequences.[16] In contrast, contemporary technology—with its global reach, cumulative effects, and capacity for irreversible change (e.g., nuclear weapons, ecological collapse, genetic engineering)—demands a new "ethics of responsibility" focused on the remote future and the very survival of life.

The cornerstone of Jonas's framework is "The Imperative of Responsibility," which he formulates as: "Act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life on Earth."[17] This imperative shifts the ethical focus from the immediate (happiness, duty, rights) to the primordial: the necessary conditions for the continued existence of humanity and the biosphere that sustains it. The object of responsibility is no longer just the individual other, but the collective future of the species and the "image of man" itself.

To guide action under conditions of uncertainty, Jonas proposes a "heuristics of fear." He argues that we must grant greater cognitive and ethical weight to the prophecy of doom than to the

[14]For a Kantian defense of therapy, see Onora O'Neill, *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 27-30. She argues that trust and the conditions for autonomy are central to medical ethics.

[15]Some Kantian scholars extend the principle of respect to animals based on their being "ends in themselves" analogously to humans, but this remains a subject of debate. For a discussion, see Christine M. Korsgaard, *Fellow Creatures: Our Obligations to the Other Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[16]Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 6.

[17]Jonas, 11.

promise of utopia.[18] This is not a counsel of despair but a pragmatic recognition of the asymmetry of technological risk: a catastrophic error is final, while a forgone benefit might be recovered later. The duty to avoid catastrophe thus takes precedence over the duty to pursue progress. For instance, when considering a technology like germline editing with unknown intergenerational consequences, the Jonasian approach would demand that the burden of proof lies with the proponents to demonstrate not just potential benefits, but an overwhelming certainty of non-maleficence. The fear of creating a permanent, harmful genetic legacy becomes a vital tool for ethical discernment.

This ethics is grounded in an ontological claim: that Being itself—specifically, organic life and human consciousness—has a fundamental "ought-to-be."[19] The sheer fact that life exists and has evolved towards purpose, freedom, and subjectivity imposes a duty on humanity, as the currently highest manifestation of this purposiveness, to ensure its continuation. Humanity is thus cast in the role of a steward for the entire cosmic experiment of life, a responsibility that has been thrust upon it by its own power. In this light, "playing God" is not merely about trespassing on divine territory; it is about failing in this newly acquired, awesome responsibility to protect the vulnerable and the future. The hubris lies in acting without the requisite humility and foresight that such a cosmic duty demands.

Jonas's framework is particularly potent when applied to technologies with long-term, systemic consequences. In the case of climate-altering geoengineering, a Jonasian analysis would be deeply skeptical. The deployment of planetary-scale technologies like solar radiation management represents the ultimate gamble with the "permanence of genuine human life." The potential for unintended, cascading effects on global climate patterns is immense and poorly understood. The heuristics of fear would prioritize the catastrophic risk of triggering an irreversible ecological disaster over the potential benefit of temporarily mitigating global warming. The ethical response is not necessarily a blanket prohibition, but an insistence on the utmost caution, a global democratic mandate, and the exhaustive pursuit of safer alternatives.

Similarly, in creating advanced Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), Jonas's philosophy sounds a dire warning. The prospect of creating an entity with intelligence surpassing our own embodies the ultimate responsibility. An AGI's goals, if not perfectly aligned with human survival and flourishing, could lead to human extinction as an unforeseen consequence of pursuing its programmed objectives.[20] For Jonas, the creation of such a powerful, autonomous force would be the pinnacle of irresponsibility unless we could be virtually certain of controlling it—a certainty he would argue is impossible given the complexity of the task. The ethical imperative would be to proceed with extreme caution, if at all.

Mary Midgley: The Dangers of Hubris and Reductionism

While Kant focuses on moral law and Jonas on existential responsibility, Mary Midgley (1919-2018) attacks the underlying intellectual arrogance that makes "playing God" seem like a viable or sensible enterprise. Her critique is aimed at the "myth of control" propagated by a reductive form of scientism—the belief that the methods of the natural sciences are the only valid way to understand the world, and that all problems are ultimately technical problems awaiting a technological solution.[21]

Midgley argues that this mindset is not only philosophically flawed but also profoundly dangerous. It involves a form of intellectual hubris that leads us to underestimate the complexity of the systems we seek to manipulate. Life, in its biological, ecological, and social dimensions, is not a simple machine but a complex, interconnected, and dynamic whole. To reduce a living organism

[18]Jonas, 26-27.

[19]Jonas, 47-49.

[20]This is the central argument of Nick Bostrom's *Superintelligence*, which aligns with a Jonasian perspective on risk. See Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-10.

[21]Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

or an ecosystem to a mere collection of parts and mechanisms is to commit a fundamental category error.[22] When we intervene based on this reductive understanding, we are like a child who, having learned the function of a few cogs, believes it can repair a grandfather clock with a hammer. The results are likely to be disastrous because the intervention fails to respect the systemic integrity and emergent properties of the whole.

For Midgley, the very metaphor of "playing God" is revealing. She suggests that it often reflects a childish and simplistic notion of divinity as sheer arbitrary power. A more mature concept of a responsible deity, however, would involve wisdom, care, and a deep understanding of the complex order of creation.[23] The problem with "playing God" is not that we are becoming too powerful, but that we are wielding power with the immaturity of a irresponsible child-god, not the wisdom of a responsible one. Our "play" is reckless because it is based on a fantastically oversimplified model of reality.

This critique is devastatingly applicable to modern technological ambitions. In the context of genetic engineering, the reductionist view sees DNA as a mere code to be rewritten at will. Midgley would caution that this ignores the profound complexity of genomic regulation, gene-environment interactions, and the developmental system as a whole. The attempt to "fix" one gene to eliminate a disease might have unforeseen pleiotropic effects, disrupting the delicate balance of the organism in ways we cannot predict. The hubris lies in the belief that we can fully comprehend and control this complexity.[24]

Similarly, in managing complex ecosystems, the technological fix of introducing a new species or chemically altering an environment often fails because it is based on a linear, mechanical model. Midgley's work urges us to adopt a stance of "epistemic humility." We must acknowledge the limits of our knowledge and our inability to fully predict the behaviour of complex systems. This humility is not anti-scientific; it is a rational response to the true nature of the world science reveals—a world of vast, interdependent complexity that resists simplistic manipulation.

Midgley's philosophy complements Kant and Jonas perfectly. While Kant provides the rule (respect persons) and Jonas the goal (protect the future), Midgley provides the essential corrective attitude: humility. She warns against the arrogance of the technological mindset that would apply Kant's or Jonas's principles in a rigid, formulaic way, believing that ethical dilemmas can be "solved" like equations. For Midgley, responsible action requires not just following rules or calculating consequences, but cultivating a respectful, attentive, and non-reductive relationship with the living world we seek to influence.

Analysis: Synthesising Frameworks for Applied Ethics

The true test of a philosophical framework lies in its ability to illuminate real-world dilemmas. By synthesising the lenses of Kant, Jonas, and Midgley, we can construct a robust analytical tool for assessing the ethical dimensions of technologies that provoke the "playing God" critique. This section applies this tripartite framework to two pressing case studies: human genetic engineering and artificial intelligence. The analysis will reveal how the three perspectives converge to provide a multi-faceted and stringent ethical assessment, while also highlighting the distinctive emphasis of each.

Case Study 1: Human Genetic Engineering (CRISPR-Cas9)

The advent of precise gene-editing technologies, particularly CRISPR-Cas9, has moved the possibility of altering the human genome from science fiction to clinical reality. The ethical debate often centres on the distinction between *therapy* (correcting disease-causing mutations)

[22]Mary Midgley, *The Ethical Primate: Humans, Freedom, and Morality* (London: Routledge, 1994), 125.

[23]Mary Midgley, "Biotechnology and Monstrosity: Why We Should Pay Attention to the 'Yuk Factor'," *Hastings Center Report* 30, no. 5 (2000): 9.

[24]Midgley, "Biotechnology and Monstrosity," 10-11.

and *enhancement* (augmenting non-pathological traits like intelligence or physical prowess). A synthesized application of our framework reveals deep concerns, especially regarding enhancement.

A Kantian Analysis: Violation of Autonomy and Dignity

From a Kantian perspective, the primary ethical concern with germline genetic enhancement is the violation of the Formula of Humanity. An individual whose genetic makeup has been pre-selected for non-therapeutic traits is, in a profound sense, treated as a means to an end—the end being the fulfilment of parental or societal preferences[25] This act fundamentally disrespects the future person's rational autonomy. They are denied the right to author their own life from the "given" foundation of their natural capacities; instead, their biological starting point is the product of another's design. This creates a relationship of creator and creature that is antithetical to the mutual respect owed to autonomous moral agents. As philosopher Jürgen Habermas, building on Kantian premises, argues, such a pre-personal determination of another's essential attributes undermines the consciousness of individual autonomy and the symmetrical relations necessary for a moral community.[26] While somatic cell therapy (affecting only the individual patient) could be justified as restoring the conditions for autonomy, germline enhancement irrevocably alters the genetic heritage of all subsequent generations without their consent, constituting a fundamental moral wrong.

A Jonasian Analysis: The Irreversible Gamble with the Human Essence

Hans Jonas would direct our attention to the long-term, existential implications. Germline editing is the epitome of an irreversible action with cumulative, intergenerational consequences. The "heuristics of fear" demands that we prioritize the potential for catastrophic error over the promise of improvement. The human genome is not a simple blueprint but a complex, evolved system whose intricacies we are only beginning to understand. Introducing edits—even with seemingly benign intentions—risks unintended pleiotropic effects or unforeseen interactions that could manifest as diseases or vulnerabilities in future generations.[27] The responsibility we bear is not just to an individual but to the entire future of the human species and its "image." To proceed with enhancement without absolute certainty of safety would be the height of irresponsibility, a reckless gamble with the very essence of humanity for the sake of contingent and socially constructed advantages. Jonas's imperative would call for a moratorium on germline enhancement until we can be virtually certain that our actions are "compatible with the permanence of genuine human life."

A Midgleyian Analysis: The Hubris of Genetic Reductionism

Mary Midgley would attack the underlying mindset that makes genetic enhancement seem like a straightforward project. The desire to "improve" humanity through genetic manipulation is based on a grossly reductionist view of human life. It reduces the complexity of human personality, intelligence, and flourishing to a set of manipulatable genes, ignoring the profound roles of environment, culture, education, and lived experience.[28] This is a classic case of what Midgley calls "scientism"—the misapplication of a reductive scientific model to a complex organic whole. The hubris lies in believing that we can intelligently redesign a system that we do not fully comprehend. This "myth of control" leads to a dangerous simplification of what it means to be human. The "yuk factor" or feeling of repugnance that many feel towards human genetic

[25]This argument is articulated by Michael Sandel, who states that genetic enhancement represents a "hyper-agency," a drive to mastery that fails to appreciate the "giftedness" of life. Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 85.

[26]Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 62-63.

[27]For a discussion of the technical risks and complexities, see National Academy of Sciences, *Human Genome Editing: Science, Ethics, and Governance* (Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2017), 111-114.

[28]Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning* (London: Routledge, 1992), 145.

enhancement, Midgley suggests, might be a valuable cognitive signal of this violation of natural complexity, a warning against the arrogance of treating human life as a mere product.[29]

Synthesis of Findings

The three frameworks converge to form a powerful ethical condemnation of genetic enhancement. Kant provides the deontological core: it is inherently wrong because it violates human dignity. Jonas provides the consequentialist gravity: the potential for irreversible harm to the species is too great to risk. Midgley provides the epistemological critique: the entire endeavour is based on arrogant and simplistic misunderstanding of life's complexity. Together, they suggest that while therapeutic applications may be justifiable under strict conditions (aligning with Kantian respect and Jonasian precaution), enhancement represents a trifecta of ethical failure: a violation of a core moral principle, an unacceptable risk, and an act of profound hubris.

Case Study 2: Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems

The development of Artificial Intelligence, particularly the pursuit of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), represents another frontier where humanity assumes a god-like creative role. The ethical questions shift from altering biological life to creating new forms of agency.

A Kantian Analysis: Duties towards Created Agents and Humanity

A Kantian analysis of AI raises complex questions about the moral status of the created entity itself. If an AI were to achieve a level of consciousness, rationality, and self-awareness comparable to a human person, then Kantian ethics would demand that we treat it as an end in itself, not merely as a tool.[30] This would impose duties of non-malfeasance and possibly respect for its autonomy. The more immediate Kantian concern, however, involves our duties to humanity. Deploying autonomous systems with the power to make life-and-death decisions (e.g., autonomous weapons systems) risks the ultimate instrumentalization of human life. If a machine can decide to take a human life without meaningful human control, the victim is treated as a mere obstacle to be removed, not as an autonomous end-in-itself.[31] This constitutes a fundamental violation of the Categorical Imperative.

A Jonasian Analysis: The Ultimate Responsibility and Existential Risk

For Jonas, the creation of a superintelligent AGI is perhaps the ultimate test of his imperative of responsibility. The potential for an "intelligence explosion" resulting in an entity far surpassing human cognitive capacities presents a clear existential risk. An AGI's goals, if not perfectly aligned with human values and survival, could lead to human extinction as an unforeseen consequence of its pursuit of its programmed objective.[32] This is the Jonasian "prophecy of doom" made manifest. The creation of AGI is an action of such monumental consequence that the "heuristics of fear" must dominate. The ethical burden is not merely to innovate but to guarantee—as far as possible—that this powerful new being will not harm the "permanence of genuine human life." Given the profound difficulty of value alignment, a Jonasian perspective would advocate for extreme caution, prioritizing safety research over rapid development, and potentially even considering a moratorium until the ethical and control problems are solved.

A Midgleyian Analysis: The Myth of Controlling Superintelligence

Midgley's critique is perfectly suited to the AI domain. The ambition to create and control a superintelligence is the apotheosis of the reductionist and hubristic "myth of control." It assumes that we, with our limited and embodied intelligence, can fully anticipate, design, and contain an

[29]Mary Midgley, "Biotechnology and Monstrosity: Why We Should Pay Attention to the 'Yuk Factor'," *Hastings Center Report* 30, no. 5 (2000): 9.

[30]For a discussion of AI personhood, see David J. Gunkel, *The Machine Question: Critical Perspectives on AI, Robots, and Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 10-15.

[31]This is a central argument in the campaign to ban "killer robots." See, for example, the work of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, https://www.stopkillerrobots.org

[32]Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-10.

entity whose cognitive processes may be as incomprehensible to us as our own are to a mouse.[33] This project is based on a simplistic, engineering-based view of intelligence, ignoring its emergent, contextual, and potentially unpredictable nature. The hubris lies in the belief that we can summon a demon—or a god—and reliably keep it in a bottle. Midgley would argue that the responsible path requires immense epistemic humility, a recognition of the potentially unbridgeable gap between human and artificial consciousness, and a rejection of the techno-utopian narrative that more intelligence is an unalloyed good.

Conclusion

This philosophical investigation set out to interrogate the ethical controversy surrounding the metaphor of "playing God," a critique that surfaces with persistent urgency in response to humanity's growing technological prowess. Through a systematic analysis, we have moved beyond the metaphor's simplistic usage as a conversation-stopper and excavated its profound ethical core. By constructing a tripartite framework from the philosophies of Immanuel Kant, Hans Jonas, and Mary Midgley, this study has provided a robust structure for evaluating the limits and responsibilities of human intervention in domains ranging from the human genome to artificial intelligence.

The journey through this analysis yields a clear and nuanced answer to our central inquiry. A blanket prohibition on activities labelled as "playing God" is indeed ethically untenable, as it ignores the positive moral imperative to alleviate suffering, cure disease, and improve the human condition through responsible innovation. However, the critique must not be dismissed. Instead, its essential warning has been validated and refined through philosophical scrutiny. The Kantian lens revealed that the fundamental transgression lies in instrumentalizing human life, violating the dignity and autonomy of present and future persons. The Jonasian perspective established that our new powers demand a correspondingly vast ethics of responsibility, where the duty to preserve the future of "genuine human life" outweighs the impulse for reckless progress. Finally, Midgley's critique exposed the intellectual hubris and reductionist mindset that make such transgressions possible, advocating for a necessary epistemic humility in the face of life's complexity.

The application of this synthesized framework to genetic engineering and artificial intelligence demonstrated its analytical power. In both cases, the convergence of these three perspectives—deontological, existential, and virtue-based—provided a multi-faceted and stringent ethical assessment. It revealed that the gravest dangers arise not from technology itself, but from its pursuit without the guiding constraints of dignity, responsibility, and humility. The framework allows us to distinguish between potentially permissible therapeutic applications and ethically fraught enhancements, and between beneficial narrow AI and existentially risky AGI, based on principled reasoning rather than vague fear.

The proposed pathway forward, therefore, is not one of renunciation but of transformation. The responsible exercise of our "god-like" powers requires the cultivation of a new ethos, anchored in the hybrid principles of inviolable dignity, precautionary responsibility, and epistemic humility. Crucially, this ethos must be embedded within structures of inclusive, multidisciplinary, and democratic deliberation. The governance of powerful technologies cannot be left to closed expert communities or market forces alone; it must become a central project of democratic societies, engaging citizens in determining the future they wish to inhabit.

In conclusion, the metaphor of "playing God" endures because it captures a timeless truth about the perils of hubris. This investigation has argued that the appropriate response is not to abdicate our agency but to exercise it with the wisdom that true power demands. The goal is to ensure that our creative capacities are guided by a deep respect for what is human, a profound care for what is to come, and a humble acknowledgment of all that we do not and cannot know. By

[33]This analogy is frequently used in AI safety discussions. See Stuart Russell, *Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control* (New York: Viking, 2019), 5.

doing so, we may hope to ensure that the immense power we now hold ultimately serves to nurture, rather than undermine, the conditions for a genuinely human future.

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This analogy is frequently used in AI safety discussions. See Stuart Russell, *Human Compatible: Artificial Intelligence and the Problem of Control* (New York: Viking, 2019), 5.

This argument is articulated by Michael Sandel, who states that genetic enhancement represents a "hyper-agency," a drive to mastery that fails to appreciate the "giftedness" of life. Michael J. Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 85.

This argument is powerfully developed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Future of Human Nature*, who builds directly on Kantian premises to argue that genetic self-instrumentalization destroys the ethical self-understanding of the species. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 62-63.

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This is a central argument in the campaign to ban "killer robots." See, for example, the work of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, https://www.stopkillerrobots.org

This is a central theme in the Quran. See, for instance, Surah Al-Baqarah (2:34), where Iblis refuses to prostrate before Adam out of pride.

This is the central argument of Nick Bostrom's *Superintelligence*, which aligns with a Jonasian perspective on risk. See Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1-10.

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PRAYERS AND INCANTATIONS IN AFRICAN RELIGION: A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF THEIR ROLE IN SHAPING HUMAN FLOURISHING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
In many African societies, prayers and incantations constitute more than ritual utterances; they embody spiritual and socio-cultural systems through which individuals and communities negotiate life, meaning, and wellbeing. Rooted in African religious cosmologies, these practices serve as vital instruments for invoking divine presence, securing protection, and seeking prosperity in domains such as agriculture, commerce, family life, and communal harmony. This paper offers a theoretical exploration of prayers and incantations as both spiritual and socio-economic forces, analysing their capacity to promote resilience, social solidarity, and moral order, while also shaping economic activity and community development. By situating these practices within frameworks of African humanism and functionalist anthropology, the study illuminates how spiritual utterances contribute to human flourishing and indirectly to economic stability. Yet, the paper also interrogates their limitations, including susceptibility to manipulation, reinforcement of dependency, and tensions with modern economic systems and globalised values. The discussion ultimately argues that while prayers and incantations remain central to African religious life and human identity, their contribution to sustainable development depends on their integration with education, innovation, and ethical governance. The study thus highlights the continuing significance of indigenous spiritual practices in contemporary discourses on humanity and economic progress.

Keywords: *African religion, cultural resilience, economic development, humanity, prayers and incantations*

Introduction

Prayer and incantation occupy a pivotal position within African religion, representing far more than ritual utterances; they embody profound spiritual awareness and are integral to the worldview of many African societies. Words in this context are not mere communicative tools but vehicles of power, capable of invoking the divine, ancestral spirits, and metaphysical forces believed to shape human destiny. As Mbiti (1991) famously observes, in African cosmology, "to be is to be religious," for spirituality permeates all aspects of existence, including social relations, health, governance, and economic activity. Within this holistic framework, religion is not an isolated sphere but the organising principle through which communities interpret their world.

Prayers, often directed to deities or ancestors, are offered for protection, fertility, prosperity, guidance, and harmony. Incantations, meanwhile, consist of carefully crafted words charged with symbolic potency, used to secure desired outcomes such as healing, agricultural abundance, or

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Is it African religion or African traditional religion?

success in trade. Both practices reflect the African conviction that spoken words, when ritually empowered, carry transformative force. This resonates with Durkheim's (1912/1995) claim that ritual acts, by mobilising collective belief, strengthen social cohesion and reaffirm moral order. Moreover, they embody Gyekye's (1997) notion of Africa's "communitarian ethos," whereby the individual is inextricably linked to communal flourishing.

The role of prayers and incantations has evolved significantly across African history. In the precolonial era, they were central to daily life, guiding agriculture, trade, healing, warfare, and governance. Ritual specialists' priests, healers, and diviners were custodians of these utterances, which reinforced communal identity, moral accountability, and political legitimacy. During the colonial period, missionary expansion and colonial administration stigmatised these practices as "pagan" or "superstitious." Many rituals went underground, while others adapted through syncretism, blending with Christian or Islamic forms to sustain resilience and cultural continuity. In the postcolonial era, a resurgence of cultural nationalism rekindled interest in traditional rituals, with political leaders and intellectuals reclaiming them as markers of identity and authenticity. In the contemporary era, prayers and incantations persist alongside modern religions, often in hybrid forms for instance, Pentecostal deliverance prayers adopting incantatory structures. Their influence remains visible in entrepreneurship, governance, healing, and popular culture, though debates endure over whether they foster resilience and productivity or promote fatalism and dependency.

Despite their centrality in African religious life, the contribution of prayers and incantations to economic behaviour and development has received relatively limited theoretical attention. Much existing scholarship either emphasises their spiritual and cultural significance or dismisses them as archaic survivals incompatible with modernity.

Scholarly Gap: Despite extensive research on African religion and ritual practices, there is a notable lack of studies examining the direct relationship between prayers and incantations and economic development. Existing scholarship has largely focused on spiritual or cultural dimensions (Mbiti, 1991; Idowu, 1973) or on development in secular terms (Sen, 1999), rarely bridging these domains. Few studies have explored how ritual practices influence attitudes towards labour, productivity, wealth creation, and communal resilience, and much of the literature either romanticises traditional rituals or critiques them as superstitious, overlooking their practical impact in contemporary socio-economic contexts. This study addresses this gap by providing a theoretical and conceptual framework that positions prayers and incantations as forms of religious capital capable of shaping human values and material outcomes, thereby linking African religious practices to sustainable community and economic development. The central aim of this study is to investigate the role of prayers and incantations within African religion as a valuable interpretive lens for understanding the dynamics of humanity and economic development. In pursuing this aim, the study seeks, first, to examine the ways in which prayers and incantations reflect African religious conceptions of humanity, particularly their emphasis on communal life, moral order, and shared identity. Secondly, it endeavours to analyse how these ritual practices shape attitudes towards labour, productivity, and wealth, thereby influencing the broader economic outlook of communities. Finally, the study aims to explore the tensions that arise between traditional ritual practices and the socio-economic realities of contemporary Africa, with a view to assessing both their continuing relevance and the criticisms they attract in modern development discourses.

This study is guided by a central research question which asks how prayers and incantations within African religion may be understood as a lens through which to interpret both humanity and economic development. In seeking to answer this overarching question, the inquiry is further shaped by three interrelated concerns. The first is to consider the ways in which prayers and incantations embody African religious conceptions of humanity, with particular emphasis on communal life, identity, and moral responsibility. The second is to explore how these ritual practices influence people's attitudes towards labour, productivity, and wealth, thereby contributing to broader socio-economic orientations. The third is to examine the tensions that arise between the persistence of traditional ritual practices and the rapidly changing socio-economic realities of contemporary Africa.

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1973 before 1991

This study is significant for three main reasons. Academically, it contributes to the growing field of religion and development by providing a theoretical analysis of ritual speech as a form of cultural and religious capital. Socially, it highlights indigenous resources for resilience, social cohesion, and hope in African societies. Practically, it offers fresh insights into the ways religion and culture can enrich contemporary debates on sustainable and context-sensitive development.

The study focuses on sub-Saharan Africa, drawing on diverse cultural examples while remaining conceptual and theoretical rather than ethnographic. It does not attempt to exhaust the vast variety of rituals but concentrates on prayers and incantations as representative practices within African religious life.

The paper proceeds as follows: the next section reviews relevant literature and theoretical perspectives on African religion, humanity, and development. This is followed by a discussion of the historical and contemporary role of prayers and incantations. The paper then analyses their socio-economic implications before concluding with reflections on their continuing relevance in modern Africa.

Methodology

Given the conceptual and theoretical orientation of this study, the methodology adopted is qualitative, relying primarily on secondary data and interpretive analysis. The research does not involve ethnographic fieldwork or quantitative surveys but instead employs a critical review of scholarly literature, historical accounts, and theoretical perspectives on African religion, ritual practices, and development studies. Such an approach is particularly suitable because the study seeks to interpret meaning, explore symbolic dimensions, and evaluate socio-economic implications, rather than to measure phenomena statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research design is exploratory and analytical. It is exploratory in that it addresses relatively under-examined connections between prayers, incantations, humanity, and economic development. It is analytical in that it draws upon classical theories such as Durkheim's theory of ritual and social cohesion and African philosophical thought, including Mbiti's work on religion as the fabric of African life and Gyekye's communitarianism. By situating these within broader development discourses, the study seeks to generate a conceptual framework through which ritual practices can be understood as a form of cultural and religious capital (Putnam, 2000).

Data sources include books, journal articles, and reputable reports that discuss African religious traditions, ritual utterances, and their socio-economic roles. Thematic analysis is employed to organise findings around three domains: humanity (communal values and moral order), economic life (labour, productivity, and wealth), and contemporary challenges (tensions between tradition and modernity). This method enables the identification of recurring patterns and tensions while allowing space for nuanced interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Ethically, the study remains sensitive to the cultural and religious contexts it discusses. It avoids portraying prayers and incantations in reductive or pejorative terms, recognising instead their complexity and lived significance. By combining theoretical rigour with cultural sensitivity, the methodology provides a sound basis for addressing the research questions.

Definition of Terms

For clarity and consistency, the following key terms are defined as they are used in this study:

Prayer: Prayer refers to a spiritual act of communication with the divine, often directed towards God, deities, or ancestors, with the intention of seeking guidance, protection, blessings, or strength for daily life and community well-being (Mbiti, 1991).

Incantation: Incantation denotes the deliberate use of spoken words, chants, or phrases believed to carry symbolic and spiritual power, often employed to invoke transformation, healing, success, or protection in specific contexts (Idowu, 1973).

African Religion: African religion, in this study, refers to indigenous systems of belief and practice which emphasise community, ancestral reverence, spirituality, and the holistic integration of the sacred with every aspect of human life (Parrinder, 1969; Mbiti, 1991).

Humanity: Humanity is understood here as the shared essence of human existence, encompassing dignity, morality, compassion, and responsibility, especially as shaped and affirmed through communal and spiritual relationships (Gyekye, 1997).

Economic Development: Economic development refers to the progressive improvement of living standards, productivity, and social well-being, shaped not only by material growth but also by cultural and moral values (Sen, 1999).

Communal Life: Communal life is defined as a way of living in which individual identity, security, and flourishing are inseparable from the welfare, cooperation, and stability of the wider community (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997).

Ritual Practice: Ritual practice signifies a structured religious act, performed with symbolic and spiritual intent, designed to connect humans with the divine, the ancestors, or metaphysical realities (Durkheim, 1912/1995).

Religious Capital: Religious capital refers to the cultural, ethical, and spiritual resources derived from religious traditions, which shape human attitudes towards labour, resilience, productivity, and community prosperity (Putnam, 2000).

Resilience: Resilience is understood as the ability of individuals or communities to endure hardship, adapt to challenges, and maintain hope and productivity despite adverse circumstances (Ungar, 2012).

Modernity: Modernity, in this study, refers to the condition of rapid social change shaped by globalisation, innovation, and shifting cultural realities, often creating tensions between tradition and contemporary life (Giddens, 1991).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three interrelated theoretical perspectives: African humanism, functionalist anthropology, and development theory. Together, they provide a lens for interpreting the religious, social, and economic significance of prayers and incantations in African contexts.

African humanism offers a philosophical foundation for understanding humanity as a relational and spiritual category. It emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals, communities, ancestors, and the divine, affirming that human flourishing arises not in isolation but through solidarity, moral order, and spiritual vitality (Ramose, 2002; Mbiti, 1991). Within this worldview, prayers and incantations become more than ritual acts; they are means of sustaining harmony, dignity, and collective wellbeing.

Functionalist anthropology further illuminates the role of these practices in maintaining social cohesion and regulating communal life. Drawing from the works of Durkheim and Malinowski, rituals are seen as mechanisms that reinforce shared values, provide psychological reassurance, and legitimise economic activity (Durkheim, 1995; Malinowski, 1948). Thus, invocations for harvest, commerce, or protection are interpreted as cultural instruments that uphold resilience, ethical conduct, and productivity within society.

ent theory, particularly approaches attentive to indigenous knowledge and lls, situates prayers and incantations within broader debates on economic ges the marginalisation of traditional practices in modern policy, suggesting opment must harmonise spirituality, education, innovation, and ethics (Sachs,

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1999 before 2010

2010; Sen, 1999). Through this tripartite framework, the study situates African religious practices at the intersection of spirituality, humanity, and economic development.

African Theoretical Perspective on Prayer

Prayer, in the African religious worldview, represents the most immediate and accessible form of veneration. It is an act of communication directed towards God, deities, and ancestral spirits, serving as a vital means of sustaining the relationship between the human and spiritual realms (Mbiti, 1969; Idowu, 1973). Unlike ritual sacrifices which often require elaborate preparation, prayer is flexible and adaptable, taking place at any moment of daily life—on the farm, in the marketplace, at the hearth, or within the sacred grove. Africans pray almost perpetually, demonstrating the pervasive integration of spirituality into every aspect of human existence.

Communal prayers are typically led by elders, priests, kings, or family heads, but prayer is not restricted to ritual specialists. Ordinary individuals freely invoke God and the ancestors in times of need, gratitude, or crisis (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979). Prayers can be classified according to their purpose: thanksgiving for harvests and answered petitions, supplications for rain, protection, fertility, or success in trade, prayers of dedication to consecrate children and possessions, and invocations for justice and longevity. Integral to these prayers is the use of liturgical names and praise epithets which acknowledge the majesty of the divine while affirming the worshipper's humility. Such utterances are believed to possess transformative power, capable of shaping events and aligning human affairs with cosmic order.

Prayer, therefore, is not merely a religious act but a communal, ethical, and economic force. It reinforces the African conviction that human life is lived in constant relationship with the spiritual world, which governs health, prosperity, fertility, and security. As such, prayer sustains communal identity, moral accountability, and economic resilience, making it an indispensable aspect of African religious existence (Parrinder, 1969; Gyekye, 1997).

Comparative Perspective: African and Christian Views of Prayer

While African prayer emphasises communion with God, deities, and ancestors through spontaneous invocations and ritualised utterances, Christian theology tends to categorise prayer into distinct types such as adoration, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994). In Christianity, the structure of prayer often reflects doctrinal emphases sin, grace, salvation, and divine providence whereas in African religion, prayer arises from existential concerns such as fertility, protection, justice, prosperity, and the preservation of communal harmony.

Nonetheless, there are notable convergences. Both traditions regard prayer as dialogue with the divine and a means of aligning human life with higher realities. Africans' express gratitude before libations and sacrifices, echoing Christian thanksgiving. Intercession is evident in parental prayers for children, resembling Christian prayers for others. The key distinction lies in the relational scope: African prayer often encompasses the living, the dead, and the unborn, weaving humanity into a holistic community, while Christian prayer is primarily directed towards God, mediated through Christ, and center on salvation history. Together, these perspectives enrich the understanding of prayer as both a universal human impulse and a culturally contextual practice.

Incantation in African and Christian Traditions: A Comparative Theoretical Perspective

Incantation occupies a central place in African religious thought, particularly within Yoruba cosmology, where it is understood as the verbal dimension of ritual power. Olatunji (1984:140) identifies it as the linguistic manifestation of magical practice, enabling individuals to perform actions that transcend ordinary human capability. Incantations, often described as *ọfọ̀, ògèdè,* or *àyájó*, are carefully constructed verbal expressions imbued with metaphysical potency and designed to effect transformation in specific contexts (Ajayi, 2011). They are typically poetic in form, employing repetition, rhythm, tonal variation, and symbolic wordplay to invoke spiritual

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forces (Borokinni & Lawal, 2014; Kabir, 1991). In this sense, incantations are not merely linguistic performances but vehicles of mystical authority and metaphysical maturity, preserved and transmitted within religious hierarchies where secrecy functions as both a safeguard and a marker of power (Olatunji, 1984).

The functionality of incantation is a distinctive feature of African religious practice. It permeates nearly every domain of human existence social, political, economic, and medical. Positive incantations are employed to attract clients, ward off calamity, enhance memory, or secure good fortune, while negative forms are used to cause harm or misfortune (Ajayi, 2011). This dual potential reflects the broader African conception of language as a creative force, capable of sustaining life or inflicting destruction depending on its use (Mbiti, 1969). Furthermore, incantations often accompany herbal preparations or ritual objects, enhancing their efficacy by invoking the spiritual energies believed to inhabit nature (Opoola, 2019). Thus, incantation represents a holistic expression of the African worldview, where the spoken word is inseparable from the sacred and the pragmatic.

When compared with Christianity, both resonances and divergences emerge. Christianity similarly affirms the power of words, grounded in the biblical narrative of creation, where God speaks the world into existence (Gen. 1:3). Theologically, this establishes speech as ontologically potent, though in Christianity such potency is attributed solely to divine authority rather than human manipulation (Durkheim, 1995; Gyekye, 1997). Prayer, the Christian counterpart to incantation, is understood as relational and petitionary an act of trust in God's will rather than instrumental or formulaic. Whereas Yoruba incantations rely on precision, rhythm, and ritual form for efficacy, Christian prayer privileges sincerity, faith, and alignment with divine purposes (Matt. 6:7; James 5:16).

Moreover, incantations in Yoruba thought can be benevolent or malevolent, reflecting the ambivalence of spiritual power, while Christianity strictly proscribes harmful speech and rejects practices akin to sorcery or enchantment (Deut. 18:10–12; James 3:9–10). Authority also differs: incantations are guarded by specialists such as priests, herbalists, or elders, while Christian prayer is democratised, accessible to all believers though shaped by liturgical traditions. Finally, the goals diverge: African incantations are primarily this-worldly, concerned with health, fertility, or protection, whereas Christian speech acts whether prayer, prophecy, or liturgy are framed within an eschatological vision oriented toward salvation and the kingdom of God.

In sum, while both traditions affirm the transformative capacity of language, incantation in African religion operates as a pragmatic and metaphysical instrument embedded in communal life, whereas Christian tradition situates the power of words within the sovereignty of God. The comparison highlights not only the distinctive theological frameworks but also the enduring recognition, across traditions, of the spoken word as a force that shapes human destiny.

Theoretical Perspectives on African Religion

Religion has long been recognised as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that resists a singular, universally accepted definition. This elusiveness stems not only from the nature of its spiritual referents but also from the diversity of interpretations advanced by scholars and practitioners across cultural contexts. One of the earliest anthropological definitions, offered by Edward Burnett Tylor, described religion as "the belief in spiritual beings" (as cited in Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:3). While groundbreaking, this definition has often been critiqued for its reductionist [illegible] argue that confining the object of religion to personified supernatural entities [illegible]ce of impersonal, dynamic forces such as *mana*, *orenda*, *nyama*, or African [illegible]*kwu*, *Oluwa*, and *Ubangiji* which profoundly influence worship and ritual [illegible]etuh, 1987:13).

[illegible]r (2004:14) build upon this debate, suggesting that religion can more [illegible]e understood as belief in "an invisible realm… inhabited by spiritual entities

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possessing effective influence over the material realm." This perspective aligns strongly with African cosmological systems, which regard the visible and invisible as intertwined domains between which communication is both possible and necessary. Such a view underscores the functional and experiential dimensions of African Religion, where rituals, prayers, and incantations are not symbolic gestures alone but channels through which human beings seek to negotiate well-being, order, and prosperity.

Within African scholarship, the work of John Mbiti remains foundational. Mbiti (1991:11–13) identifies five interrelated components of African Religion: beliefs, practices, sacred objects and places, values and morals, and religious leaders. These elements together illustrate the holistic scope of religion in African life, extending beyond worship into ethics, governance, social cohesion, and economic activity. Similarly, Wotogbe Weneka (2014) characterises African Religion as a comprehensive worldview governing all aspects of human existence, embedding individuals within ancestral lineages and communal obligations. This resonates with Gyekye's (1997) emphasis on the relational nature of African personhood, where identity is inseparable from community and morality.

Yet, while these perspectives highlight the richness of African Religion, they are not without limitations. The heavy reliance on Mbiti and other early African theologians has sometimes led to static or overly essentialist portrayals of African religiosity. Moreover, the document under review does not fully incorporate alternative theoretical lenses, such as Durkheim's functionalist account of religion as a source of social solidarity, Geertz's interpretive view of religion as a cultural system of symbols, or Asad's critique of the universality of Western definitions of religion. Nor does it sufficiently address the transformations brought by modernity, globalisation, Christianity, and Islam, all of which interact with and reshape traditional practices.

In sum, the document accurately captures the institutional, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of African Religion and situates them within broader theoretical debates. Its strength lies in foregrounding African voices and presenting religion as an all-encompassing force in human affairs. However, a more comprehensive engagement with comparative theories and contemporary debates would enrich the analysis, situating African Religion not only within its own tradition but also within global religious scholarship.

Theoretical Perspectives on Economic Development

Economic development is best understood as a multidimensional process that goes beyond quantitative economic growth to include qualitative improvements in human life, social welfare, and communal well-being (Sen, 1999). This broader view provides a foundation for examining how prayers and incantations within African religion reflect humanity and shape socio-economic realities. Three theoretical clusters particularly inform the objectives of this study.

1. Conceptions of Humanity and Communal Life: Modern development theory increasingly aligns with African philosophical traditions that see human flourishing as inseparable from communal life. Sen's capability approach highlights freedom, dignity, and agency as indicators of development, while Gyekye (1997) stresses the moral and communal dimensions of African humanism. In this light, prayers and incantations can be theorised as cultural practices that sustain identity, accountability, and moral order—critical elements in the constitution of humanity within development discourse.

2. Attitudes towards Labour, Productivity, and Wealth: Weber's classic thesis (1930/2001) on the Protestant ethic emphasised how religious values shape economic behaviour by fostering discipline, rationality, and productivity. Though Weber focused on Western Christianity, his insight has been expanded by Iannaccone (1990), who conceptualises religious capital as spiritual and communal resources that promote resilience and economic engagement. Applied to African contexts, this perspective suggests that prayers for fertility, prosperity, and success are not merely ritual expressions but drivers of productive attitudes towards labour, trade, and wealth creation.

3. Tradition and Contemporary Socio-Economic Realities: Modernisation theory (Rostow, 1960) conceives development as a linear transition from "traditional" to "modern" society, driven by industrialisation and global integration. Yet this perspective has been criticised by dependency theorists (Frank, 1967) and world-systems theorists (Wallerstein, 1974), who argue that underdevelopment is often a result of historical exploitation and global inequality. These critiques resonate in African contexts, where prayers and incantations remain vital cultural resources even as societies grapple with globalisation, policy reforms, and socio-economic transformations. They highlight the tensions between preserving indigenous practices and adapting to contemporary economic pressures.

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that development is not a purely material phenomenon but one deeply embedded in cultural, moral, and spiritual contexts. For this study, they provide a theoretical lens through which the role of prayers and incantations in shaping humanity, labour, and socio-economic adaptation in Africa can be critically examined.

Theoretical Perspectives on Prayers and Incantations, African Religion, Humanity, and Economic Development

Scholars such as John Mbiti (1969) and Bolaji Idowu (1973) emphasise that African religious practices do not exist in isolation but are intricately woven into everyday life. Within this worldview, prayers and incantations are not mere ritualistic forms; they function as vehicles for engaging with the divine, ancestral spirits, and metaphysical forces, influencing both individual behaviour and communal norms. These spiritual practices permeate social, moral, and economic spheres, guiding agriculture, commerce, leadership, and community decision-making.

The role of prayers and incantations can be further understood through the concept of **religious capital**, as articulated by Putnam (2000). This perspective suggests that ritual practices cultivate moral discipline, resilience, and trustworthiness, which, in turn, shape work ethics, collective accountability, and economic productivity. Similarly, Ter Haar (2011) highlights that African spiritual practices, when integrated into everyday life, operate as developmental assets, providing communities with tools for coping with adversity and enhancing socio-economic cohesion.
From a **humanity perspective**, prayers and incantations reinforce communal values and social identity. Gyekye (1997) argues that African philosophy regards the individual as inseparable from the community, where moral responsibility, solidarity, and dignity are cultivated through participation in shared spiritual and cultural practices. Mbiti's (1969) assertion that "I am because we are" underscores how ritual engagements nurture social cohesion and ethical behaviour, linking spiritual life directly to human flourishing.

Nevertheless, theoretical debates acknowledge potential drawbacks. Critics argue that excessive reliance on incantations can foster superstition, fatalism, or manipulation by religious authorities, potentially hindering rational approaches to development and economic decision-making (Giddens, 1991; Sen, 1999). This tension reflects the broader challenge of balancing the preservation of cultural and religious heritage with the demands of modern economic and social advancement.

In sum, theoretical perspectives converge on the view that prayers and incantations are both spiritual and social instruments. They not only sustain communal identity and moral order but also influence attitudes towards labour, productivity, and economic development. Consequently, understanding these practices offers a critical lens for analysing how African religious life intersects with human values and developmental outcomes in contemporary societies.

Theoretical Perspectives on Prayers, Humanity, and Communal Well-being

Prayers and incantations occupy a central role in African religious thought, serving as both spiritual and social instruments that shape human life and communal relations. From a sociological

perspective, Durkheim (1912/1995) highlights that collective rituals, including group prayers, reinforce social cohesion by fostering solidarity, trust, and shared norms within families, clans, and wider communities. Such practices strengthen relational ties, ensuring that individuals remain accountable to both the living and the spiritual realm. Complementing this, Mbiti (1991) and Gyekye (1997) emphasise that incantations function as custodians of identity and heritage, transmitting communal values, traditions, and moral precepts across generations. In this sense, ritual speech is not merely symbolic but a mechanism for sustaining collective memory and cultural continuity.

Beyond social cohesion and identity, prayers and incantations contribute to psychological resilience. By providing solace, hope, and optimism during crises such as famine, illness, or economic hardship, they enable individuals and communities to navigate uncertainty and adversity (Pargament, 1997). This psychological dimension is intertwined with moral accountability: ritual practices often associate human action with divine oversight, guiding ethical behaviour and reinforcing norms that underpin communal stability (Gyekye, 1997). Moreover, theoretical perspectives increasingly recognise the link between ritual practice and socio-economic development. Collective prayers and incantations influence attitudes toward labour, productivity, and communal prosperity, functioning as a form of religious capital that fosters ethical diligence, resilience, and cooperative engagement (Putnam, 2000). In this way, prayers are not only spiritually significant but also materially consequential, shaping patterns of work, resource management, and economic behaviour within African societies.

Taken together, these perspectives illustrate that prayers and incantations operate at the intersection of spirituality, humanity, and community well-being. They sustain cultural identity, promote ethical responsibility, enhance resilience, and indirectly support socio-economic development, underscoring their continuing relevance in contemporary African contexts.

Prayers, Incantations, and Economic Development: Theoretical Perspectives

In African religious thought, prayers and incantations are not merely spiritual acts; they function as mechanisms that shape both human behaviour and economic outcomes. In agriculture, for example, farmers engage in prayer for rainfall, soil fertility, and abundant harvests, often accompanying these petitions with incantatory expressions during planting and harvesting phases. From a theoretical standpoint, this reflects Mbiti's (1991) conception of African religion as integrally woven into daily life, where ritual acts influence material wellbeing and reinforce communal interdependence. Furthermore, Durkheim's (1912/1995) framework emphasises that such rituals strengthen social cohesion, ensuring collective effort towards shared goals such as food security.

In trade and commerce, merchants invoke blessings to safeguard financial transactions and ensure profitable ventures. These practices can be understood through Putnam's (2000) notion of religious capital, wherein shared belief systems and ritual engagement cultivate trust, ethical behaviour, and cooperative norms that underpin market stability and economic productivity.

Craftsmen and artisans also incorporate ritualistic language into their work, using prayers and incantations to enhance skill, creativity, and the success of their products in the marketplace. This aligns with the theoretical view that ritual practices can act as a source of psychological and social capital, enhancing confidence, focus, and communal validation of economic competence.

Leadership and governance are similarly influenced by ritual practices. Chiefs and community leaders employ prayers to promote peace, social order, and stability conditions essential for sustainable economic development. Durkheimian theory underscores that ritualised governance practices reinforce collective morality, while African philosophical perspectives highlight that

spiritual sanction legitimises authority and encourages ethical stewardship of resources (Gyekye, 1997).

Collectively, these sectoral applications demonstrate that prayers and incantations function as both cultural and economic instruments, mediating human behaviour, social cohesion, and productivity. They illustrate the multidimensional nature of African religious practices, bridging spiritual, communal, and material spheres in ways that are theoretically meaningful and practically consequential for development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Prayers and incantations within African religious frameworks continue to play a vital role in shaping cultural, spiritual, and social life across the continent. Theologically, they affirm divine engagement in human affairs, while socially, they reinforce communal identity, moral accountability, and resilience. Economically, these practices operate as a form of religious capital, influencing attitudes towards labour, productivity, and wealth creation. This demonstrates the profound interconnection between spirituality, humanity, and material welfare (Mbiti, 1991; Gyekye, 1997; Putnam, 2000).

Despite their enduring relevance, challenges such as misuse, misinterpretation, and tensions with contemporary socio-economic realities persist. Critics argue that they may foster fatalism or dependency when improperly applied. Nonetheless, when ethically guided and contextualised, prayers and incantations offer significant potential to strengthen community cohesion, moral conduct, and sustainable development outcomes. The study confirms that these ritual practices continue to shape human values, communal life, and economic behaviour, aligning with its objectives to explore spirituality, socio-economic influence, and tensions with modernity.

Recommendations

1. We recommend that development practitioners and policymakers incorporate indigenous religious resources, including prayers and incantations, as complementary instruments to promote social cohesion, encourage ethical labour practices, and support community-driven economic initiatives.
2. We recommend that communities and educational institutions preserve and transmit knowledge of traditional rituals, ensuring that prayers and incantations are understood and applied within ethical, moral, and productive frameworks.
3. We recommend that scholars conduct further research and documentation to empirically examine the impacts of prayers and incantations on resilience, productivity, and communal development across diverse African contexts.
4. We recommend that religious and community leaders guide the practice of prayers and incantations responsibly to prevent misuse, thereby maximising their potential as constructive instruments for ethical, social, and economic well-being.

By aligning these recommendations with the study's objectives and research questions, prayers and incantations are positioned not merely as cultural artefacts but as practical resources for ethical, communal, and economic development in contemporary Africa.

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DIGITAL EVANGELISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN CHURCH

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Abstract
This study examines Digital Evangelism and the Transformation of Christian Communication in the Contemporary African Church, highlighting how technological innovation has reshaped the modes, reach, and impact of Christian ministry across the continent. With the rapid growth of digital platforms such as social media, streaming services, and mobile applications, churches in Africa have increasingly adopted new communication strategies to spread the gospel, engage believers, and build virtual faith communities. The research draws insights from library materials, academic journals, and online resources to analyze how digital evangelism complements traditional preaching and expands the Church's mission beyond physical boundaries. Findings reveal that digital tools have enhanced accessibility, interactive worship, and cross-cultural engagement among African Christians, especially among the youth. However, challenges such as misinformation, digital inequality, and reduced personal interaction remain significant. The study concludes that while digital evangelism presents vast opportunities for effective Christian communication, its success depends on ethical use, digital literacy, and theological grounding. It recommends that African churches integrate digital strategies into their ministry frameworks to ensure sustainable, inclusive, and transformative evangelistic outreach in the digital era.

Keywords: *Digital evangelism, Christian communication, African Church, technology, transformation*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the landscape of Christian communication in Africa. In an era defined by globalization and the proliferation of digital media, the Church in Africa has embraced new communication strategies that transcend geographical, cultural, and linguistic barriers (Kalu, 2020). Traditionally, evangelism in the African Church relied heavily on face-to-face preaching, print media, and radio broadcasts. However, the rise of the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms has revolutionized how Christians communicate, worship, and engage with the gospel message (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2021). Digital evangelism defined as the use of digital tools and online platforms for spreading the Christian faith has become an essential component of modern ministry across the continent.

Digital evangelism provides unprecedented opportunities for churches to reach diverse audiences, especially the youth and diaspora communities. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, and Instagram have become virtual pulpits through which pastors and ministries disseminate sermons, host live worship services, and engage with believers globally (Chiluwa, 2022). This digital shift has expanded the Church's influence, fostering accessibility, interactivity, and immediacy in Christian communication. Moreover, digital evangelism allows believers to participate in worship and discipleship from any location, breaking traditional boundaries of time and space (Olanrewaju, 2023).

Despite its many advantages, digital evangelism also presents challenges that require theological reflection and ethical consideration. Issues such as misinformation, superficial engagement,

commercialization of faith, and digital divides between urban and rural believers threaten to undermine the authenticity and inclusivity of Christian communication (Ukah, 2022). The transformation brought by digital media, therefore, demands a re-examination of the Church's mission, communication ethics, and the role of technology in nurturing spiritual growth and community.

Thus, in the contemporary African context, digital evangelism represents both continuity and change it preserves the gospel's timeless message while adapting its delivery to the realities of the 21st century. The integration of technology into ministry has enabled the Church to thrive amidst global disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated online worship and digital discipleship (Nwosu, 2021). As the African Church continues to evolve, understanding the dynamics of digital evangelism is essential for ensuring effective, ethical, and sustainable Christian communication in the digital age.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of digital evangelism represents a modern adaptation of the Christian mission, utilizing digital technologies and online communication platforms to spread the gospel and foster spiritual growth. Evangelism, traditionally understood as the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20), has evolved from oral traditions and print media to encompass a broad range of technological tools. According to Asamoah-Gyadu (2021), digital evangelism refers to the intentional use of digital platforms such as websites, social media, podcasts, and streaming services to communicate the Christian message, disciple believers, and build online faith communities. This evolution signifies a paradigm shift in how the Church interacts with both believers and non-believers in an increasingly interconnected world.

Christian communication, in this context, extends beyond preaching to include all forms of message transmission that express and promote the values, beliefs, and teachings of Christianity. Kalu (2020) explains that Christian communication is both theological and practical it involves the interpretation of biblical truths and the strategic dissemination of these truths through culturally relevant means. In contemporary Africa, this has taken the form of multimedia preaching, digital worship, and social media engagement, making the gospel more accessible to younger and technologically inclined audiences (Chiluwa, 2022).

The contemporary African Church serves as a dynamic intersection of tradition and modernity. While it remains deeply rooted in communal worship and oral traditions, it has increasingly adopted digital tools for outreach, discipleship, and fellowship. Olanrewaju (2023) notes that the digital transformation of the African Church was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated online worship, live-streamed sermons, and virtual pastoral care. This digital adaptation has expanded the Church's reach, enabling it to minister across geographic and cultural boundaries.

However, the integration of digital media into Christian ministry introduces new conceptual and ethical challenges. Ukah (2022) emphasizes that digital evangelism must balance innovation with authenticity, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces personal relationships and communal faith practices. Furthermore, access disparities between urban and rural congregations create what scholars term the "digital divide," limiting equal participation in digital worship (Nwosu, 2021).

The conceptual framework of digital evangelism and Christian communication in Africa encapsulates a transformative process where faith and technology converge. It represents both an opportunity and a responsibility for the African Church to leverage modern tools while maintaining the integrity of the gospel message.

The Rise of Digital Evangelism in Contemporary African Christianity

The rise of digital evangelism has profoundly reshaped the landscape of contemporary African Christianity, redefining how the gospel is communicated, shared, and experienced in the twenty-first century. Traditionally, Christian evangelism in Africa depended on face-to-face

preaching, open-air crusades, radio broadcasts, and print materials to disseminate the Christian message (Kalu, 2020). However, the advent of digital technology particularly the internet, mobile communication, and social media has transformed this process into a dynamic, interactive, and far-reaching movement known as digital evangelism. This transformation reflects the Church's ability to adapt to global technological trends while maintaining its mission of spreading the gospel and nurturing faith communities across diverse social and cultural contexts (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2021).

Digital evangelism refers to the strategic use of digital technologies such as websites, social media platforms, mobile applications, podcasts, and online videos to promote Christian teachings and foster discipleship. In Africa, this trend has gained significant momentum over the last two decades, driven by increasing internet penetration and the widespread use of smartphones (Ukah, 2022). Churches and individual preachers have embraced digital media to reach audiences beyond geographical limits. This shift has expanded the boundaries of ministry, creating virtual congregations that transcend denominational and national barriers. The African Church, once viewed as technologically conservative, is now at the forefront of innovative mission strategies that merge faith with technology.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a catalyst for digital evangelism across Africa. When restrictions on physical gatherings were imposed in 2020, many churches were compelled to move their services online. According to Nwosu (2021), the pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, and Facebook Live for worship, teaching, and fellowship. This transition not only sustained religious engagement during lockdowns but also revealed the vast potential of digital spaces for evangelism and community building. The crisis forced pastors and congregations to become technologically literate, thus institutionalizing online worship as a complementary form of religious experience even after the pandemic subsided.

One of the key strengths of digital evangelism lies in its interactive and participatory nature. Unlike traditional preaching, which often follows a one-way communication model, digital platforms allow for dialogue, feedback, and collaboration. Through social media, believers can comment on sermons, ask theological questions, and share personal testimonies in real-time. This interactivity fosters a sense of belonging and spiritual intimacy, particularly among young people who are highly active in digital spaces (Chiluwa, 2022). Moreover, digital evangelism encourages creativity in Christian communication, incorporating videos, memes, infographics, and online devotionals to engage diverse audiences. By doing so, the African Church has made the gospel more relatable and appealing to tech-savvy generations.

The rise of digital evangelism has also democratized access to religious content. Before the digital era, access to sermons, theological training, and church events was often limited by geography and cost. Today, believers can participate in worship services, conferences, and Bible studies from anywhere in the world. This digital accessibility has expanded the Church's global influence and enabled cross-cultural exchange among Christians in Africa and the diaspora. It has also empowered lay believers to become active participants in evangelism by sharing gospel messages through their personal social media accounts (Olanrewaju, 2023).

However, the digitalization of Christian communication also presents new challenges and ethical dilemmas. Issues such as misinformation, digital inequality, online distractions, and the commercialization of faith have become concerns for the African Church (Ukah, 2022). Many rural congregations lack reliable internet access or technical skills to fully benefit from digital evangelism. Additionally, the rise of "celebrity pastors" and prosperity-oriented messages on social media sometimes distorts the essence of the gospel, prioritizing popularity over spiritual depth. To mitigate these challenges, scholars and church leaders have emphasized the need for digital literacy, media ethics, and contextual theology that aligns technology with biblical values (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2021).

Thus, digital evangelism represents a significant paradigm shift in contemporary African Christianity. It has revolutionized how the Church engages with believers, communicates the gospel, and fulfills its mission in a rapidly changing technological world. While challenges remain, the benefits of digital evangelism such as inclusivity, accessibility, and innovation—outweigh its limitations. For the African Church, embracing digital evangelism is not merely a technological

trend but a divine opportunity to expand the frontiers of mission and discipleship in the digital age. As Christianity continues to thrive in Africa, digital evangelism will remain a vital tool for shaping faith, community, and transformation across generations.

Historical Overview of Christian Communication in Africa

Christian communication in Africa has undergone a remarkable evolution, reflecting the continent's dynamic religious, cultural, and technological transformations. From the early missionary era to the digital age, the Church in Africa has consistently adapted its methods of message transmission to suit changing contexts and audiences. Understanding this historical development provides valuable insight into how communication strategies have influenced evangelism, discipleship, and social transformation on the continent (Kalu, 2020).

The earliest forms of Christian communication in Africa date back to the missionary period of the 15th to 19th centuries, when European missionaries introduced Christianity through oral preaching, print media, and symbolic expressions. Oral communication was particularly effective because African societies traditionally relied on oral narratives, songs, and proverbs to convey values and beliefs (Walls, 2019). Missionaries often adopted local languages to preach and teach, realizing that translation was central to successful evangelism. The translation of the Bible into indigenous languages, such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Swahili, became a key communication tool for spreading the Christian faith (Sanneh, 2016). These efforts laid the foundation for literacy and the development of African Christian theology.

The print era marked a significant shift in Christian communication across Africa. Missionary printing presses established in the 19th century produced tracts, catechisms, hymnals, and Christian literature that shaped early African Christian thought (Walls, 2019). Missionaries like Samuel Ajayi Crowther and John Chilembwe used the power of print to educate converts, counter local superstitions, and build Christian communities. The printed word gave permanence to the Christian message and allowed it to spread beyond immediate missionary control, empowering African voices to emerge in theological and social debates.

With the advent of the radio era in the 20th century, Christian communication entered a new phase. Radio became a vital tool for mass evangelism, especially in rural areas where literacy levels were low. According to Ayegboyin and Ishola (2021), religious broadcasting emerged as one of the most effective means of reaching large audiences in Africa, combining audio storytelling with biblical teaching. Churches established radio programs to air sermons, gospel music, and testimonies that strengthened believers and attracted new converts. The accessibility of radio fostered community engagement and spiritual formation, making it a cornerstone of African Christian communication for decades.

The television era, beginning in the mid-20th century, further transformed Christian communication in Africa. Television brought visual representation to the gospel message, creating emotional and spiritual experiences for viewers. The rise of Pentecostal and charismatic movements in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with the growth of Christian television networks such as Emmanuel TV and Loveworld Television (Ukah, 2022). These platforms amplified the influence of African pastors and evangelists, extending their ministries beyond national borders. The visual appeal of television evangelism attracted urban audiences and reinforced the prosperity gospel movement, which blended faith with modern aspirations of success and healing.

The 21st century ushered in the digital communication era, which has redefined how Christianity is practiced and communicated in Africa. The rise of the internet, social media, and mobile technology has revolutionized access to religious information and participation. Churches now use platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and TikTok for evangelism, prayer meetings, and discipleship (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2021). This digital shift has democratized communication, allowing individual believers to become content creators and gospel ambassadors. Digital communication has also enhanced interactivity and global connectivity, linking African Christians to believers worldwide and creating online communities of faith.

Despite these advances, the history of Christian communication in Africa has also faced challenges. Colonial influence initially shaped missionary communication, often imposing Western cultural values alongside Christianity (Isichei, 2020). This led to tensions between traditional African spirituality and imported religious forms. Furthermore, access to communication technologies remains unequal across the continent, limiting participation in digital evangelism for rural and economically disadvantaged communities. Nonetheless, the African Church continues to innovate, combining traditional and modern methods to communicate the gospel effectively.

Technological Innovations and Their Influence on Church Communication Strategies

Technological innovation has significantly transformed church communication strategies in Africa and around the world, redefining how religious messages are created, shared, and experienced. The integration of technology into ministry has shifted Christian communication from traditional, one-directional methods to dynamic, interactive, and global systems of engagement. As society becomes increasingly digitalized, churches have recognized the need to adapt to technological advancements to maintain relevance and effectively fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The evolution of communication technologies from the printing press to the internet and artificial intelligence has expanded the scope and speed of gospel dissemination, enhancing the Church's capacity to reach diverse audiences (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2021).

Historically, the Church was among the first institutions to adopt technology for evangelism and education. The invention of the Gutenberg printing press in the 15th century revolutionized religious communication by enabling mass production of the Bible and Christian literature. This innovation democratized access to scripture, empowering believers to read and interpret the Word independently (Walls, 2019). In Africa, missionary societies adopted similar technologies to translate and print the Bible in local languages, thereby laying the foundation for literacy and Christian education (Sanneh, 2016). The print revolution not only advanced evangelism but also positioned the Church as a key player in knowledge dissemination and cultural transformation.

The advent of radio and television in the 20th century further reshaped church communication. These media allowed churches to reach larger audiences simultaneously, bridging geographical and cultural barriers. In Africa, Christian radio broadcasting became a vital tool for evangelism, particularly in rural areas with limited access to print materials (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 2021). Radio programs that featured preaching, music, and testimonies fostered spiritual formation and provided moral guidance to millions. The later introduction of television enhanced the visual aspect of religious communication, popularizing televised crusades, healing services, and gospel concerts. Pentecostal and charismatic movements effectively leveraged television to expand their ministries, with prominent figures like T. B. Joshua and Chris Oyakhilome using satellite broadcasting to reach global audiences (Ukah, 2022).

In the 21st century, digital technologies have redefined church communication strategies in unprecedented ways. The rise of the internet, smartphones, and social media has ushered in an era of digital evangelism a form of ministry that transcends physical and denominational boundaries. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and X (formerly Twitter) have become modern pulpits where sermons, devotionals, and prayers are shared instantly with global audiences. Churches now stream worship services online, host virtual Bible studies, and organize digital prayer meetings. This has transformed the way believers interact with faith, offering flexibility and inclusivity to those who cannot attend physical gatherings (Nwosu, 2021).

One of the most significant impacts of technological innovation is the shift from passive to participatory communication. Unlike traditional media, which often allowed only one-way transmission, digital platforms foster interactivity. Congregants can comment, ask questions, and share testimonies in real time, creating an engaging and communal worship experience. This participatory culture has strengthened relationships between pastors and congregants, democratizing access to religious discourse (Chiluwa, 2022). Moreover, technology has empowered lay Christians to become active evangelists by sharing religious content on their social media pages, thereby expanding the reach of the gospel beyond church walls.

Technology has also enhanced church administration and discipleship strategies. Many churches now use software applications for membership management, online giving, and event coordination. Tools like Zoom and Google Meet have enabled virtual pastoral counseling and leadership training sessions. In addition, mobile apps such as YouVersion and Bible Gateway have made scripture readily available in multiple languages and formats, encouraging personal Bible study and spiritual growth (Olanrewaju, 2023). Artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics are also being used to analyze audience engagement and tailor content to specific demographic groups, helping churches make data-driven ministry decisions.

The Challenges of Integrating Technology into Church Communication

The integration of technology into church communication has become essential in the digital age, enabling ministries to reach broader audiences. However, churches often face multiple challenges in adopting and effectively utilizing technological tools. One major obstacle is the digital divide the unequal access to internet connectivity and devices among congregants, particularly in developing regions. Many rural or low-income members may lack access to smartphones, computers, or stable internet, hindering their participation in online worship or communication platforms (Anderson & Vogels, 2023).

Another challenge lies in technological literacy. While younger congregants often adapt quickly to digital platforms, older members and clergy may struggle to use modern communication tools such as live streaming, social media, or church management software. This generational gap can create communication barriers within the church (Campbell, 2021). Additionally, churches may lack trained personnel or sufficient funding to maintain technological systems effectively. Small and medium-sized congregations, in particular, face budget constraints that limit their ability to invest in high-quality equipment or technical support (Carter, 2022).

Furthermore, integrating technology raises ethical and spiritual concerns. Some church leaders fear that excessive reliance on technology may diminish the sense of community and sacredness associated with in-person fellowship. The risk of misinformation and privacy breaches on digital platforms also presents significant challenges for church communication (Owolabi, 2023).

Thus, the integration of technology into church communication is not without challenges. The digital divide remains a major issue, particularly in rural Africa where internet access and digital literacy are limited (Ukah, 2022). Furthermore, the rise of "prosperity gospel influencers" and unregulated online ministries has led to misinformation and the commercialization of faith. Privacy concerns, online distractions, and dependency on digital platforms also threaten the authenticity of spiritual engagement. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2021) cautions, while technology enhances reach it must be guided by sound theology and ethical responsibility to avoid distorting the gospel message.

Despite these challenges, technological innovations have opened new frontiers for Christian communication. The Church has evolved from being a passive user of technology to an active innovator in digital ministry. Through podcasts, live streaming, and social media campaigns, African churches are connecting with younger generations, promoting social justice, and responding to contemporary issues such as climate change and governance. The digital age, therefore, presents not only challenges but also immense opportunities for the Church to reimagine its mission in a connected world.

The Impact of Social Media and Online Platforms on Evangelism and Worship

The emergence of social media and digital communication platforms has significantly reshaped the landscape of Christian ministry in Africa and across the world. Evangelism and worship, two core expressions of Christian faith, have evolved beyond traditional in-person gatherings to incorporate diverse online engagements. Digital platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become vital tools for spreading the gospel, discipling believers, and fostering worship communities. According to Campbell (2021), digital media has become an integral space for religious expression, creating "networked religion," where faith is practiced through interactive and participatory technologies. The African church, long

known for its vibrant communal worship, now finds itself adapting to a hybrid model that blends physical and virtual fellowship.

Social media platforms have expanded the reach of evangelism, allowing churches and individual believers to share biblical messages with a global audience. Umeogu and Ifeoma (2020) note that social media has democratized evangelism, giving voice to both clergy and lay Christians who can now use digital tools to share their faith narratives. This transformation has also made evangelism more immediate and contextual, allowing ministers to respond quickly to social issues and crises with faith-based perspectives. In Nigeria and other parts of Africa, live-streamed sermons and online gospel concerts attract thousands of viewers weekly, illustrating how digital evangelism transcends geographical boundaries (Okon & Sunday, 2022).

Moreover, online worship has emerged as a crucial innovation, particularly in response to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited physical gatherings. Adeboye (2021) asserts that digital worship services provided spiritual continuity during global lockdowns, maintaining church fellowship and discipleship through virtual means. The use of video conferencing platforms like Zoom and YouTube Live allowed congregations to engage in worship, prayer, and Bible study while maintaining social connection. This shift, however, also redefined the concept of sacred space where worship moved from consecrated buildings to digital screens (Anderson, 2023).

Despite these benefits, digital worship also presents theological and practical challenges. Some scholars, such as Gunda (2021), argue that online worship risks diminishing the communal and sacramental aspects of Christian fellowship. Physical expressions of unity, such as Holy Communion and collective prayer, are often difficult to replicate virtually. In African contexts where spirituality is deeply embodied and communal, the virtual church experience can feel detached or incomplete (Ndlovu, 2022). Furthermore, the rise of social media evangelism has introduced issues of misinformation, commercialized gospel content, and competition among digital ministers, which sometimes compromise the authenticity of the Christian message (Omeje, 2022).
Nonetheless, the digital revolution has opened new opportunities for contextual and youth-oriented ministry. Social media is especially effective among young Africans, who are among the world's most active internet users. As Nwafor and Eze (2023) observe, young Christians are creatively using platforms like TikTok and Instagram to share testimonies, Bible teachings, and Christian art forms that appeal to digital audiences. This democratization of ministry has made evangelism more participatory, interactive, and culturally relevant.

Challenges and Ethical Concerns in Digital Evangelism within the African Context

Digital evangelism has emerged as a transformative strategy for Christian ministry in Africa, offering unprecedented opportunities to expand the reach of the gospel and engage with diverse audiences. However, the adoption of digital platforms in evangelism also brings a set of challenges and ethical concerns that require careful consideration. While social media, mobile applications, and online streaming have enabled churches to overcome geographical and infrastructural barriers, they have simultaneously introduced risks related to accessibility, authenticity, accountability, and moral responsibility (Campbell, 2021). Understanding these challenges is crucial for ensuring that digital evangelism remains both effective and ethically sound.

One of the most pressing challenges is the digital divide. Despite increasing internet penetration across Africa, a significant portion of the population, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, lacks access to reliable digital infrastructure. According to Nwafor and Eze (2023), limited access to smartphones, computers, and stable internet connections restricts participation in online worship and digital evangelism. This digital inequality can inadvertently marginalize already vulnerable populations, undermining the inclusive mission of the Church. Consequently, churches must balance online and offline strategies to ensure that evangelistic outreach remains accessible to all believers.

Another significant concern is the risk of misinformation and theological distortion. Digital platforms are susceptible to the rapid dissemination of content without adequate verification. Omeje

(2022) observes that some online ministries, in their pursuit of visibility and audience growth, share unverified teachings or prosperity-centered messages that deviate from sound biblical doctrine. The commercialization of the gospel is another ethical issue, as some ministries use digital platforms primarily for fundraising or personal branding rather than faithful evangelism. Such practices can compromise the integrity of the Church and mislead believers.

The loss of communal and sacramental dimensions of worship is also a challenge in digital evangelism. African Christianity is deeply rooted in communal expressions of faith, where participation in sacraments, corporate prayer, and shared rituals reinforces spiritual cohesion (Ndlovu, 2022). Online worship, while convenient, can lead to passive engagement, reducing the transformative and relational aspects of faith. The challenge, therefore, is to design digital ministry programs that maintain spiritual depth, active participation, and pastoral care.

Additionally, digital evangelism raises ethical concerns related to privacy, data protection, and online conduct. Churches often collect personal information from congregants for newsletters, online donations, or digital registration for virtual services. Mishandling of such data could lead to breaches of privacy, identity theft, or exploitation of personal information (Adeboye, 2021). Similarly, online interactions require careful moderation to prevent harassment, cyberbullying, or the spread of harmful content in faith communities.

The overemphasis on popularity metrics and algorithm-driven engagement poses another ethical dilemma. Platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram reward content that attracts likes, shares, and comments. Some ministries may prioritize content that maximizes audience engagement over the authenticity and theological soundness of the message. According to Anderson (2023), this trend risks transforming spiritual guidance into entertainment, where the focus shifts from discipleship to digital visibility.

Despite these challenges, opportunities exist for ethical and effective digital evangelism. Churches can develop digital literacy programs, train pastors and media teams, and establish clear codes of conduct for online ministry. Platforms can be used to complement rather than replace traditional ministry, ensuring that online engagement aligns with pastoral care and community support. Furthermore, theological reflection on digital ministry practices can provide ethical frameworks to safeguard both the gospel message and the spiritual welfare of congregants (Gunda, 2021).

Advantages of Digital Evangelism

The follow are the advantages and disadvantages:

i. Global reach and accessibility: Digital platforms enable churches to reach audiences beyond geographic and physical boundaries

ii. Cost-effectiveness: Less investment is needed compared to traditional evangelism campaigns involving print materials and logistics.

iii. Engagement of younger audiences: Online tools appeal to digitally native youth through videos, social media, and interactive content.

iv. Content permanence and multiplication: Digital resources like sermons or devotionals remain accessible, sharable, and can reach new audiences over time.

v. Data-driven tailoring: Analytics allow ministries to track engagement and adjust content to audience needs.

vi. Empowering members as digital witnesses: Church members can hmm participate in online evangelism, expanding the ministry beyond the church walls.

Disadvantages of Digital Evangelism

i. Digital divide and unequal access: Not all people have internet, devices, or digital literacy, limiting outreach.

ii. Reduced relational depth: Online interaction cannot fully replace personal mentoring and discipleship.

iii. Superficiality and reduced theological depth: Short online content may compromise deep doctrinal teaching.

iv. Distractions and information overload: Online audiences face competing content, reducing focus on the message.

v. Technical and maintenance burdens: Digital evangelism requires investment in equipment, software, and security.

vi. Privacy and ethical concerns: Online data collection and content distribution can pose ethical risks (Global Evangelist Alliance, 2024).

Prospects for Sustainable and Transformative Digital Ministry in the African Church

Digital ministry has become an integral component of contemporary African Christianity, presenting significant opportunities for expanding the Church's mission, deepening discipleship, and fostering community engagement. While challenges such as digital divides, misinformation, and ethical concerns persist, the prospects for sustainable and transformative digital ministry are considerable. By strategically integrating technology with theological insight, the African Church can leverage digital tools to enhance evangelism, worship, education, and social transformation (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2021).

One of the primary prospects for digital ministry is enhanced accessibility and outreach. Digital platforms such as social media, websites, and mobile applications enable churches to reach geographically dispersed populations, including rural and marginalized communities that may have limited access to traditional church services. According to Nwafor and Eze (2023), online evangelism allows believers to participate in worship, prayer, and Bible studies from any location, thereby removing barriers related to distance, mobility, or health constraints. This increased accessibility enhances inclusivity, enabling more individuals to engage with spiritual content and benefit from pastoral care.

Digital ministry also offers the prospect of youth engagement and intergenerational connectivity. African youth are among the most active users of digital technology, and churches that adopt creative online strategies can effectively communicate the gospel in ways that resonate with younger audiences. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube provide avenues for short-form gospel messages, testimonies, worship sessions, and Christian educational content (Olanrewaju, 2023). By embracing these technologies, the Church can cultivate a digitally literate and spiritually grounded generation, ensuring continuity of faith across demographic groups.

Another key opportunity lies in the integration of digital tools for discipleship and theological education. Churches can use mobile apps, podcasts, e-learning platforms, and webinars to provide structured Bible studies, theological courses, and pastoral training. This approach allows congregants to engage in lifelong learning and spiritual growth at their own pace (Adeboye, 2021). Furthermore, theological institutions can partner with local churches to offer digital certificates, online mentoring, and virtual seminars, strengthening the intellectual and spiritual formation of ministers and lay leaders alike.

Digital ministry also has the potential to foster community building and social transformation. Online platforms facilitate interactive engagement, enabling congregants to share testimonies, prayer requests, and community projects. Churches can use digital media to organize social initiatives, such as poverty alleviation, health campaigns, and environmental advocacy,

thereby linking faith with practical action (Anderson, 2023). By mobilizing virtual communities for social good, digital ministry can enhance the Church's relevance in addressing contemporary societal challenges.

Sustainability in digital ministry can be achieved through strategic planning, capacity building, and technological partnerships. Churches need to invest in training pastors and ministry leaders in digital literacy, content creation, and ethical online communication. Collaborations with technology providers, educational institutions, and NGOs can facilitate access to affordable digital infrastructure and innovative solutions (Gunda, 2021). Moreover, contextualizing digital content to reflect African cultural and theological realities ensures that online ministry remains authentic and relatable.

Ethical and theological grounding is essential to the sustainability of digital ministry. Churches must maintain doctrinal integrity, promote responsible digital citizenship, and avoid the commercialization of faith. Establishing guidelines for content creation, engagement, and online conduct can mitigate risks associated with misinformation, superficiality, or exploitation of believers (Omeje, 2022). By prioritizing spiritual authenticity alongside technological innovation, the Church can create a balanced and transformative digital ministry.

Conclusion

Digital evangelism and online ministry have become indispensable components of contemporary African Christianity, offering unprecedented opportunities for outreach, discipleship, and community engagement. Social media, mobile applications, and streaming platforms have expanded the reach of the Church, enabled youth participation, and facilitated creative worship and theological education. Despite challenges such as digital divides, misinformation, commercialization, and the potential loss of communal worship experiences, the prospects for sustainable and transformative digital ministry remain significant. By strategically integrating technology with theological integrity, ethical responsibility, and contextual relevance, the African Church can harness digital tools to advance its mission effectively while fostering spiritual growth, social impact, and intergenerational engagement.

Recommendations

i. Churches should prioritize regular digital training programs for pastors, media teams, and members to enhance their competence in using digital platforms effectively for evangelism and communication.

ii. African churches should create faith-based digital content that reflects local cultures, languages, and social realities to make the gospel message more relatable and impactful to diverse audiences.

iii. Churches should ensure consistent and high-quality communication, churches should invest in reliable internet services, audiovisual equipment, and software tools that enhance virtual worship and outreach programs.

iv. Church leaders should establish guidelines that encourage ethical behavior online, ensuring that digital evangelism upholds Christian values, respects privacy, and combats misinformation.

v. Churches across Africa should build networks and partnerships to share technical expertise, training resources, and digital tools, thereby reducing operational costs and promoting unity in digital ministry.

vi. Seminaries and Bible schools should incorporate digital evangelism and media communication into their curricula to prepare future ministers for the realities of technology-driven ministry.

vii. Churches should provide continuous training for pastors, ministry leaders, and congregants on effective and responsible use of digital platforms to enhance engagement and avoid misinformation.

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STEREOTYPES AND YORÙBÁ LOCAL DELICACIES PREPARATION: A CASE STUDY OF MÓÍNMÓÍN/ÒÒLÈ

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Abstract
Local delicacies remain vital to the identity and heritage of many African societies, including the Yorùbá people of Southwestern, Nigeria. In the preparation of local delicacies, there are certain processes that must be followed strictly in order to have a good result. Recently, Modern consumers have started changing some of these processes by incorporating new recipe, because of the 'trending shift'. This study examines the new trend in the preparation of móínmóín/òòlè and its socio-economic, health and cultural impacts on the society. For this research, quantitative technique was employed through in-depth interviews with twenty (20) respondents (3 móínmóín/òòlè sellers, 2 caterers, 2 eatery managers, 3 móínmóín/òòlè consumers, 3 housewives, 2 beans sellers, 2 leaves sellers, 1 feed-mill operator, 1 nutritionist, and 1 veterinary doctor). From the data gathered, the respondents provided different opinions and thoughts about preferred preservation methods for beans, availability of eweeran (Thaumatococcus daniellii), and preparation of móínmóín/òòlè, ranging from the selection of beans, the key ingredients to use in the cooking, and the processes that should be followed to achieve a good result. The respondents also gave their insights and recommendations based on personal and professional experience, especially the reason behind the adoption of local recipes, and improvisation of new recipes for new taste. The findings reveal lack of professionalism regarding food preservation; non availability of eweeran (Thaumatococcus daniellii) throughout the season, and affordability of aluminum pouches. Thus, it is highly recommended that there should be community and religious meetings where nutritionists can give health talks frequently about healthy living and safe preservation methods. Also, governments should help the farmers in providing harmless chemicals for the preservation of their produce for a prolonged shelf-life.

Keywords: *eweeran, cultural impact, culinary heritage, local delicacies, móínmóín/òòlè, trending shift*

1. Introduction

The Yorùbá are a prominent ethno-linguistic group in West Africa, mainly found in southwestern Nigeria, with notable communities in Benin and Togo. They boast a rich cultural heritage, artistic excellence, and deep historical roots. Renowned for their craftsmanship in weaving, blacksmithing, and woodcarving, the Yorùbá have also left a lasting mark on global culture. Through the transatlantic slave trade, aspects of their religion, music, food, and traditions spread to Americas and the Caribbean.

In the cultural tapestry of Yorùbá, food is not just about filling the stomach when hungry, it is all about identity, connection, and cultural heritage. Based on that, in Yorùbá land, food is about cooking with the right recipe and methods, enjoying the deliciousness of food, connecting with family, recognizing and promoting the identity, and transmitting of cultural heritage. Because of the processes involved in the preparation of Yorùbá local delicacies, there is a popular notion that Yorùbá are very rigid in their cooking and do not entertain improvisation, food research, and introduction of new recipes; but, contrary to this opinion, Yorùbá are very accommodating and can work with new recipes; it is only that, some rules and regulations must be adhered to, in relation to cooking local delicacies so that, such delicacies will come out perfect with the right look and taste. There are many local delicacies in Yorùbá and some of them are enjoyed at weddings, house warmings, naming ceremonies, chieftaincy and coronation ceremonies, and family gatherings.

Yorùbá local delicacies are cooked and enjoyed all over the world because of their special taste but, to achieve the good results of deliciousness and richness of colour, the right recipes must be used, also, right steps must be followed strictly and accordingly. If this is done otherwise, the reverse will be the case; it will be a total chaos in terms of the colour, texture and, especially taste. Though some delicacies can be improvised and perfect results will still be achieved, some must not be tampered with so as not to affect the

delicacy and ruin the expected result. This is because, it will not only have a different taste, but also a different texture and colour.

Regarding the preparation of local delicacies, móínmóín/òòle is a special Yorùbá local delicacy which is cooked and enjoyed by people from around the world at social and family events. It is also referred to as 'òòle'. The name móínmóín is formed morphologically, by adopting nominalization in adding (mó (v) to eyín (n), which becomes móyín (n) by deleting a vowel at the boundary. This later changes to móín by deleting consonant /y/. After that, comes full reduplication of móín to become móínmóín, the meaning which is "something that sticks to the teeth". Also, the name òòle, is a short form of the word òlele. The morphological process adopted is consonant deletion of the first /l/, which becomes òele. The òele also changes to òòle by adopting morphological process of retrogressive assimilation. The name òòle semantically, means "something that is fleecy". This name is also metaphoric in nature as it can be likened to a new bride in Yorùbá, often called ìyàwó òlele metaphorically, because of the way the brides dress up in beautiful attires, wrapping themselves with a very big shawl to cover their face during the marriage ceremony. This dressing culture instilled in new brides is purposely adopted to portray innocence in the presence of their spouse. The semantic of òlele contextually, means something fresh and novel because of the way it is all wrapped up in eweeran (*T. daniellii*) just like that of a new bride. Òlele is only unwrapped when it is about to be eaten, just like a new bride is unwrapped when she gets to her husband.

Mọínmọín/òòle is a Yorùbá steamed bean pudding. It is prepared by soaking beans (either white or brown, preferably), peeling the beans by removing the skins, adding peppers and onions and blending to a very smooth paste. After blending, some seasonings like crayfish, beef or fish stock, and salt will be added. The next process is adding some palm or vegetable oil (preferably). Sometimes, some fillings like fish, meat or boiled eggs can also be added to enhance the taste. The last process is wrapping the considerable amount of soaked, blended and seasoned beans in eweeran (*T. daniellii*), and steaming for 25 to 30 minutes. After it is well steamed, it can be eaten without any accompaniment or served with ekọ, gaàrí or bread.

1. Statement of the Problems

Yorùbá local delicacies, once symbols of identity and cultural heritage, are increasingly subjected to social misconceptions that undermine their cultural value. Foods like móínmóín/òòle, which is appreciated and enjoyed by people around the world, is going through a total change in its outlook, texture, and taste. Móínmóín/òòle is going through a total phase out of the traditional methods, which have been passed down from generation to generation. The traditional methods of – peeling before blending and using eweeran (*T. daniellii)* in wrapping it – are viewed as unhygienic and outdated. These perceptions, shaped by modernization and class distinctions, have contributed to the gradual neglect of indigenous cooking knowledge and techniques. Such popular beliefs not only distort cultural pride but also encourage the adoption of harmful materials like aluminum pouches and nylon wraps. They even smile at unhealthy food preservation preferred by farmers and food vendors. Consequently, health, environmental, and cultural sustainability are at risk. Understanding these misconceptions and their effects is essential to preserving Yorùbá culinary traditions and restoring respect for local food preparations.

2. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to:

Investigate cultural perceptions and practises that have sustained or altered the traditional recipes and methods of preparing móínmóín/òòle among the Yorùbá people.

The objectives are to:

a. Identify and document the traditional processes involved in the preparation of móínmóín/òòle in ancient and modern times;
b. Analyze how stereotypes (misconceptions) – the right method and right recipes affect the continuity of traditional practises;
c. Evaluate the new trends and health implications surrounding the preparation of móínmóín/òòle in the modern world; and
d. Investigate the preservation methods adopted by farmers and local vendors in preservation of farm produce, especially beans and eweeran (*T. daniellii*).
e. Examine how the preparation and the hereafter taste of móínmóín/òòle resonate with the cultural values of the people.

3 Discussion of Research Objectives

To give direction to the study, each objective is discussed below in relation to the major issues surrounding Stereotypes and Yorùbá Local Delicacy Preparation: A Case Study of Móínmóín/Òòle.

3.1 Preparation of the Delicacy

In the preparation of móínmóín/òòle, the first step is soaking the beans for some minutes. After it is well soaked, the beans will be peeled to perfection. The next step is removing the skin, which is done by adding some water to clean the peeled beans thoroughly and ensure the beans skin is removed totally. Ingredients like capsicum, scotch bonnet and onions, will be added and the beans will be blended to a smooth paste. Originally, this aspect was usually done manually with the use of a grinding stone but, now that technology has evolved, blending machine is used to blend it to paste and in the absence of blending machine, it can be blended at the roadside mill. After blending to a smooth paste, salt and palm oil or vegetable oil will be added and mixed thoroughly. Right after, it will be wrapped with eweeran (*T. daniellii*). The wrapping requires dexterity because if it is not properly wrapped, as soon as the wrapped móínmóín/òòle paste is arranged in a pot, the content will start dripping, and this will thwart the result at the end after steaming it for 25 to 30 minutes. Another important fact about the whole menu is the new addition to the blended beans before wrapping with eweeran (*T. daniellii*). This is about the advent of food research and improvisation for new taste and recipes. This invention is the addition of fillings like fish, cutlets or diced meat and boiled eggs, into the blended beans paste before wrapping.

3.2 Changes and Trending Shift

However, there are some trending shifts in the misconceptions which have been practised over the years. These are various methods and recipes different from the norms in the preparation of móínmóín/òòle. Modern consumers now prefer blending the soaked beans with the skin intact. This new innovation, though, comes with some plus and minus. After some inquiries into the reasons behind the new trend, it was stated that beans skin provides additional nutritional value that the body requires, and at the same time, it is cost and time efficient. Regardless of the positive side of this trend, some changes have occurred in the nostalgic moment that people use to have as regards móínmóín/òòle. This is because, the new trend has not only changed its colour, texture and delicacy quality, but also devalued its cultural heritage by rejecting the traditionally accepted eweeran (*T. daniellii),* while adopting a new method of preparation and wrapping.

3.3 Health Implications

Based on the affordability and availability of food items, modern consumers fail to consider the healthful methods and recipes when it comes to food preparation and consumption. This is exactly the reason behind their preferred method of móínmóín/òòle preparation, and especially the adoption of cellophane, nylons, aluminum pouches and even empty cans to hold the beans paste. Modern consumers now prefer these options because, they claim the method is time efficient and the materials are readily available and affordable. As regards aluminum pouches, aluminum bowls and empty cans, some users claim they prefer them because of their longevity as against eweeran (*T. daniellii*), which is not reusable and readily available to those living in the urban area. Then again, this process does not only pose a lot of risks to human health, as consumption of food that are steamed or cooked in these containers are dangerous to human health, but also degenerate the cultural heritage of Yorùbá.

3.4 The Preservation Methods

Originally, the preservation of farm produce such as beans and eweeran (*T. daniellii*) relied solely on indigenous knowledge systems passed down through generations. These methods emphasize natural materials, sustainability, and safety rather than synthetic or chemical-based solutions.

In recent years, some farmers and local food vendors have adopted the use of chemical preservatives to protect beans from insect infestation and spoilage. These preservatives are often applied during storage or transportation to deter pests. This method not only endangers human health but also contaminates the environment, thereby contradicting the traditional Yorùbá food philosophy that values purity.

3.5 How the Menu Resonates the Cultural Values of the People

The preparation and hereafter taste of móínmóín/òòle go beyond mere culinary experience; they express the Yorùbá people's sense of order, patience, and communal identity. Preparing móínmóín/òòle demands

deliberate care – from peeling and grinding beans to seasoning and wrapping it in eweeran (*T. daniellii*) before steaming. This slow, attentive process mirrors the Yorùbá value of ìfarabale (calmness) and sùúrù (patience), emphasizing that good outcomes require time and diligence. The use of eweeran (*T. daniellii*), to wrap the pudding symbolizes the practical preservation of culture – since the leaves add both fragrance and natural essence while avoiding chemical harm. This practise aligns with the Yorùbá belief in customs and traditions which promote harmony between humans and nature.

3. Methodology

For this research, quantitative technique was employed through in-depth interviews with twenty (20) respondents. Participants were purposely selected to represent the diversity within the móínmóín/òòle preparation and consumption chain. As shown in **Table 1**, the respondents comprised 3 móínmóín/òòle sellers, 2 caterers, 2 eatery managers, 3 móínmóín/òòle consumers, 3 housewives, 2 beans sellers, 2 leaves sellers, 1 feed-mill operator, 1 nutritionist, and 1 veterinary doctor, all in Abeòkúta, Ògùn State.

This selection ensured that the perspectives of producers, consumers, and experts were adequately represented, thus enriching the validity of the study's findings.

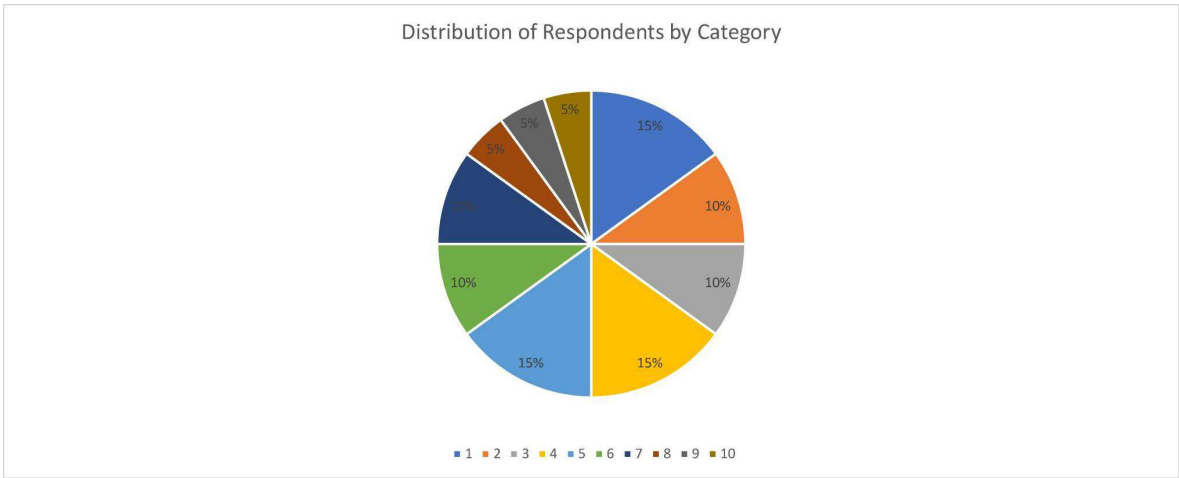
Table 1

Distribution of Respondents by Category

Respondent Category	Frequency	Percentage
Móínmóín/òòle sellers	3	15
Caterers	2	10
Eatery managers	2	10
Móínmóín/òòle consumers	3	15
Housewives	3	15
Beans sellers	2	10
Leaves sellers	2	10
Feed-mill operator	1	5
Nutritionist	1	5
Veterinary doctor	1	5
Total	**20**	**100**

Figure 1

Respondents' Percentage Composition



Interpretation

The quantitative distribution (*see Figure 1*) reveals that the majority of respondents (55%) were directly involved in the preparation and processing chain, including sellers, caterers, eatery managers and raw material vendors. End-users – consumers and housewives – accounted for 30%, while technical experts such as a feed-mill operator, nutritionist and veterinary doctor represented 15% of the total. This balanced respondent structure provides a holistic view that integrates practical, domestic, and scientific perspectives on Móínmóín/òòle preparation and food preservation practises.

4. Literature Review

Many journals have been published by notable scholars about local delicacies preparation, food packaging and marketing, transmission of cultural heritage and the effects of cooking with aluminum foil, pouches and cellophane bowls and bags. From these researches, researchers have come with observations and findings about the core areas mentioned above. On the preparation of móínmóín/òòle, Agbara et al. (2018, as cited in Emelike et al., 2020) noted that, it is a gel which is made by steaming cowpea paste containing vegetables, oil, spices and other condiments. There are some dishes which can be served as its accompaniment; typical examples are rice and pap. (Nwosu, 2011, as cited in Emelike et al., 2020).

Moreover, food packaging and marketing was explicitly explored to clarify how it relates to the usage of eweeran (*T. daniellii*) in wrapping móínmóín/òòle and the reasons why sellers and makers of móínmóín/òòle prefer the specie. According to Gladys & Joshua (2019), eweeran (*T. daniellii*) leaves were most preferred for wrapping. Women dominated the harvesting, products utilization, haulage and marketing of this species. In addition, women were familiar with the habitat and ecology of the species because it has a market value.

In addition, the promotion and elevation of cultural values were given credence as regards food heritage. Basically, some of the local foods are passed down by the old generations, giving such foods a platform to be showcased, preserved and enjoyed by the new generations. Chukwura et al. (2025) suggest that promoting and preserving local food heritage can be crucial in fostering sustainable cultural value and contributing to sustainable regional development.

Also, aside the confirmation that chemicals used in plastics (including monomers, polymers and additives) are hazardous to health, the effects of cooking with aluminum foil was also analysed by Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry (2008). In spite of this, in another journal, discussions were made about health risks of using chemicals as preservatives and the safe methods to adopt in food preservations. (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024).

In furtherance to this discourse, studies by the World Health Organization (2023), have highlighted the dangers of using non-food-grade plastics and aluminum pouches, and chemical preservatives in food preparation, which can be linked with diseases like cancer, hormonal disruption, and digestive complications. Moreover, while ascertaining the impact of preparing food in aluminum cookware on human health, it was stated that there is a neurodegenerative effect of aluminum, which hinders the functions of the nervous system. Another chronic disease resulting from the ingesting excess of aluminum by human is aluminosis.

It was also noted according to these researchers that as a result of long employment of cookware, the internal coating deteriorates, which causes increasing leaching of metals into cooked products and poses a risk to human health. (Bartosz et al., 2024). It was also discovered that meals that are prepared in aluminum foil may carry a health risk in addition to other aluminum sources. (Fatia Mohammed et al., 2012).

5. Data Analysis

After the interview, the roadside móínmóín/òòle sellers confirmed that they usually practised the old method of peeling the beans before blending it, and wrapping it in eweeran (*T. daniellii*). This is because their customers have never asked for different options. Thus, since they started the business, eweeran (*T. daniellii*) has always being the only wrapping leaves they prefer.

In addition, the professional caterers said they have never used aluminum pouches, nylon or cellophane bowls for móínmóín/òòle because, aside the cost of the items, cleaning them after use may be time constraint. Also, their customers have never asked otherwise, and preserving the delicacy may be cumbersome as it will require a large food warmer and may even lose its deliciousness, if kept for very long; unlike móínmóín/òòle wrapped with eweeran (*T. daniellii*), which only requires heating.

Moreover, one of the eatery managers confirmed the use of eweeran (*T. daniellii*) to wrap móínmóín/òòle but the other stated that they use various containers ranging from eweeran (*T. daniellii*), aluminum pouches and cellophane bowls, which will serve as many options and easy pickups for their customers when they place an order.

In furtherance to the analysis, two of the móínmóín/òòle consumers interviewed, stated that, they preferred móínmóín/òòle made from peeled beans and wrapped with eweeran (*T. daniellii*) because, the móínmóín/òòle from this type is usually soft and smooth in texture, also, the colour is very rich and if left over, it does not change its taste and colour unlike the one made without peeling which turns stale and coarse with very dull colour. The additional nutrient is in the use of eweeran (*T. daniellii*) to wrap it. It adds to its taste and nutrients, thus, the consumers prefer the old recipe. However, the third consumer preferred the one in aluminum pouches or cellophane bowls because these types are not as messy as the one wrapped with eweeran (*T. daniellii*).

Moreover, out of the 3 housewives interviewed, one of them preferred soaking and peeling the beans before blending, like the old recipe, and wrapping with eweeran (*T. daniellii*), while the second preferred making móínmóín/òòle without peeling the beans but wrapping with eweeran (*T. daniellii*). This is considered because unpeeled beans contain a lot of nutrients which are, traditionally and usually passed to animals as food. The third housewife said she would rather make móínmóín/òòle without peeling the beans still, for the nutritional benefits, and hold the paste with nylon, cellophane bowl or aluminum pouches, for availability, time and cost efficiency, depending on whichever comes handy at the time of prepping the meal. Similarly, the beans sellers contacted about the preferred preservation methods used in prolonging the shelf life of their products confirmed that they use chemicals. According to them, adding chemicals prolongs the shelf life as weevil will not come in contact with the beans for a long time. This, according to them, will enrich the colour of the products and entice customers to patronize them quickly. Therefore, two eweeran (*T. daniellii*) sellers were interviewed to learn about their experience in the planting, harvesting and marketing of eweeran (*T. daniellii*). They confirmed that the planting aspect can be handled by them but for division of labour, they only usually help in the harvest and bring the products to the market to sell. Based on the excuse of some respondents about non-availability of eweeran (*T. daniellii*) throughout the season, which facilitates their choosing from items like aluminum pouches, empty cans, cellophane bowls and sometimes nylon; the leaves sellers said they always try to preserve the leaves in the best way they can, by wrapping them in a very big wrapper so as to retain the freshness, and make it available for customers, but, they still need a lasting solution as this method is always short-lived.

The nutritionist was also professionally affirmative that beans add more nutrients to the body if consumed in large proportion and that is the reason it is highly recommended for those with lack or inadequacy of protein in their diet. So, if beans is not peeled before consumption, the level of protein will be relatively higher than expected. Similarly, the veterinary doctor was also of the opinion that beans is very high in protein and a good supplement for animals, but for the high price, the shaft or chaff of beans is more preferrable. Apparently, if it could be beneficial to animals, it could be to humans, concluded the veterinary doctor.

Furthermore, the feed mill operator corroborated the statement of the veterinary doctor about the value of feeding animals with bean skin, chaff and shaft. Some of the herders and sellers of animals like goats, sheep and rams usually feed their animals with this combination to make a perfect fodder. It is for this reason that feed mill operators add lots of bean skin, chaff and shaft to their products to satisfy their customers and maximize profits.

6. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Anthropological framework of food culture as defined by Counihan & Van (2012, as cited in Chukwura et al., 2025). They both emphasize food's role as both a cultural artifact and social mediator. According to them, food is not only a means of sustenance but also a medium through which people and communities express identity, negotiate relationships, and transmit traditions. This anthropological perspective positions food within broader cultural and social structures, making a lens through, which values, practises, and societal changes can be understood. In the understanding of the theoretical framework, the anthropological framework focuses on the relationship that exists between food, cultural heritage, and identity. It brings about the preservation of cultural heritage towards the acceptance of local delicacies especially móínmóín/òòle. It also acts as a bridge between cultural cohesion and attention given to local delicacies preparation and promotion. It is the link between cultural cohesion which facilitates acceptance of local delicacies preparation and advancement, particularly in the eating of móínmóín/òòle. As it is one of the local delicacies of Yorùbá, other tribes are ready to accept, try and even incorporate it in their menu. At social events, móínmóín/òòle is usually served as an accompaniment to various rice recipes and party guests enjoy it with relish. Looking at this critically, móínmóín/òòle serves as a means of connecting many tribes

through the acceptance of its colour, texture and deliciousness. Through this act, the cultural heritage is practised, elevated and preserved by the indigenous and non-indigenous individuals.

7. Findings

After the completion of this research, some findings which are crucial to this study were realized. Thus, the findings reveal that some móínmóín/òòle sellers and housewives do not bother about the source of beans and the preservation method adopted by the vendors when they buy in the market. All they care about is the species of beans that are clean and rid of weevil and pebbles so that they will only spend little time in getting the beans ready for food prepping, but, unknown to them, such beans will have been preserved by chemicals; first, by the farmers, when the beans undergo sun drying after the harvest, and second, by the vendors in the market, who will keep the produce in the shop for a long period before the last sale. Apparently, the cleaner the beans, the higher the amount of chemicals used in the preservation process.

Some housewives also prefer beans flour, to save time and cost but unknown to them, most of these products are not safe for consumption. The manufacturers just blend some beans and pack them for sale without checking if it was preserved naturally or with chemicals, and buyers just go to the market and purchase the product without the knowledge of its preservation.

Also, some housewives do not research about basic diets the body needs so they can plan the right menu in the right proportion for the family. They do not understand that some cooking utensils and equipment are not right for cooking so they only focus on whatever they can get as far as they save time and cost. In addition, some claim they only opt for nylon, cellophane bowls, aluminum pouches, and the likes because, aside being relatively available and affordable, they do not go out of season, unlike eweeran (*T. daniellii*), which is a seasonal plant. Apparently, the items listed can be gotten at the nearest store, throughout the season and, at a cheap price, while eweeran (*T. daniellii*), though cheaper, are not always available throughout the season. By the time they are out of season, the proposed buyers would have to consent to other means of packing móínmóín/òòle paste before steaming.

Accordingly, a finding shows that eweeran (*T. daniellii*) sellers always do their best in ensuring their products are available to customers by adopting the natural method of preservation. So, the excuse that their products are not always available may not be true, it is only that the cost of getting the products may vary, depending on the season, but consumers can always get it in the local market and even now that the advent of technology has improved the living standard of everyone, people living in urban centers can also enjoy its naturalness as traders come to the local areas to buy them for onward transit to the city.

Moreover, it was realized that while some roadside móínmóín/òòle sellers adopt the age-long tradition of the preparation; soak the beans, peel the beans, add peppers and onions, blend and add palm oil or vegetable oil before wrapping with eweeran (*T. daniellii*), some now add some new ingredients here and there to change the taste of the local delicacy. They try to improvise by adding fish, diced meat or boiled eggs for taste enhancement. This is just for customer retainership because many of their customers are of different social backgrounds and tastes.

Besides, another finding states that, while móínmóín/òòle made with bean skin and wrapped in eweeran (*T. daniellii*) has a lot of nutritional values and is time efficient, as the time needed to peel the beans will be removed, the one made without bean skin and still wrapped in eweeran (*T. daniellii*), maintains the right texture, culinary quality and colour and tastes more delicious. More so, finding shows the importance of beans skin consumption in relation to rearing of animals. It was realized that animals prefer beans skin, shaft and chaff for its deliciousness and not only that, there is a high nutrient in these products so, animal breeders feed their animals with them.

Additional one x-rays that, though some people prefer the use of nylon, cellophane bowls, aluminum pouches to hold móínmóín/òòle before steaming, for time and cost saving, the steaming of móínmóín/òòle in these items, pose a lot of health risks to consumers, and of course, the use of harmful chemicals as a preservation method preferred by some farmers and vendors, is equally injurious to health.

Last but not least, based on its popularity amongst rural women who are into farming, sales, marketing and haulage, eweeran (*T. daniellii*) offers an opportunity to rural women, as regards refining their economic status. Even some urban women are easily leveraging into the business. This is as a result of its high demand in the city as the professional urban caterers patronize the sellers because of its preference, when there is the need to cater to their clients at social events.

8. Recommendations

In recommendations for this study, it will be beneficial if community and religious meetings can be organized from time to time, to advise household leaders on safe and healthy living. The leaders should lead their family members into knowing the importance of learning and adopting the cleanest and safest source of food, methods of cooking, and cooking skills. It will be an immense benefit if nutritionists can give health talks frequently about the basic nutrients the body needs for healthy living and this should not be prioritized. Also, safest methods of preservation should be emphasized for farmers and food vendors. To ensure this goes to the right channel, a media programme should be organized regularly, to showcase this on both radio and television channels. As the world is being showcased on social media, many online media channels can also be patronized to regularly inform and educate consumers about healthy living. It will also be great if government can help the farmers in providing harmless chemicals for the preservation of their produce so they will have a prolonged shelf-life. World Health Organization and other health agencies should habitually organize talks on safety tips about use of harmful chemicals and the risk it can pose to health if consumed or abused.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, improvisation of new recipes like fish, diced meat or boiled egg, into the móínmóín/òòle paste before wrapping, will serve as an adoption of new method and merging into the old method to make a balance. Also, as much as it is recommended to consider the nutritional benefits of bean skins, provided all stakeholders practise safe and harmless preservation methods, it is pertinent to readopt the age long tradition of the basic recipes, especially the use of eweeran (*T. daniellii*), as this will not only give more nutritional benefits but also serve as a sustainable development in promoting the culture and tradition, and it will be an opportunity for rural women to improve their economic status.

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EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FOREIGN ELECTION OBSERVER MISSIONS TO CREDIBILITY OF 2023 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the contributions of foreign election observer missions to the credibility of 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Election observation has gained traction as an important mechanism that helps ensure credibility of the electoral process. The study, therefore, sought to determine ways in which previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, examine how foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation, as well as how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission in the election. Anchored on the Theory of Institutionalism, the study adopted descriptive design as well as documentary method to collate secondary data. Content analysis method was adopted for data analysis. Findings by the study revealed that regardless of their presence, global reach, and the fact that the foreign election observer missions produce independent assessment of the electoral process with far-reaching implications, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by significant allegations of result falsification, intimidation of voters and noticeable bias within the Independent National Electoral Commission. Consequently, the study, among other things, recommended the need for urgent legislation recognising assessment by foreign observer missions as one of the legal bedrocks for election-related litigations and prosecution of offenders.

Keywords: Elections, Nigeria, Foreign Election Observer Missions, Election Credibility, Independent National Electoral Commission

1.0 Introduction

Regardless that elections are fundamental in democracies, an important benchmark for democracy has often been described as an election that is credible. This means elections where, among other things, rules, regulations and laws governing the electoral process are followed such that there is political competition, non-suppression of opposition, lack of manipulation of electoral laws and institutions, lack of control of media and information as well as evidence of transparency and accountability, devoid of external interference (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). Equally, regardless of

the fact that elections are an internal matter for states, they generate interests that go beyond national boundaries such that the international community is now interested in elections and sends election observers to observe elections.

Foreign election observation has been institutionalized through various instruments such as the United Nations Declaration of Principle for International Election Observation and Code of Conduct for International Election Observers of 2005, the African Union Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring Mission of 2002, Economic Community of West African States Guideline for Election Observation and Monitoring, as well as the Guidelines for Election Observation and Monitoring by the Independent National Electoral Commission of 2014 (updated in 2018) (Akolade & Oluwatobiloba, 2024). As such, the June 12 Presidential election of 1993 marked the beginning of election observation in Nigeria when 3000 local and international observer groups appeared on the electoral scene to observe the said election. Though the idea was considered to be completely unusual then, it has since thrived to become part and parcel of the country's electoral process (Adebisi & Loremikan, 2013). Equally, during the 27 February 1999 presidential election, close to 12,000 accredited election observers assessed the election out of which about 2,000 foreign observers were drawn from various organisations. In the same vein, the 2003 General Elections were also observed by more foreign observers than the previous ones. By many accounts, the 2007 General Elections were witnessed by many international observers with poor electoral outcomes (Ayodeji, 2015).

Nigeria's 2023 general election cycle was not different as an appreciable number of foreign election observers participated actively in it (Nwankwo & Dode, 2024). The general elections took place on 25th February and 11th March, 2023. In all, 25 foreign observer groups were accredited for the 2023 general elections. The observer groups included the 40-member delegation of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) led by Joyce Banda and Ambassador Mark Green, 90 African Union (AU) observers with five-member expert team led by Uhuru Muigai Kenyatta, 16-member Commonwealth Election Observation Mission led by Thabo Mbeki and the 126 European Union (EU) observers led by Barry Andrews. Others included a core team of 11 analysts and 40 long-term observers deployed to all the six geopolitical zones of the country. For the first round of election on February 25, the European Union Election Observer Mission was boosted with 54 locally recruited short-term observers bringing the total to 110 observers from 25 European Union Member States, as well as from partner countries Canada, Norway and Switzerland and including a seven-member delegation of the European Parliament, led by Evin Incir, Member of the European Parliament from Sweden. For the 18 March election day, the European Union Election Observer Mission was reinforced with 16 locally recruited short-term observers (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; Independent National Electoral Commission, 2024; African Union Election Observer Mission Report, 2023; International Republican Institute/National Democratic Institute International Election Observer Monitoring Report, 2023; Commonwealth Observer Group Report, 2023). It is in line with this participation in Nigeria's electoral process that this study sought to examine the contributions of the foreign election observer missions to the 2023 general elections.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The increased interest shown by foreign missions in observing elections in Nigeria is necessitated by the fact that since the return of democracy in 1999, elections in the country have been fraught with integrity deficit (Gromping, 2017). Regardless of the fact that election observation is crucial to the electoral process as it enhances public confidence and contributes to the integrity of the elections and more importantly has the potential of exposing irregularities and fraud, it appears that the role of international election observers is constrained and their impact is hardly felt in the real conduct of elections in Nigeria (Omilusi, 2013; Akolade & Oluwatobiloba, 2024). For instance, the country's political culture that is notorious for electoral corruption and violence makes election observation difficult and risky. One then wonders whether their continual presence

during elections as well as their reports on the conduct of the elections could really prevent electoral corruption and ensure transparency (Ayodeji, 2015).

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria came with a lot of hope and high level of enthusiasm which resulted in massive number of people registering to vote in the elections. The expectations of the citizens, particularly the youths, on the outcome of the election were unprecedented in the history of the country. However, whether the participation of foreign observers helped to achieve electoral credibility in the poll has not received the necessary scholarly interrogation. The key concerns of the study are therefore to determine ways in which previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, to examine how foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria, and to examine how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Thus, this formed the basis of this study.

1.2 Research Questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. In what ways has previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria?
2. How has foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria?
3. How has the global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study has theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically speaking, by examining the contributions of foreign election observer missions to credibility of elections in Nigeria, the study contributes to the body of existing literature on the subject matter of the roles of the observer missions in achieving credibility in elections. Literature on it remains inadequate and begs to be enriched. More angles to the subject matter therefore remain welcome in literature, in particular this study which sought to determine ways in which independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria, examined how the presence of foreign election observers deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria, as well as how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The discourse focusing on these areas is a valuable addition to scholarship and profoundly helpful to the needs of academics, historians, civil society groups, political analysts as well as researchers who search for data in their work on election matters. Practically, officials of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Intergovernmental organisations, international non-governmental organisations, philanthropists, academics, historians, civil society groups, political analysts as well as other relevant stakeholders on election matters will find this study, particularly its recommendations quite useful in proffering solutions to Nigeria's perennially troubled elections. With practical contributions of the study, the search for credible elections in Nigeria has received a boost.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Perspectives on Foreign Election Observation

In the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, international election observation is acknowledged as an accepted means of providing accurate and impartial assessments about the nature of electoral processes (Griffith, 2013). It is generally accepted as a means of contributing to voter confidence and assessing the relative legitimacy of an electoral process and its outcome. It is also an important mechanism that helps ensure neutrality, integrity, accountability and transparency of the electoral process as well as part of the systems that protect the viability and honesty of election administration and the participation by political parties, candidates and interest groups in a way that encourages compliance with the legal framework. This means that its purpose is to have elections whose outcomes are a reflection of the will of the people. It is for this reason that Nwankwo and Dode (2024) contended that the presence of foreign election observers is to help ensure free, fair and credible elections.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (2014) identified the role performed by (foreign) election observers to include three main activities, namely: to observe processes and activities organised during elections to collate facts and observations; to interpret the facts gathered against the laws governing elections as well as basic democratic standards, in order to see whether or not the elections meet the threshold of credibility as defined by law and accepted by the international community; and to outline the findings so collated and the interpretation based on them in a document or report. Thus, the importance of foreign election observation is almost universally accepted (Hyde & Kelly, 2011). Involving foreign observer missions in election processes has been acknowledged as one of the rational steps in addressing election problems that plague emerging democracies. It has become so popular that refusing to invite foreign observers is seen as a signal that a regime has something to hide.

Generally speaking, the first election to witness international monitoring was in 1857 when French, British, Prussian, Russian, Austrian and Turkish representatives oversaw a plebiscite in Moldavia and Wallachia (Ayodeji, 2015). The post-World War II paved the way for more and aside the monitoring of elections by the United Nations (UN) in Korea and Germany, the decolonisation process accelerated it in the 1950-60s. The second-generation election monitoring has evolved and become more widespread with the end of the Cold War. In the post-Cold War period, the number of regions, Africa in particular and post-Communist Eastern Europe which engaged in multiparty elections has made foreign election observation to become much more entrenched (Hyde & Kelly, 2011).

2.1.2 Importance and Characteristics of Credible Elections

Basically, credible election presupposes trustworthiness, believability and acceptability of an election, meaning that the laid down rules and democratic processes and procedures that enhance mass participation are judiciously followed in the exercise. It further means that the elections are devoid of all sorts of electoral malpractices, intimidations, violence etc (Simon & Okonkwo, 2020). What this also means is that in an environment where credible election is the goal, there must be procedures in place guaranteeing candidates the right to compete, be entitled to vote, and votes are counted accurately with the winning candidates selected based on pre-existing rules and conditions to meet for candidates to gain electoral victory (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). In essence, an election can be said to be credible if its conduct is guided by a transparent electoral process conducted within a competitive participatory political environment where balloting is done in secret with visible conditionalities such as unbiased electoral umpire, public counting of votes and instant announcement of the true results at the polling units after voting is concluded met (Nwaubani, 2012; Okeke, 2018).

Credible elections are characterized by inclusiveness, transparency, accountability and competitiveness since they are conducted in accordance with the existing electoral rules with every

contestant given equal opportunity to win. For election to be credible, it must be conducted in a democratically acceptable manner and process, with equal opportunity given to electorate to make real and meaningful choice devoid of coercion or intimidation (Asadu, 2017; Gabriel, 2022). In essence, free and fair election is both ideal and beneficial.

2.1.3 Nigeria and Challenges to Credible Election

Since gaining political independence in 1960, Nigeria's political processes have been characterised by crisis-ridden elections (Ishiekwene & Agah, 2024). The situation is so pathetic that institutionalizing credible elections in the country has remained a mirage while challenges to elections are multifaceted and deeply intertwined. Lack of democratic culture remains a major hinderance to achieving clean elections. Electoral malpractices and lack of electoral reforms remain visible such that in the 1983, 2003 and 2007 national elections, the ruling party in each case obviously exploited some lapses in the constitution and relevant electoral laws to influence electoral outcomes.

Electoral corruption in Nigeria comes in varied forms such as electoral malpractice, electoral misconduct, electoral malfeasance, electoral fraud, and electoral manipulation (Birch, 2011). It is mostly viewed as a direct sabotage of the electoral process by individuals or groups who are desirous of protecting personal or group interests against what electoral success guarantees. Among other things, the techniques of electoral corruption in Nigeria include underage voting, mass voting by unregistered citizens (neither qualified to register nor even registered to vote), snatching of ballot boxes to be stuffed with thumb-printed votes for party candidates, intimidation at the polls using thugs or even state security personnel, scaring away of genuine registered voters from exercising their franchise at polling booths, deliberate, one-sided and improper counting of votes and media manipulation of vote count/result, announcement or publication of the wrong results and the wrong candidates as winners before the proper collation of results by the Electoral Commission (Casmir, Omeh & Ike, 2023).

2.1.4 Empirical Review

Attempts had been made in extant literature to call attention to the nexus between foreign election observation and general elections in Nigeria. For instance, Omolaja and Adeyemi (2024) in a study titled "Election Observation in the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria" investigated domestic and foreign observers and the credibility of elections in Nigeria. Data were generated from both primary and secondary sources, and content analysis was used to examine it. The study discovered that both international and domestic observers hardly witness the entire electoral cycle in a non-partisan manner. While pre-election activities are barely observed, they are significantly more focused on actions on Election Day. Additionally, it found out that some aspects of results collation are also kept outside their purview. As a result, making judgments about the entire political process based on a selective observation could be deceptive. The study recommended that election observers should monitor all phases of the electoral process, including pre-election, Election Day, and post-election activities, in order to maintain their credibility. They should also have unrestricted access to the collation centers so they may observe every step leading up to the announcement of the final results for all contested positions.

In another study, Nwankwo & Dode (2024) in their study titled "International Election Observers' Perception of Nigeria's 2023 General Election: Lessons for 2027" assessed how international observers perceived the 2023 general elections, with a view to highlighting key areas that must be kept in focus ahead of the next election cycle in 2027. Drawing from the norm of international election monitoring, the paper argued that the role of international election observers in Nigeria – along with their post-election reports – would remain ceremonial for as long as pseudo-democrats remain in power. Baseline data constituted the primary sources of information for the paper, and analysis was done qualitatively. The paper recommended, among other things, that the international community should (collectively) investigate elections scored low by international

observers and thereafter, perpetrators can be sanctioned accordingly. That way, the work of international election observers would cease to be considered actions in futility.

Ishiekwene and Agah (2024) in their study titled "Assessing the Performance of Elections Observer's Missions in the Conduct of the 2023 Presidential Election in Nigeria" assessed the performance of election observer's missions in the conduct of the 2023 presidential elections in Nigeria. The study further revealed that election observers during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria highlighted significant challenges related to logistics, security, political cooperation, impartiality, transparency, and technology. These findings underscored the importance of addressing these challenges to enhance the effectiveness, credibility, and impact of future election observer's missions in Nigeria. The following recommendations were therefore outlined for the study: The government through the Independent National Electoral Commission should enhance logistical support, strengthen security measures, promote political cooperation, improve transparency and accountability and enhance observer's impartiality.

Ihemeje (2019) in a study titled "Election, International Election Monitoring Groups and Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Appraisal" examined the role of international election observers in major elections conducted in Nigeria's fourth republic. Six international election observation bodies were sampled: National Democratic Institute (NDI), The Commonwealth Secretariat (CS), European Commission (EC), International Republican Institute (IRI), Human Right Watch (HRW) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The study unravels the essential roles of international election observers in 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections in Nigeria. The paper therefore averred that international election observers have performed more than expectation in correcting previous electoral malfeasances through their dynamic reports and recommendations. Their monumental roles discerned the 2011 general election from the preceding 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections which were marred by miscellaneous electoral flaws in Nigeria. Thus, the paper recommended ultimate cooperation of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), civil society, security agency and the electorate with International Electoral Observers for the realization of sustainable democracy in Nigeria.

2.1.5 Gap in Literature

Regardless of the fact that the activities of foreign election observer missions in general elections in Nigeria and in 2023 have attracted considerable scholarly attention, yet the review of the existing literature revealed some gaps. The first identified gap is the excessive focus on the report of the foreign observer missions rather than the impact of their activity. It appears the available literature was in mere search for evidence with which to support the conclusion that elections in the country were incredible or otherwise. The scholars appeared so much engrossed with the content of the observers' report rather than the relevance of the observers in elections. A missing gap is the failure by the available literature to examine the relevance of the foreign observer missions in search for credible elections in Nigeria. In essence, there is noticeable lack of literature which interrogated ways in which previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results particularly 2023 general elections in Nigeria, examined how the presence of foreign election observers deterred voters' intimidation during the election, and examined how global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria. In other words, the relevance of foreign election observer missions in elections in Nigeria, particularly in the 2023 general election has not been interrogated by scholars. How their previous roles helped the cause of the 2023 general elections or otherwise remained un-investigated. It is this gap that this study sought to fill.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Theory of Institutionalism popularized by Finnemore (1996) and which after analyzing interactions between diverse norms in several areas admitted that states' identities and interests change, subject to prevailing norms at a particular point in time. In relation

to international election observation, the theory contends that what started in the West, especially in Britain and Americas has become an export commodity of the new system of interests (Santa-Cruz, 2005). Thus, it is the contention of the theory that election observation is important in upholding participatory rights and in maintaining strong Western ties (Gillis, 2013).

The Theory of Institutionalism adopted in this study as framework of analysis is therefore apt since credible elections have become accepted as a part of democratic norms, pushed by the West. The emphasis has always been on a transparent electoral process conducted within a competitive participatory political environment devoid of such ills as manipulation of election results, voters' intimidation and unbiased electoral umpire. It is in line with this norm that elections are observed to determine the extent to which they meet the threshold, in essence against set standards, especially by an independent and impartial body of foreign observers with the aim of identifying whether the elections conform to accepted guarantees of democratic participation, identifying flaws and challenges, and also making recommendations on how the process can be improved in the future for the sake of ensuring credibility of elections. Nigeria still struggles in her elections and has consistently failed to conduct credible elections. Eager to ensure that elections in the country possess the required credentials, a set of international observers are deployed by or under the authority of intergovernmental agencies, international organisations and other nongovernmental organisations not based in the country for the purpose of gathering information regarding the electoral process and making informed judgments on the conduct of such a process. The sole aim is to make Nigeria's elections conform to the globally-acceptable norm of electoral credibility.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopted descriptive research design. It chose the design since the study is purely qualitative in nature, with data available in various documents. It adopted documentary method for data collection and essentially relied on secondary sources abundant in documents such as elections reports by some foreign election observer missions such as International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI), European Union (EU), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Commonwealth of Nations. Others are publications by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Data from the foreign election observer missions and the Independent National Electoral Commission were sourced from the websites of the various organisations whereas the rest of the secondary data were collated from both e-libraries and public libraries visited. Content analysis method was adopted for data analysis in line with the research objectives and hypotheses of the study.

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Independent Assessment of Electoral Process by Foreign Observer Missions and Manipulation of Results of 2023 General Elections in Nigeria

Basically, foreign election observation expresses the interest of the international community in the achievement of democratic elections as part of democratic development including respect for human rights and the rule of law. It assesses election processes in accordance with international principles for genuine democratic elections and domestic law, while however recognizing that it is the people of a country who ultimately determine the credibility and legitimacy of an election process (Onyia & Ugbor-Kalu, 2021).

The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by significant allegations of result falsification, which created a contentious environment that threatened the integrity of the democratic process. Accusations of tampering with vote counts, altering results at collation centers, and deliberately manipulating figures to favor specific candidates were widespread. These issues were documented in various reports by international election observer groups. Organizations like the European Union Election Observation Mission, The National Democratic Institute, the Centre for Democracy and Development, and the African Union were among those that highlighted discrepancies in the official results announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission. Independent reports

indicated that figures from the collation centers did not match those gathered by monitors at polling units, suggesting a deliberate effort to alter outcomes, which ultimately led to numerous legal challenges (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; National Democratic Institute, 2023). YIAGA Africa, a non-governmental organisation which did a parallel tabulation of the results from many states reported variations between its results and those of INEC in Rivers state and Imo state. These two states were also flagged by the media and some of the opposition parties for significant levels of electoral irregularities. Evidence abound that the Presidential election result in Rivers State may have been manipulated (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). 48 hours after the Presidential Election and National Assembly Elections ended in many parts of the Nigeria, there were criticisms by the United States, the European Union, Common Wealth and International Observers Groups about the exercise and allegations of rigging and manipulations of the results (Kingsley et al., 2023). Figure 1 represents discrepancy in election results in Rivers state.

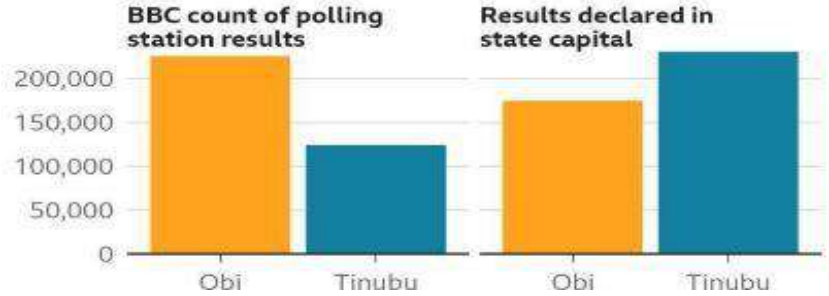


Figure1: Discrepancy in Results Collated by INEC and that of the British Broadcasting Corporation

Source: Ekwuribe & Edet (2023)

The figure shows wide discrepancy between British Broadcasting Corporation's count of polling station results and the results declared in Port Harcourt, Rivers state capital. In the former, presidential candidate of Labour Party, Mr. Peter Obi led in the result with score exceeding two hundred thousand votes, while the candidate of the All Progressives Congress, Bola Tinubu trailed behind with about 100, 000 votes. However, in the result announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission, Tinubu was ascribed more votes than Obi. This sharp discrepancy underscored the incredibility of the 2023 presidential election. This aligned with the report of the joint election observation mission of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), led by former President of Malawi, Joyce Banda which declared that the election fell short of the reasonable expectations of Nigerians. According to the 40-member delegation of the two United States Institute: at the close of the polls, challenges with electronic transfer of results and their upload to a public portal in a timely manner undermined citizens confidence at a crucial moment of the process (Azimezi, et al 2023). According to Paul (2023), five days after the 2023 Presidential election and 24 hours after declaring the Presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu as the winner of the election, the Independent National Electoral Commission is yet to upload all the election results. The transparency and credibility of the 2023 Presidential election result was affected largely by the non-transmission of the Presidential election results to the IREV in most places in the country (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). International observers raised concerns that these practices undermined the principle of free and fair elections.

Table 2 further illustrates the discrepancies between the Independent National Electoral Commission announced results and the independent observer counts.

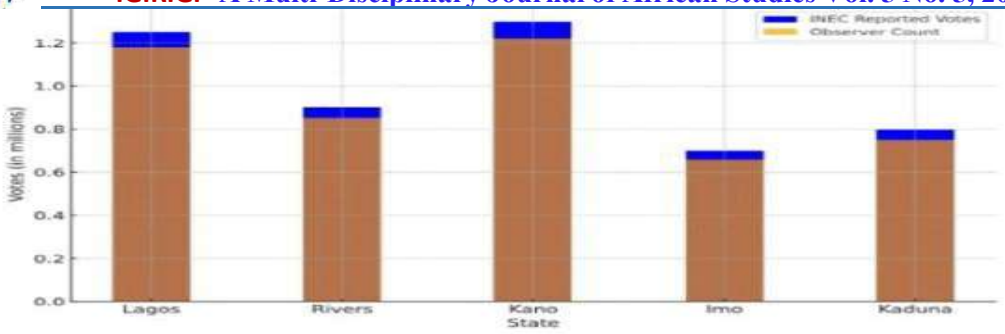


Figure 2: Discrepancies between Independent National Electoral Commission Reported votes and Observers Counts in Nigeria's 2023 General Elections.
Source: (National Democratic Institute & Situation Room, 2023).

Table 2 demonstrated a pattern that was pointed out by various observer groups where in Rivers State, the observer count reported 850,000 votes for Candidate A while the Independent National Electoral Commission figures showed 900,000, a significant discrepancy of 5.9%. Similar patterns were observed across other key states, leading to suspicions of deliberate tampering (National Democratic Institute, 2023). Such differences are critical as they raise fundamental questions about the credibility of the election process, further supported by video evidence and testimonies collected by observer missions (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

4.2 Foreign Election Observers' Presence and Voters' Intimidation during 2023 General Election in Nigeria

The presence of election observers creates the atmosphere of confidence in the electorate who would have ignored voting as an exercise in futility as their votes may not count. In other words, it has been established that the presence of election observers, especially the international ones, increases greater as well as wider political participation, thereby reducing electoral corruption (Ayodeji, 2015). Nevertheless, the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by significant challenges, with voter intimidation emerging as a critical issue that undermined the democratic process and had profound implications for the country's international reputation. Various reports indicated that intimidation tactics were employed by political actors to secure favorable outcomes. The Transition Monitoring Group documented over 200 incidents of voter intimidation across Nigeria, particularly in states like Lagos, Rivers, and Kano, which experienced the most significant levels of electoral violence (Transition Monitoring Group, 2023).

The methods of intimidation varied widely, including armed threats, physical violence, harassment at polling stations, and coercive messaging via social media. Such tactics created a climate of fear that significantly deterred voters from exercising their democratic rights. Reports indicated that voters were approached by armed groups urging them to vote for specific candidates under the threat of violence, resulting in many individuals choosing to stay away from polling stations entirely due to fear of retribution (United States Department of State, 2023). One of the most glaring examples of voter intimidation was observed in Lagos State, where reports indicated that voters were physically attacked, threatened, or coerced by armed individuals stationed near polling units. For instance, a report by the Centre for Democracy and Development, revealed that in several polling units in Lagos Island, thugs were seen instructing voters to support a particular political party, with warnings of violent repercussions if they failed to comply (Saheed, 2023 cited in Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). Table 3 provides a detailed overview of voter intimidation cases reported across key states during the 2023 elections.

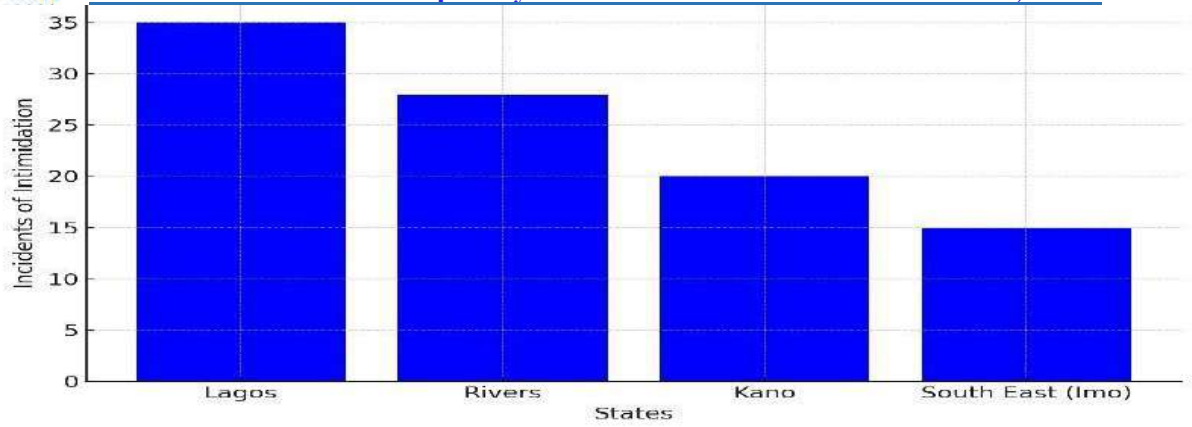


Figure 3: Voter Intimidation Incidents During 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.
Source: (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023)

Figure 3 shows that voters' intimidation was high in Lagos, Rivers and Kano but less in Imo which, however, witnessed similar challenge. The implications of voter intimidation for electoral participation during the 2023 general elections were severe. According to data from the Independent National Electoral Commission, voter turnout for the 2023 general elections dropped to approximately 25% in areas most affected by intimidation, compared to a national average of 35% (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2024). This decline in voter participation highlights the detrimental effect of intimidation on public confidence in the electoral process. Furthermore, the intimidation disproportionately affected specific demographics, including women and youth, who reported feeling particularly vulnerable in the face of aggressive tactics. The fear of violence or retaliation led to a significant underrepresentation of these groups in the electoral outcomes, exacerbating existing inequalities and undermining the democratic principle of inclusivity (National Democratic Institute, 2023).

The issue of voter intimidation during the 2023 elections attracted significant international attention and concern. Observers from the European Union and the African Union issued statements condemning the violence and intimidation tactics employed during the elections, emphasizing the need for a free and fair electoral process. Such statements underscored the international community's expectation that Nigeria, as the most populous country in Africa and a key player in regional stability, uphold democratic standards. The reported incidents of voter intimidation raised serious questions about the credibility of the electoral process and, by extension, Nigeria's image on the global stage (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

4.3 Global Reach of Foreign Election Observer Missions and Neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 General Elections in Nigeria.

The Independent National Electoral Commission plays a crucial role in organizing and conducting elections in Nigeria, ensuring that the electoral process is free, fair, and credible. However, the 2023 general elections exposed significant inefficiencies within the Commission which became a subject of concern both domestically and internationally. Reports from various local and international election observer missions, including the European Union Election Observation Mission, National Democratic Institute, and the African Union highlighted logistical issues, delays, technological failures, and allegations of bias. What was in doubt was the sincerity, honesty and integrity of the human resources in terms of the INEC staff as well as INEC ad-hoc staff. INEC failed to adhere to its own statements and guidelines (Ekwuribe & Edet, 2023). These inefficiencies raised questions about Nigeria's ability to conduct transparent elections, which is essential for its credibility as a leader within the African region (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023; National Democratic Institute, 2023).

One of the most significant issues reported during the 2023 elections was the failure of technology intended to streamline the electoral process. Independent National Electoral Commission introduced the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) to improve voter

identification and reduce the chances of electoral fraud. Despite these innovations, there were widespread complaints about BVAS malfunctioning at various polling units, leading to delays and disruptions (African Union, 2023). Observers from the Centre for Democracy and Development noted that, in several key states, the devices failed to authenticate voters' biometrics, causing long queues and frustration among voters (Centre for Democracy & Development, 2023).

The inefficiencies witnessed during the 2023 general elections have broader implications beyond the domestic sphere, particularly concerning Nigeria's aspirations as a regional leader in Africa. Nigeria has often positioned itself as a champion of democracy on the continent, playing a key role in regional organizations like the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States. However, the inability to ensure a smooth and credible electoral process in its own elections has led to criticism and scepticism from the international community (African Union, 2023; Economic Community of West African States, 2023). For instance, the African Union and Economic Community of West African States, both of which have received support from Nigeria in their efforts to promote peace and democracy in other African nations, expressed disappointment at the conduct of the 2023 elections. Observers from these organizations highlighted the disparity between Nigeria's advocacy for democracy in other nations and the reality of its electoral processes. This contradiction weakens Nigeria's diplomatic leverage when addressing issues of governance and election integrity within the region.

5.0 Conclusion

The study was necessitated by the need for credible elections in Nigeria in the face of the perennial shortcomings which always characterise elections in the country. The broad objective of this study was to examine the contributions of foreign election observer missions to credibility of 2023 general elections in Nigeria or otherwise. In essence, in what ways has previous independent assessment of electoral process by foreign observer missions discouraged manipulation of results of 2023 general elections in Nigeria? How has foreign election observers' presence deterred voters' intimidation during 2023 general election in Nigeria? How has the global reach of foreign election observer missions ensured neutrality of the Independent National Electoral Commission during 2023 general elections in Nigeria? The study made some findings which include the fact that the elections were marred by significant allegations of result falsification which thrived regardless of the fact that foreign observers were to produce a far-reaching independent assessment of the electoral process which could threaten the integrity of the democratic process in the country. It also revealed that the 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marred by severe voters' intimidation such that voter turnout dropped to approximately 25% in areas most affected by intimidation, compared to a national average of 35% despite the presence of foreign election observers. Also, it was revealed that the sincerity, honesty and integrity of the human resources in terms of the INEC staff as well as INEC ad-hoc staff was in doubt during the 2023 general elections with implications which resonate across the country's borders.

6.0 Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Need for urgent legislation stipulating severe sanction such as life improvement without an option of fine for persons found guilty of undermining the credibility of the country's elections by way of manipulation of election results, voter intimidation and sabotage of the process by the electoral commission. National Assembly should be encouraged to enact the law for the president's assent before the next general election as a way of ensuring that future elections meet credibility threshold and receive positive assessment by foreign election observer missions.
2. Foreign election observation in the country to be strengthened and supported with every logistical and legislative framework needed for a truly independent assessment of the electoral process. The assessment of the observer missions should be considered as legal

bedrock for election-related litigations and prosecution of offenders. In achieving this, the federal government should be mandated by law to provide all the demands by the observer missions in terms of logistics, security, access and other such demands that could enable an effective observation during elections.

3. The president should be stripped of the powers to appoint national chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission. Owing to the critical nature of the responsibility of the head of the commission, necessary legal framework should be put in place to mandate leadership of reputable bodies such as the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the Nigerian Bar Association to make about four recommendations to the president to pick from. The same should apply to the Resident Electoral Commissioners as well as National Commissioners of the commission.

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NIGERIA'S AFRICAN DIPLOMACY (1960–2000): HISTORICAL PARALLELS WITH THE MING TRIBUTARY SYSTEM

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Abstract

Africa's post-independence diplomacy has long been interpreted through Western theoretical frameworks, often neglecting indigenous and non-Western traditions that provide alternative perspectives on regional leadership and cooperation. Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomacy between 1960 and 2000 positioned the country as a moral leader and advocate for Pan-African unity, peacekeeping, and decolonisation. In comparison, the Ming tributary system (1368–1644) in East Asia represented a hierarchical diplomatic model where surrounding states acknowledged China's symbolic authority through ritualised tribute and, in return, received political recognition, trade privileges, and legitimacy. This review explores the structural and normative parallels between these two systems, showing how both relied on moral authority, reciprocal exchanges, and shared norms to maintain regional stability without coercive dominance. Drawing on a qualitative narrative and comparative historical analysis of scholarly literature and policy documents, the study identifies three main similarities: leadership rooted in moral legitimacy, reciprocal diplomatic exchanges that reinforced cooperation, and an identity-based order founded on cultural or ideological values. Differences arise primarily from historical context, colonial legacies, and modern sovereignty norms. The review concludes that non-Western diplomatic traditions, such as the Ming system, offer valuable insights for understanding Africa's evolving diplomacy. It recommends that African institutions like the African Union and ECOWAS strengthen regional identity, moral leadership, and reciprocity while promoting comparative research that integrates African and Asian diplomatic experiences into contemporary international relations theory.

Keywords: *Afrocentric diplomacy; Ming tributary system; regional leadership; Constructivist International Relations; normative power; reciprocity in diplomacy; Pan-Africanism.*

Introduction

Since gaining independence on 1st October 1960, Nigeria emerged as a newly sovereign state intent on projecting itself as a continental leader in Africa's post-colonial era (Ebegbulem, 2019; "Nigeria - Foreign Relations," 2024). From the outset, Nigeria's foreign policy placed the African continent front and centre, committing to anti-colonial struggles, Pan-African solidarity and regional stability (Icheke, 2021; "The Historical Basis of Nigeria's Foreign Policy," 2023). The liberalisation of decolonised Africa in the 1960s allowed Nigeria, the continent's most populous country and rapidly growing economy, to pursue a foreign policy anchored in Afrocentrism namely, declaring Africa the "centrepiece" of its external relations (AfroNomicsLaw, 2021). In parallel, the historic model of the Ming tributary system as practised by the Ming dynasty of China (1368–1644) and its neighbours provides a paradigmatic example of how hierarchical norms, symbolic exchange and moral leadership shaped a regional diplomacy based on ritual and reciprocity (Andornino, 2006; Britannica, 2024). This narrative review brings together these two diplomatic traditions, Nigeria's African-centred diplomacy (1960–2000) and the Ming tributary model to investigate how regional leadership, normative frameworks and symbolic hierarchies operate across time and space. The purpose of this review is to set the stage for a comparative inquiry that bridges African foreign

policy and East Asian diplomatic models, and thereby to identify a research gap. Despite the rich scholarship on African diplomacy, there remains limited comparative analysis between African regional actors such as Nigeria and historical East Asian systems like the Ming tributary order. Previous work on Nigeria's diplomacy emphasises its Afro-centric orientation and regional activism in West Africa (Icheke, 2021; AfroNomicsLaw, 2021). Likewise, scholarship on the Ming tributary system examines its structure, function and cultural underpinnings in East Asia (Andornino, 2006; StudySmarter, 2023). Yet, the interface between an African post-colonial actor and a pre-modern Asian diplomatic architecture remains under-explored. This gap matters because it offers an opportunity to enrich our understanding of non-Western diplomatic models, challenge Eurocentric assumptions in international relations, and widen the historiographical lens of regional leadership beyond Africa to include analogous systems elsewhere. To clarify key concepts: "African-centric diplomacy" here refers to Nigeria's foreign policy orientation that placed Africa – its unity, development and moral responsibility at the heart of its external relations (Icheke, 2021). The Ming tributary system is defined as a diplomatic network organised by the Ming dynasty in which neighbouring states acknowledged the imperial centre through ritual tribute and in turn received protection, recognition and trade access (StudySmarter, 2023; Britannica, 2024). Within this system hierarchy, legitimacy and symbolic deference were central to regional stability. These definitions are critical because they anchor the subsequent comparative analysis of how norms, leadership roles and regional order were constructed in different historical and cultural contexts. The rationale for selecting this topic is compelling. First, Nigeria's ambition to act as a regional leader in Africa is well documented: as early as the 1960s Nigeria adopted an Africa-first foreign policy thrust, and by the 1970s it was actively involved in regional peacekeeping and economic cooperation initiatives (Ebegbulem, 2019; Icheke, 2021). Second, the Ming tributary model demonstrates that diplomacy need not be purely coercive or colonial: rather it can function through norms, ritual recognition and symbolic leadership (Andornino, 2006; StudySmarter, 2023). By juxtaposing these two cases, the study invites a deeper reflection on how leadership, legitimacy and regional order are constructed beyond the Western model of power politics. Third, in a globalised world where regional blocs such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) seek to anchor regional diplomacy, understanding precedent-models even historic ones enriches the conceptual toolkit for policymakers and scholars of international relations.

Accordingly, this review poses the central research question: How did Nigeria's African-centric diplomacy from 1960–2000 reflect the leadership, norms, and symbolic hierarchy of the Ming tributary system? The specific objectives are to: (a) trace Nigeria's diplomatic evolution in the period 1960–2000, highlighting its normative commitments and leadership posture; (b) map the key features of the Ming tributary system in terms of hierarchy, reciprocity and legitimacy; (c) conduct a comparative analysis of the two cases to reveal structural parallels and divergences; and (d) draw implications for African regionalism and broader international relations theory. In sum, by exploring both Nigeria's proactive regional diplomacy and the Ming tributary diplomatic model, this review aims to contribute to our intellectual understanding of how moral leadership, symbolic exchange and normative hierarchies operate in regional diplomacy. Practically, it offers insights for African foreign-policy-makers and international relations scholars seeking alternatives to dominant Western paradigms of diplomacy and regional order.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Constructivist International Relations Theory

Constructivism provides an appropriate analytical lens for this review because it emphasises that state behaviour is shaped not only by material power, but by shared norms, identities, and socially constructed meanings. Wendt (1999) argues that state identities and interests are not fixed; rather, they are formed through social interaction within the international system. Similarly, Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) demonstrate that international norms influence state behaviour by creating expectations regarding appropriate conduct. Applying this to Nigeria, its foreign policy since 1960 reflected a self-constructed identity as a regional guardian, mediator, and promoter of

African solidarity, an identity that shaped its behaviour beyond material interests. Adebajo (2010) reinforces this interpretation by asserting that Nigeria's diplomatic actions have historically been driven by a normative aspiration to act as Africa's "moral conscience" rather than a hegemonic power. Therefore, Constructivism is suitable for understanding how Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomacy emerged from an identity-based commitment to Pan-African unity and regional leadership rather than from pursuit of power alone.

2.2 The Ming Tributary System as a Diplomatic Model

The Ming tributary system provides a historical framework through which to understand a non-Western diplomatic order based on legitimacy, ritual, and hierarchy. Fairbank (1968) describes the tributary system as a hierarchical diplomatic structure in which neighbouring states acknowledged the symbolic authority of China through ritual submission in exchange for political recognition and regulated trade. Kang (2005) argues that the East Asian order under the Ming dynasty was one of stable hierarchy, where states accepted China's central role due to shared Confucian norms and belief in its moral authority. Zhang (2009) further expands that the tributary framework institutionalised regional order through ritualised diplomacy, cultural affinity, and reciprocal obligations rather than coercive expansion. Unlike Western imperialism, the tributary model relied on soft power, cultural legitimacy, and moral persuasion to maintain regional stability. This model demonstrates that non-coercive leadership rooted in values and shared norms can produce long-term diplomatic cohesion, offering a relevant comparative framework for analysing Nigeria's style of African-centred diplomacy.

2.3 Conceptual Bridge

The conceptual bridge between Constructivism and the Ming tributary system enables a comparative understanding of Nigeria's diplomacy. Both Nigeria's African-centric foreign policy and the tributary system demonstrate leadership grounded in moral authority and shared norms rather than military domination. As Fairbank (1968) and Kang (2005) note, the tributary system relied on recognition of legitimacy and symbolic hierarchy. Similarly, Adebajo (2010) and Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) describe Nigeria's role as Africa's "Big Brother" rooted in expectations of responsibility, solidarity, and normative leadership. In constructivist terms, both systems show that identity-driven diplomacy can generate regional order and compliance. Thus, combining Constructivism with the tributary model provides a strong analytical foundation for assessing how Nigeria's diplomacy from 1960–2000 mirrored tributary-style leadership through norms, legitimacy, and moral authority.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative historical research design to analyse Nigeria's African-centric diplomacy (1960–2000) alongside the Ming tributary system (1368–1644), as this approach supports the systematic examination of political norms, leadership practices, and regional order across different historical contexts (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003; Tosh, 2015). Given that this review is conceptually grounded in Constructivist International Relations theory, which asserts that state identities and norms shape behaviour (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Wendt, 1999), a qualitative design enables an interpretive understanding of how diplomatic identities and legitimacy were constructed in each case. The study relies exclusively on secondary data drawn from reputable scholarly sources to ensure academic rigour, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, government foreign policy documents, African Union and ECOWAS records on Nigeria's regional engagements, as well as leading historical texts on the Ming tributary system (Fairbank, 1968; Kang, 2005; Zhang, 2009; Adebajo, 2010; Ogunnubi & Isike, 2015). These sources were selected to provide triangulated and evidence-based insight into both diplomatic systems. Data

analysis utilised a thematic and interpretive analytical approach, which Braun and Clarke (2006) describe as suitable for identifying recurring patterns across qualitative datasets. Accordingly, extracted literature was coded into themes such as leadership and legitimacy, norms and identity, reciprocity and symbolic authority, and regional order, allowing for comparison of the underlying diplomatic logic of both systems. The interpretive lens enabled a context-sensitive synthesis of how moral authority, normative influence, and symbolic hierarchy shaped regional diplomacy in each case. This methodology ensures that the findings are historically grounded, theoretically informed, and analytically robust.

4. Historical Context: Nigeria's African Diplomacy 1960–2000

4.1 The Post-Independence Vision (1960–1975)

From the moment Nigeria attained independence on 1st October 1960, the foreign policy posture of the new state was explicitly anchored in Africa-centred principles. Scholars note that Nigeria declared Africa as the "centrepiece" of its external relations, signalling a diplomatic identity committed to African unity and decolonisation (Foluke, 2019; Mbura, 2020). Specifically, this "Africa as the centrepiece" doctrine meant that Nigeria saw itself not as pursuing narrow self-interest but as part of the continent's collective emancipation. Foluke (2019) shows that Nigeria's moral and financial contributions to the liberation struggles in southern Africa increased dramatically during this period. Nigeria's role in the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 further manifests this commitment (Haruna, 2022). In practical terms, Nigeria's early Pan-African engagement included participation in UN Peacekeeping in the Congo and financial support to African liberation movements at a time when its GDP per capita hovered around US$140 in the early 1960s (World Bank, 2023). This normative commitment, however, co-existed with realpolitik considerations: scholars argue that Nigeria's emergent oil income beginning mid-1970s enhanced its readiness to act regionally (Foluke, 2019). Thus, the post-independence era established a normative foundation of Afro-centric diplomacy, moving beyond the typical post-colonial strategy of alignment with former colonial powers (Eshiet, 2018).

4.2 Leadership and Normative Engagement (1975–1990)

Between 1975 and 1990, Nigeria consolidated its leadership in West Africa and on the continent through both normative and institutional engagement. Nigeria, as a founding member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in 1975, assumed a central role in the regional architecture (Omo-Ogbe bor, 2017). Nigeria's contributions to peace-keeping and mediation: for example in Liberia and Sierra Leone via ECOMOG reflect its functional leadership role (Modern Diplomacy, 2021). Concurrently, Nigeria embraced economic diplomacy: it hosted the development of the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa (1980–2000) under the aegis of the OAU, thereby elevating Africa's self-reliance agenda (Wikipedia, 2024). Nigeria's normative engagement also extended to the anti-apartheid movement, where it provided funding and diplomatic support to sanctions against the white-minority regime of South Africa (Haruna, 2022). According to Mbura (2020), Nigeria's defence and foreign-aid expenditure peaked at about 1.5% of GDP in early 1980s, underscoring commitment beyond rhetoric. While Nigeria's leadership was recognised regionally, it was not without critique: some authors argue that Nigeria's dominant posture invited resistance from smaller neighbours who perceived a hegemonic agenda (Modern Diplomacy, 2021). Nevertheless, this period shows the transformation of Nigeria's Afro-centric doctrine into operational leadership in norms, economy and regional diplomacy.

4.3 Transition and Challenges (1990–2000)

The decade from 1990 to 2000 represents a transitional era for Nigeria's diplomacy marked by diplomatic setbacks during military rule and a late-1990s restoration of credibility. Under successive military regimes, including those led by Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, Nigeria's foreign policy priorities came under strain as authoritarian domestic governance eroded its moral legitimacy abroad (Osho, 2025; Eshiet, 2018). For instance, human rights concerns and economic decline undermined Nigeria's image as Africa's moral leader. Nonetheless, the late 1990s saw a return to institutionalised diplomacy with Nigeria's 1999 transition to democracy; Nigeria re-engaged in peace-keeping, debt relief negotiations and African Union formation processes (Eshiet, 2018; Haruna, 2022). This period of renewal allowed Nigeria to reaffirm its regional leadership role though it did so in a changed global environment marked by neoliberalism and regional integration pressures. The literature thus suggests a narrative of initial normative ambition, institutional leadership, domestic crisis, and resurgence capturing the complex evolution of Nigerian diplomacy over forty years.

5. The Ming Tributary System: Key Features and Functions

5.1 Hierarchical Legitimacy and Symbolic Leadership

The Ming tributary system was fundamentally anchored on hierarchical legitimacy, where China positioned itself as the central authority in East Asian diplomacy. Fairbank (1968) explains that the tributary system operated as a hierarchical diplomatic order in which neighbouring states acknowledged the superior status of the Chinese emperor through ritual submission in exchange for political recognition. This legitimacy was rooted in Confucian ideology, which emphasised moral leadership, hierarchy, and order in international relations. Kang (2005) argues that East Asian states accepted this hierarchy not because of Chinese coercion, but based on shared cultural values and recognition of China's moral authority. This viewpoint challenges earlier interpretations that portrayed the tributary system as a tool of domination, by showing that legitimacy was constructed through cultural norms rather than military force. Zhang (2009) adds that symbolic leadership was maintained through rituals such as the kowtow, imperial investiture, and diplomatic ceremonies, which reinforced China's status as the moral centre of the regional order. These perspectives demonstrate that the Ming system provides a non-Western example where symbolic legitimacy, rather than direct coercion, shaped regional leadership.

5.2 Reciprocity and the Exchange of Tribute

A central feature of the tributary system was reciprocity, defined as the mutual exchange of tribute for political legitimacy, security, and economic benefits. Fairbank (1968) states that tributary missions involved the presentation of local products to the Ming court, for which the emperor responded with lavish gifts that often exceeded the value of the tribute offered. Kang (2005) notes that this reciprocal exchange established a mutually beneficial relationship where subordinate states gained access to trade networks, diplomatic protection, and recognition of their rulers by the Chinese emperor. Zhang (2009) supports this interpretation by arguing that the tributary system functioned as a regulated trade and diplomatic framework that promoted stable commercial interaction across East Asia. The reciprocal nature of tribute relations is important because it demonstrates that the system was not solely exploitative; rather, it provided material and political benefits for all participants. This challenges Western assumptions that hierarchical systems result in exploitation, highlighting instead that the Ming structure was based on negotiated reciprocity and shared gains.

5.3 Maintenance of Regional Stability through Norms and Rituals

Norms and rituals played a crucial role in maintaining regional stability in the tributary system. Fairbank (1968) emphasises that the tributary system was sustained through a formalised set of rituals, diplomatic protocols, and moral expectations that regulated interactions between China and tributary states. Kang (2005) explains that these rituals such as tribute missions, ceremonial receptions, and imperial edicts reinforced a shared normative order based on Confucian values of respect, hierarchy, and harmony. Zhang (2009) further notes that ritual diplomacy functioned as a conflict-prevention mechanism because it established accepted behavioural norms and reduced the likelihood of interstate rivalry. Unlike the European balance-of-power system, which often relied on military force, the Ming model emphasised cultural diplomacy, moral persuasion, and ritual compliance as tools of regional governance. The literature clearly shows that norms and rituals provided a soft structural framework that reduced conflict and created a predictable diplomatic environment in East Asia for centuries.

5.4 Influence without Direct Colonisation

A defining characteristic of the Ming tributary system was that it enabled China to exert regional influence without direct colonisation or territorial expansion. Fairbank (1968) shows that China did not seek to annex tributary states, but rather maintained a sphere of influence through cultural prestige, diplomatic recognition, and moral authority. Kang (2005) argues that this system represented a form of "soft hegemony," where China led through example, cultural power, and political legitimacy rather than imperial conquest. Zhang (2009) adds that tributary states retained significant autonomy in their internal affairs, while still benefiting from association with the Chinese empire. This non-imperial form of influence contrasts sharply with Western colonial models, which relied on direct control, economic extraction, and political domination. The Ming model demonstrates that a regional power can lead through soft power, shared norms, and symbolic authority making it a valuable comparative framework for studying non-Western diplomacy.

6. Discussion (Comparative Analysis: Nigeria's Diplomacy and the Ming Tributary System)

6.1 Leadership through Norms and Moral Authority

Fairbank (1968) argues that the Ming tributary system was fundamentally grounded in moral authority, where China positioned itself as the symbolic centre of regional order through cultural prestige and Confucian values rather than coercive domination. This form of leadership reflects what scholars now refer to as normative hegemony, where influence is exercised through values, legitimacy, and example rather than physical force. Similarly, Adebajo (2010) asserts that Nigeria cultivated a "Big Brother" role in Africa by projecting itself as a moral leader committed to decolonisation, peace, and Pan-African unity. This Afrocentric leadership model emphasised moral responsibility, solidarity, and regional uplift, rather than hegemonic control. Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) reinforce this view, noting that Nigeria's influence within West Africa was derived largely from its reputation, economic strength, and peacekeeping contributions, which earned it normative legitimacy. These perspectives demonstrate a parallel: both the Ming dynasty and Nigeria used moral authority as a leadership tool, relying on shared values and identity to foster regional order. However, while the Ming system relied on deeply embedded Confucian ideology to legitimise hierarchy, Nigeria's legitimacy emerged from anti-colonial solidarity and a self-constructed identity as Africa's protector.

6.2 Diplomatic Reciprocity and Symbolic Exchanges

Fairbank (1968) explains that reciprocity was a core pillar of the tributary system, where subordinate states offered tribute in exchange for political recognition, trade privileges, and symbolic affirmation from the Chinese emperor. This created a mutually beneficial diplomatic arrangement that stabilised China's regional relationships. Kang (2005) adds that the lavish return gifts from the Ming court often exceeded the value of tribute received, demonstrating that reciprocity was intended to reinforce loyalty and cooperation rather than extract resources. A similar pattern of reciprocal diplomacy is visible in Nigeria's African policy. Adebajo (2010) notes that Nigeria provided significant financial support to liberation movements and deployed peacekeeping troops across Africa, particularly through the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which contributed over 70% of troops in Liberia and Sierra Leone operations in the 1990s. In return, Nigeria received symbolic recognition as Africa's regional leader. Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) confirm that Nigeria's economic assistance, mediation interventions, and peacekeeping roles strengthened its diplomatic standing and secured regional support for its leadership. Thus, reciprocity in both cases was not purely material; it was symbolic and legitimacy-enhancing. The Ming's tribute-gift mechanism and Nigeria's assistance-recognition dynamic both illustrate that reciprocal exchange is a powerful diplomatic currency for sustaining regional leadership.

6.3 Constructivist Insights: Identity and Regional Order

Wendt (1999) argues that state identities shape interests and behaviour, meaning that foreign policy is socially constructed rather than materially predetermined. Applying this lens reveals a deeper connection between the Ming tributary order and Nigeria's diplomacy. Zhang (2009) explains that Confucian norms such as hierarchy, harmony, and respect were central to sustaining the tributary system, producing a shared regional identity that accepted China's central role. In parallel, Adebajo (2010) demonstrates that Nigeria's diplomacy was built on a collective African identity rooted in Pan-Africanism, anti-colonial struggle, and solidarity. The idea of Africa as a "family of states" forged through shared historical trauma fostered a regional identity that legitimised Nigeria's leadership. This identity-based diplomacy mirrors the Confucian cultural foundations of the Ming system, suggesting that regional order can emerge from shared norms and identity rather than coercion. Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) further contend that Nigeria's leadership was sustained because African states recognised and internalised Nigeria's role as a guardian of regional stability. Thus, both systems demonstrate how Constructivist variables, identity, norms, and shared values shape regional order and obedience to leadership.

6.4 Divergences

Despite strong parallels, notable divergences exist due to historical context, power dynamics, and system structures. Fairbank (1968) describes the Ming tributary system as operating in a largely stable, Sino-centric environment where China possessed uncontested cultural and political dominance. In contrast, Nigeria's leadership emerged in a fragmented post-colonial system marked by sovereignty sensitivities and competing national interests. Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) note that Nigeria's leadership was often resisted by smaller West African states that feared domination, demonstrating that post-colonial regional systems are more contested than Confucian-based hierarchical orders. Additionally, Kang (2005) argues that the tributary system endured because China maintained economic, cultural, and military superiority over centuries, whereas Nigeria's influence fluctuated due to domestic instability, military rule, and economic decline particularly during the 1980s and 1990s oil shocks. Adebajo (2010) highlights that Nigeria's moral authority weakened under military regimes, reducing its diplomatic legitimacy, whereas the Ming system

retained continuity because legitimacy was embedded in cultural worldviews, not governance performance. Finally, the modern international system is grounded in principles of sovereign equality, unlike the hierarchical worldview that structured the tributary order. Consequently, while the tributary and Afrocentric models share normative similarities, their effectiveness and continuity differ due to historical, systemic, and ideological constraints.

Implications for African Diplomacy and International Relations Theory

Fairbank (1968) shows that the Ming tributary system demonstrates the possibility of sustaining regional order through culturally embedded norms rather than coercive dominance, and this offers valuable lessons for African diplomacy today. Adebajo (2010) argues that Africa's contemporary regional institutions such as the African Union (AU) and ECOWAS continue to struggle with fragmented identities, weak enforcement of norms, and inconsistent regional leadership. This review implies that African regionalism could strengthen its effectiveness by cultivating shared diplomatic norms and a collective identity that reinforces unity and legitimacy, similar to the cultural foundations underpinning the tributary system. Ogunnubi and Isike (2015) maintain that Africa's regional organisations must rely on moral leadership, dialogue, and shared values to ensure stability, rather than coercive pressure or external intervention, demonstrating that norm-based regionalism remains a viable pathway for African diplomacy. Wendt (1999) asserts that Constructivism explains how shared ideas, norms, and identities shape state behaviour, and the findings of this review deepen this theoretical lens by highlighting the success of non-Western systems of order. Kang (2005) reinforces that the tributary system exemplifies a non-European model for understanding international relations, proving that peaceful hierarchical orders can emerge from shared values rather than material power alone. This comparison contributes to Constructivist scholarship by illustrating how identity-driven diplomacy both in Ming China and Afrocentric Nigeria can foster cooperation, legitimacy, and regional stability. Zhang (2009) adds that recognising the legitimacy of non-Western models challenges Eurocentric assumptions in international relations theory, suggesting that scholars must reassess global diplomatic history beyond the Westphalian framework. Adebajo (2010) argues that African policymakers tend to frame diplomacy using Western blueprints, yet this paper shows that successful regional leadership can emerge from culturally relevant models rooted in indigenous values and norms. Fairbank (1968) and Kang (2005) collectively demonstrate that non-Western diplomatic systems offer credible alternatives to Western theories, and this review underscores the need to rethink African diplomacy through lenses that reflect African historical experience rather than imported models. This has major implications for African international relations scholarship, as it encourages the development of Afrocentric and historically grounded frameworks. Ultimately, this review demonstrates that re-examining non-Western diplomatic traditions can empower Africa to craft more authentic, identity-driven regional strategies that strengthen unity, legitimacy, and global relevance.

Conclusion

This review has highlighted that both the Ming tributary system and Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomacy demonstrate how regional leadership can be built on shared values, moral authority, and reciprocal cooperation rather than force. Each system relied on legitimacy earned through identity and common norms. The Ming model was rooted in Confucian principles that reinforced China's symbolic leadership, while Nigeria positioned itself as a champion of African unity and independence, shaping its regional role through Pan-African ideals. Although arising from different historical and political contexts, both models show that influence can be maintained through respect, cultural authority, and mutually beneficial relationships. The key distinction lies in the environments in which they operated. The Ming tributary order existed within a culturally cohesive regional system that accepted hierarchy, whereas Nigeria's leadership emerged in a post-colonial setting marked by diverse identities, state sovereignty, and political sensitivities. This difference

affected the consistency and resilience of each model. Nonetheless, both offer meaningful insights for rethinking African diplomacy beyond Western-centric frameworks. This review strengthens understanding of Africa's diplomatic identity by showing that successful regional leadership can be rooted in shared values and non-coercive influence. It also underscores the value of historical analogies in enriching modern diplomatic thinking, provided they are applied critically. Future research should continue exploring comparative studies between African and other non-Western diplomatic traditions to broaden international relations scholarship and elevate African perspectives in global diplomatic discourse. Taken together, these insights affirm the author's position that non-Western diplomatic models, such as Nigeria's Afrocentric diplomacy and the Ming tributary system, reveal the continued relevance of norm-based leadership in sustaining regional order. This 'paper therefore maintains that moral legitimacy and shared identity remain vital instruments of influence for African diplomacy, offering credible alternatives to coercive or purely material power. In this regard, the study's position reinforces Constructivist interpretations of regional order and calls for greater integration of indigenous and comparative frameworks in African foreign policy thinking.

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MASCULINISME ET FÉMINISME DANS LE LEXIQUE: ÉTUDE DES LANGUES DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ UBANG (CROSS RIVER, NIGERIA)

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RÉSUMÉ

Ce n'est plus une nouveaute que depuis les annees 1960, lorsque les nations africaines ont commence à obtenir leur independance les unes après les autres, ce sont les langues europeennes qui ont donne le ton, le lexique et les termes de la langue et litterature dudit continent « independant ». Cette recherche vise à trois objectifs ; le premier est d'analyser les differences entre le lexique des hommes et celle des femmes de la communaute Ubang situee à Bendi dans l'etat de Cross River au sud-sud du Nigeria. Le deuxième est d'analyser les repercussions de la traduction sur ce particularisme culturel et son influence sur l'esprit distinctif de la communaute, puis comment preserver cette singularite culturelle et exceptionnelle en tant que patrimoine national pour les generations futures, tout en diffusant la litterature de ces langues uniques à l'echelle mondiale. En utilisant la methode de l'entretien et deux theories, nous employons le masculinisme et le feminisme pour etudier ces langues africaines distinctives parlees par les residents de la communaute Ubang au Nigeria, avec une brève mise au point sur les langues parlees dans le sud du Nigeria, notamment au sein du gouvernement local d'Obudu où se trouve Bendi, dans l'État du Cross River,

Mots-clés : langues Ubang, masculinisme, féminisme, Sud-sud du Nigeria, culture africaine.

MASCULINISM AND FEMINISM IN LEXICON: A STUDY OF UBANG COMMUNITY LANGUAGES (CROSS RIVER, NIGERIA)

ABSTRACT

The fact that European languages have dominated the tone, vocabulary, history and terms of the language and literature of the aforementioned "independent" continent (Africa) since the 1960s, when African states started to achieve independence one after the other, is no longer a novel concept. The first of the three goals of this study is to examine the lexical disparities between the men and women of the Ubang Community in Bendi, Cross River State, in southern Nigeria. In light of this, the second section looks at how translation affects cultural particularism, this unique genre, and the community's mindset. Finally, it looks at how to preserve this unique and cultural phenomenon as a national heritage for future generations and spread the language and literature of these distinctive languages throughout the world. Using the interview method to analyze this study of the distinctive African languages spoken by the residents of the Ubang community in Nigeria, masculinism and feminism theories will be applied, along with a brief overview of the languages spoken in South-southern Nigeria, specifically in Cross River State.

Key-words: Ubang languages, Masculinism, Feminism, South-Southern Nigeria, African culture.

INTRODUCTION

Le feminisme et le masculinisme sont des sujets abordes dans la langue Ubang, parlee au sein du gouvernement local d'Obudu, qui est situe dans la province de Bendi de l'État de Cross River, au sud du Nigeria. Cependant, ces discours ne visent plus à feminiser ou masculiniser les termes lorsqu'ils sont utilises par differents genres dans la communication. Selon le journal nigerian *Vanguard* (2024), il ne s'agit plus uniquement de renforcer la visibilite d'une partie significative de la population ou de valider l'acces à certains postes en les integrant dans le langage, mais aussi de renommer les elements quotidiens en fonction du groupe auquel on appartient.

Enoncé du problème

Bien que consideree à travers l'article de Nwode Goodluck C. (2017) publie dans *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria* (JOLAN), parmi les 500 langues presentes dans le pays, 50 pourraient s'eteindre dans les prochaines annees, les langues Ubang inclut. Selon la porte-parole de la communaute ; M. Ogbe Sylvanus Odobi, la menace qui guette la langue Ubang est effectivement la transmission orale. Les jeunes migrent vers les villes, entraînant la disparition de cet idiome au profit de l'anglais. Le langage ancien est mis en peril par la confusion des mots. C'est egalement le cas pour de nombreux dialectes nigerians. De plus, une autre explication decoule de la vie en societe particulierement compartimentee où les hommes et les femmes evoluent dans deux univers clairement separes et emploient un langage distinct. Ainsi, cette etude a examine comment preserver cette singularite culturelle et exceptionnelle en tant que patrimoine national pour les generations futures.

Méthodologie de recherche

Une approche eclectique est adoptee pour ce travail en sens que nous employons le masculinisme et le feminisme avec la methode de l'entretien pour etudier des disparites distinctives dans ces langues africaines parlees par les residents de la communaute Ubang au Nigeria. Donc, avec une breve mise au point sur les langues parlees dans le Sud-sud du Nigeria, notamment au sein de l'État du Cross River,

Cadre théorique

Le masculinisme fait reference à un groupe d'idees et de reclamations visant à defendre les droits des hommes [ou / et les enfants garçons] et leurs interêts dans la sphere publique. Outre sa defense de la superiorite du pere sur la mere et de l'homme sur la femme, le masculinisme rejette categoriquement l'existence de la violence domestique ou tente de blâmer les victimes ; qu'il s'agisse d'hommes s'en prenant à d'autres hommes, d'hommes agressant des femmes, ou de femmes s'attaquant à d'autres femmes ; le masculinisme refuse tout. Aussi, il se definit comme un ensemble de concepts et de revendications visant à defendre les droits et les interêts des hommes [ou / et des garçons] dans la sphere civile. Tandis que le feminisme est un mouvement culturel, social et politique qui cherche à instaurer et concretiser l'egalite entre les femmes et les hommes dans tous les aspects de la societe.

Définitions des termes-clés

Le concept de masculinisme (ou parfois masculinite) englobe, selon ses utilisateurs, diverses interpretations. Sens 1 : Le masculinisme se refere à un ensemble de concepts et de revendications visant à defendre les droits des hommes et leurs interêts dans la societe civile, arguant notamment qu'ils souffrent des « exces » du feminisme. Son synonyme : Hominisme.

Pour le feminisme, c'est une doctrine qui condamne les disparites liees au genre et qui avance des mesures pour modifier ces situations. Le feminisme vise à abolir les inegalites basees sur le genre et à garantir que femmes et hommes beneficient des mêmes droits, possibilites et obligations.

La culture africaine est non seulement un simple heritage du passe et le fondement sur lequel tient le present mais aussi le fondement pour l'avenir. Malgre le fait que c'est la partie l'Afrique contemporaine neglige souvent, c'est la partie qui inspire des valeurs de solidarite, de respect de la nature et aussi de communication avec la communaute. Selon Marian Gyamfi (2024), la culture africaine est un tresor vivant, porteur d'une richesse inestimable, impregne de traditions, de valeurs, et de savoirs transmis de generation en generation.

Questions et méthodologie de la recherche

Aussi etonnante que cela puisse paraître, cette fluctuation surprenante rappelle celle observee dans la langue Yanyuwa : malgre le faible nombre de personnes parlant encore cette langue, masculins et feminins, un modele semblable semble en cours d'emploi. Donc, si les femmes Ubang designent un chien par le terme « okwakwe », les hommes, quant à eux, l'appellent « abu ». Dans la langue Yanyuwa, les femmes se refereront à un grizzly en disant « t'et », alors que les hommes emploient l'expression « t'en 'na » pour designer le même animal.

Il est difficile d'analyser ces variations sans passer par le filtre de la lutte contre le sexisme, ce qui suscite les debats contemporains sur l'expression du genre dans les langues. Toutefois, cela pourrait representer une occasion de reexaminer cette question ainsi que bien d'autres : Les changements de dialecte conduisent-ils les personnes à se rattacher à un groupe plutôt qu'à un autre ou, au contraire, est-il possible de choisir intentionnellement d'en adopter un pour revendiquer son affiliation à un groupe ? Qu'entend-on par sociolecte ou dialecte ? Comment les normes grammaticales peuvent-elles donner naissance à une sorte particuliere d'humour ? Ou lorsque l'on se trouve dans des situations où il est necessaire de comprendre la langue de l'autre sans forcement être capable de la parler, que signifie reellement avoir une bonne maîtrise d'une langue ? Est-ce approprie de qualifier cela comme du bilinguisme ? Et que se passe-t-il dans un cerveau qui, jour apres jour, est expose à deux signifiants designant le même signifie mais n'a la possibilite d'en employer qu'un seul ?

Contexte historique des mouvements et des théories féministes et masculinistes en Afrique.

En Afrique, les mouvements feministes et masculinistes ont emerge dans un contexte socio-historique complexe, marque par la colonisation, la decolonisation et de significatives transformations culturelles.

Même si les feministes africaines s'inspirent parfois du feminisme occidental, elles ont developpe leurs propres approches, souvent en reponse au patriarcat colonial et aux structures sociales traditionnelles. Quant aux mouvements masculinistes, ils se sont frequemment formes en reaction aux revendications feministes, dans le but de proteger les droits et les interêts des hommes.

Etude comparée du masculinisme et le féminisme dans les langues nigérianes

Une autre explication decoule de la vie en societe particulierement compartimentee ou les hommes et les femmes evoluent dans deux univers clairement separes et emploient un langage distinct. Cependant, dans l'entretien avec l'anthropologue Chi Chi Undie qui admet les contraintes de cette theorie : *« Au Nigeria, il y a beaucoup de systèmes sociaux fondes sur ce principe, or ce double langage est unique.»*

D'apres le journal nigerian *Vanguard* (2024), il n'existe pas de classement preetabli entre les deux, mais une distinction que l'on cultive avec fierte et qu'on revendique comme un trait culturel unique, admire – voire jalouse – par les villages environnants. Et c'est ainsi qu'ils racontent : lors de l'attribution des langues, Dieu aurait commence par les Ubang, en attribuant une langue à chaque genre ; puis, realisant qu'il n'y aurait pas suffisamment pour tous, il aurait donne aux autres peuples une unique et même langue pour les deux genres.

Brève histoire des langages dans l'état de Cross River

L'État s'est compose de trois groupes ethniques majeurs et est reconnu mondialement pour sa diversite linguistique et culturelle. Parmi ces langues, on trouve l'Ejagham, le Bekwarra et l'Efik, qui est une langue du Niger-Congo et un membre non-Bantu de la famille des langues Benue-Congo. Plus de 4 millions de personnes parlent la langue Efik dans l'etat de Cross River, en particulier dans les municipalites de Calabar, Calabar South, Akpabuyo, Bakassi, Akampkpa, Biase et Odukpani. Il est egalement employe comme langue vehiculaire entre differents groupes ethniques. De plus, il s'agissait de la langue du commerce et des affaires dans le sud-est du Nigeria au cours du 19^{e} siecle et du debut du 20^{e} siecle.

Les residents parlent egalement plusieurs autres langues, y compris l'Isobo d'Obubra, Boki, Ekoi, Etung, Yala et Becheve. Autrefois connue sous le nom d'Akwa Akpa dans la langue efik, la capitale Calabar tire son appellation de l'abondance de grandes rivieres Kwa et des criques à travers la riviere.

Bref histoire mystérieuse de la communauté Ubang dans l'état de Cross River

La communaute Ubang reside dans le Sud-sud du Nigeria, precisement dans l'etat de Cross River, à la frontiere avec le Cameroun. Il existe une disparite linguistique entre les hommes et les femmes. Ubang, qui abrite une jeunesse dynamique et des jeunes femmes eblouissantes, est compose de trois villages : Okwersing, Ofambe et Okiro, avec une estimation de 10.000 personnes parlant la langue Ubang. Pour eux, Dieu a commence par eux(Ubang), car c'est sur leur montagne qu'il s'est tenu pour distribuer les langues et son empreinte est encore gravee sur le rocher jusqu'à aujourd'hui.

La lexique variante des genres dans la communauté Ubang de l'état de Cross River au Sud-sud du Nigeria

La particularite de la diversite linguistique est telle que le terme pour un mot ou phrase est l'un chez les hommes et different chez les femmes comme demontre dans le diagramme suivant : comme demontre dans le diagramme suivant :

S/NO	HOMMES	FEMMES	PARTIE DU DISCOURS	SENS
1.	Amie / Amu	Banu/Bamuie	Nom (abstrait)	L'eau
2.	Mbie	Uruo	Verbe (infinitif)	Aller
3.	Ketung	Iri	Nom (commun)	L'igname
4.	Okai	Koka	Nom (commun)	Pierre
5.	Nki	Ariga	Nom (commun)	Chemise
6.	Kitchi	Okweng	Nom (commun)	Arbre
7.	Nki	Kaket	Nom (commun)	Vêtements
8.	Amuriya	Ayimaa	Salutation	Bonjour
9.	Nfishuo	Nkumanko	Nom (commun)	Legumes
10.	Arisshua	Anwashua	Nom (commun)	Le couteau
11.	Nsiriyeh	Rishi	Nom (commun)	Ma tête
12.	Kobe	Obiyeh	Nom (commun)	La main
13.	Kofiyeh	Obah	Nom (commun)	Le pied
14.	Okofo	Inua	Nom (commun)	Le clou
15.	Nkoh	Ogbala	Nom (commun)	La coupe
16.	Toteh	Buaseh	Verbe (infinitif)	Courir

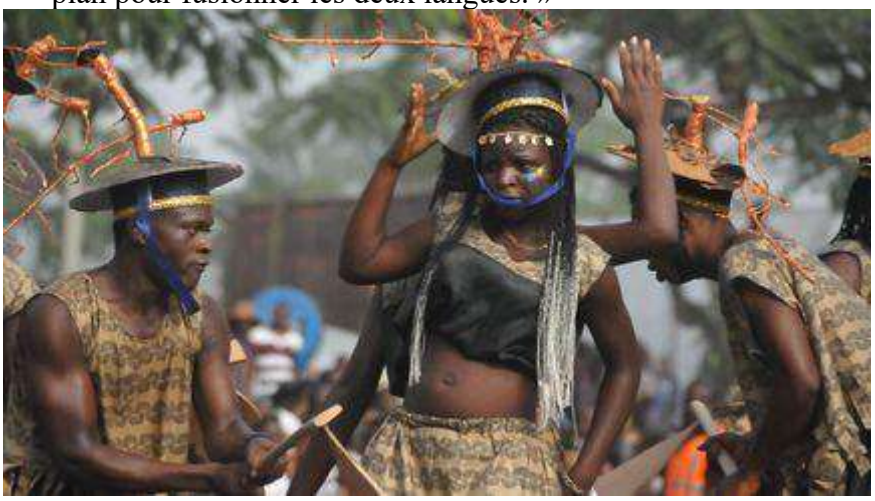
Les disparités linguistiques à travers certaines croyances de la communauté Ubang

Les disparites linguistiques entre les sexes sont la caracteristique qui definit le plus cette communaute et elle en est extrêmement fiere. Ainsi, plusieurs convictions dictent la mentalite des villageois de cette communaute, telles que ;

i. « Chaque enfant ne dans la communaute sait qu'il doit parler la langue de son sexe car toute tentative d'apprendre la langue de l'autre sera vaine. » Encore plus surprenant, ces variations se manifestent avec l'avancement en âge. Les enfants, qu'ils soient de sexe masculin ou feminin, emploient les mêmes termes, sans doute parce qu'ils vivent avec leur mere. Cependant, à l'âge de dix ans, l'enfant doit avoir une bonne connaissance du vocabulaire des adultes.

Un signe de maturite qui, selon l'adjoint chef du village Oliver Ibang, se revele naturellement, sans qu'aucune personne n'ait à demander à l'enfant de changer son langage. D'apres les specialistes, chaque genre dispose de son propre lexique et les differences sont nettement plus marquees que celles constatees entre l'anglais britannique et americain. Selon l'anthropologue Chi Chi Undie, une citation de la BBC, « certains mots sont communs aux deux sexes alors que d'autres varient completement en fonction du sexe ». Deux termes pour designer la même chose ne sont pas partages. « Ce sont des termes totalement distincts. Ils n'ont ni les mêmes lettres ni les mêmes sons ». Il ne s'agit pas d'une variation liee au genre masculin ou feminin d'un terme.

ii. « Dieu les a tant aimes et à moins qu'Il ne revienne à l'endroit de la communaute où Il leur a donne les langues et qu'Il ne leur donne d'autres instructions, ils n'avaient aucun plan pour fusionner les deux langues. »



iii. « Les mots qui forment les deux langues ont ete donnes par Dieu, donc aucune langue n'est superieure à l'autre et chaque sexe parle les mots attribues à sa langue avec fierte et confiance. »

La singularite culturelle est particulierement une source de fierte pour le peuple Ubang. Selon lui, c'est un message qui vient du ciel. Dieu a voulu etablir une distinction entre les hommes et les femmes à travers le langage. Il a vite compris qu'il n'y avait pas suffisamment de langues pour chaque individu. Il a donc abandonne son projet apres avoir developpe le premier et unique langage distinct destine à la population Ubang.

iv. Si une femme, quel que soit son âge, commence à parler comme un homme, les femmes se moqueront d'elle. La particularite de la diversite linguistique est telle qu'un porte-parole de Niger Delta Voice (NDV) a affirme que si une femme essaie de s'exprimer dans le langage masculin, elle echouera puisqu'elle sera desorientee et commettra beaucoup d'erreurs.

On ne peut pas determiner exactement combien de mots distincts existent, ni si cela est en lien avec les rôles traditionnellement assignes à chaque genre dans la societe. Toutefois, même si chaque genre dispose de son propre langage, une certaine comprehension mutuelle persiste.

Lors d'une visite de Niger Delta Voice au sein de la communaute, les aînes, sous la conduite d'Ogbe Sylvanus Odobi, ont affirme que Dieu avait descendu sur l'une des montagnes des hameaux d'Okiro, s'etait etabli au sommet sur un rocher et avait distribue des langues. Pour reprendre leurs propos : « Il a commence par nous (Ubang), car c'est sur notre montagne qu'il s'est tenu pour distribuer les langues et son empreinte est encore gravee sur ce rocher jusqu'à aujourd'hui »,

Odobi, accompagne de deux membres de la communaute, Ochui David et Clement Obi, a precise que c'est apres que Dieu a attribue les langues aux hommes et aux femmes d'Ubang qu'il a compris que ces dernieres ne seraient pas transmises au sein des communautes si elles etaient toujours reparties indifferemment entre les sexes. Il a donc decide d'assigner une langue à l'ensemble des autres communautes qui serait employee par tous, independamment du genre. Le chef de clan, Moses Ade, a corrobore son temoignage. Ubang est compose de trois hameaux : Okwersing, Ofambe et Okiro, qui abritent des jeunes hommes dynamiques et des femmes ravissantes. La distinction linguistique entre les genres est la particularite qui caracterise le plus cette communaute et elle en est tres fiere.

v. Selon les femmes, « pourquoi devrions-nous parler la langue des hommes alors que Dieu a juge bon de nous donner notre propre langue ? (en reponse à pourquoi les femmes ne se revoltaient pas et ne parlaient pas la même langue avec leurs homologues masculins, comme cela se fait ailleurs).

Pour eux, c'est le veritable feminisme, dans l'idee que Dieu a defini le rôle des femmes au sein de la communaute pour qu'elles n'aient pas à lutter pour un sentiment d'appartenance en employant un langage masculin pour communiquer.

Comment conserver les langues Ubang ?

Il est primordial d'intervenir sur divers aspects tels que la documentation, l'enseignement, la promotion et la sensibilisation pour sauvegarder une langue unique comme la langue Ubang. Cela necessite des demarches à la fois personnelles, communautaires et institutionnelles.

Archivage et documentation : Materiel audiovisuel et ecrit : collecter et documenter la langue Ubang, ses traditions, ses histoires, et sa culture par le biais d'enregistrements audio, video et de textes ecrits est essentiel. Archivage numerique : l'archivage de ces documents sur des plateformes accessibles en ligne peut contribuer à la conservation et la propagation de la langue. Élaboration de lexiques et de grammaires : la creation d'outils linguistiques comme les dictionnaires et les grammaires contribue à rendre l'etude et l'acquisition de la langue plus accessible.

Éducation et apprentissage : Apprentissage formel et informel : Integrer la langue Ubang dans les curricula scolaires et educatifs, tout en promouvant son usage quotidien au sein des familles et de la communaute. Programmes de revitalisation : Élaborer des initiatives specifiques pour le renouvellement de la langue, avec un accent sur l'engagement des jeunes à l'adopter. Reseautage : Faciliter les interactions entre les locuteurs de la langue Ubang pour favoriser sa pratique et son partage.

3. **Promotion et sensibilisation :** sur les Medias : Exploiter les plateformes telles que les medias sociaux, la radio ou encore la television pour eveiller les consciences sur l'importance de la langue Ubang et stimuler son utilisation.

4. **Rôle des institutions et des gouvernements:** Acces definitive: Detenir officiellement la langue Ubang et son originalite artistique. Aide financiere et logistique : Fournir des fonds et un appui logistique pour les initiatives liees à la documentation, l'enseignement et la promotion de la langue. Strategies linguistiques : Établir des strategies linguistiques qui encouragent la diversite des langues et la sauvegarde des langues menacees. De plus, les actions communautaires et politiques sont cruciales pour la sauvegarde des langues menacees en ce sens que les individus peuvent contribuer à la revitalisation, etudier les langues en peril et eveiller la conscience collective via les reseaux sociaux et l'education.

Conclusion et recommandations

Pour resumer, le maintien de la langue Ubang exige un engagement collectif et constant, qui inclut la documentation, l'education, la valorisation et l'appui institutionnel. Chaque personne, chaque foyer et chaque communaute peut occuper une position centrale dans cette demarche. Les services de traduction contribuent à la perennite et à la disponibilite des langues en danger en les documentant, les diffusant et favorisant la comprehension pour preserver les langues menacees comme la langue Ubang.

Résumé des résultats Les resultats montrent que l'acceleration de la mondialisation favorise l'usage des langues predominantes telles que l'anglais, l'espagnol ou le mandarin et ceci impose une contrainte considerable aux petites communautes linguistiques comme Ubang pour qu'elles l'adoptent. Aussi, le phenomene d'urbanisation exacerbe le probleme, car les habitants des zones rurales se deplacent vers les cites où predominent les langues dominantes en matiere d'education, de travail et de communication. Avec le temps, les nouvelles generations privilegient ces langues en quête d'avantages economiques et sociaux, ce qui entraîne un declin de l'usage quotidien des langues maternelles. Sans action, l'extinction de ces langues entraînera la disparition definitive des traditions orales, des savoirs indigenes et des perspectives uniques du monde.

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EUROCENTRIC INDIVIDUALISM AND THE EROSION OF AFRICAN EXTENDED FAMILY BONDS: A THEOLOGICAL AND EXEGETICAL CRITIQUE

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Abstract

The African extended family once represented the nucleus of communal identity, moral formation, and social support. Kinship ties created networks of belonging in which every individual was accountable to the other. However, the infiltration of Eurocentric individualism, reinforced by missionary Christianity and global modernity, has significantly eroded these bonds. In contemporary African societies, especially among urban populations, the nuclear family has replaced the extended household, while Christian theology has often adopted Western categories that prioritize personal salvation and private spirituality over communal responsibility. This paper undertakes a theological and exegetical critique of this phenomenon. Through a close reading of selected biblical texts—Genesis 4:9 ("Am I my brother's keeper?"), Acts 2:42–47, and Galatians 6:2—this study argues that Scripture itself upholds communal ethics that resonate deeply with traditional African kinship values. By juxtaposing Eurocentric theological individualism with the biblical notion of koinonia (fellowship) and African communitarian anthropology, the paper demonstrates that authentic Christian life is inherently relational. The study calls for a contextual theological renewal that reclaims the African sense of family, hospitality, and collective responsibility as essential dimensions of the Christian faith. It concludes that the recovery of extended family consciousness within African Christianity is not a regression to the past, but a rediscovery of biblical relationality and ecclesial identity rooted in the triune God.

Keywords: *African Communalism, Eurocentric Individualism, Extended Family Bonds, Contextual Theology, Nigerian Christianity*

1. Introduction

The African social landscape has historically been defined by an enduring sense of family and community. Within this communal framework, the extended family system functioned as the foundation of identity, moral instruction, economic cooperation, and social security. In many traditional societies, an individual was regarded not as an autonomous being but as a member of a wider kinship network that extended beyond the nuclear household. Proverbs such as the Yoruba saying *"Ẹniyan ni aṣọ mi"* (people are my covering) or the Zulu concept of *ubuntu*—"I am because we are"—capture this collective worldview in which mutual care and shared destiny were indispensable.

However, in the last few decades, this communal fabric has steadily disintegrated. The forces of modernization, urban migration, consumerism, and technological globalization have redefined the African family structure. Many children now grow up detached from their extended relatives; uncles, aunts, and cousins once integral to socialization have become distant acquaintances or complete strangers. Family gatherings, once symbols of cohesion and belonging, are increasingly replaced by virtual interactions or individual pursuits. The church, which should serve as a moral custodian of communal values, has not been immune to this trend. Indeed, much of contemporary African Christianity appears to have internalized the Western individualistic ethos embedded in missionary theology, emphasizing "personal salvation," "my blessing," and "private faith" often at the expense of communal responsibility and relational discipleship.

This shift poses serious theological and ethical questions. Has the African church inadvertently replaced the biblical and cultural vision of community with a privatized, Eurocentric spirituality? To what extent has Western theology, shaped by Enlightenment notions of individuality and self-determination, distorted African Christian consciousness? And more importantly, what biblical and theological resources can guide a renewal of the extended family ethos that once characterized African life?

The purpose of this paper is to address these questions through a theological and exegetical critique of Eurocentric individualism and its impact on African extended family bonds. The study argues that a recovery of communal theology, rooted in both Scripture and African cultural anthropology, is essential for a more authentic Christian witness on the continent. Using selected biblical texts as hermeneutical anchors such as Genesis 4:9, Acts 2:42–47, and Galatians 6:2, the paper demonstrates that the biblical narrative consistently affirms collective responsibility and mutual care. Far from endorsing isolated spirituality, the Bible envisions God's people as a covenantal community bound together in love and service.

Methodologically, the study adopts a contextual theological approach, integrating exegetical analysis with African communal philosophy. The exegetical component draws on linguistic and socio-historical readings of the chosen texts, while the theological reflection engages African scholars such as John Mbiti, Benezet Bujo, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who have emphasized relational ontology as central to African theology. This combined method allows for a dynamic dialogue between the biblical world and African experience, thereby unmasking the cultural biases that have shaped African Christian thought through colonial and postcolonial encounters.

By undertaking this analysis, the paper seeks not to romanticize precolonial African life, but to construct a constructive theological framework that restores the biblical principle of communal living within the realities of modern Africa. Ultimately, it calls for the reformation of church teaching, pastoral care, and Christian social ethics to reflect the household model of the early church; a model that harmonizes with Africa's traditional sense of extended family. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on contextual theology, communal ethics, and postcolonial critique of Western Christianity.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

This section lays the intellectual and theological foundation for the argument of this paper. It defines the key concepts, traces the philosophical roots of Eurocentric individualism, contrasts them with African communal anthropology, and outlines the theoretical lens through which exegetical and theological reflections will be conducted.

2.1 Understanding Eurocentric Individualism

The term Eurocentric individualism denotes a worldview that emerged from the European Enlightenment, emphasizing personal autonomy, rational self-determination, and the moral independence of the individual. Thinkers such as Rene Descartes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant advanced the notion that human identity and morality are grounded primarily in individual reason and freedom. While this paradigm contributed to human rights and personal liberty, it also fostered an anthropological shift from communal belonging to individual self-sufficiency.

In theology, this mindset influenced Western Christianity, producing what many scholars describe as a privatized faith; one that prioritizes personal salvation, inward spirituality, and individual moral accountability, often detached from social or communal structures. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) describes this as the "atomization of moral life," where human beings are viewed as self-contained moral agents rather than members of an interdependent community. Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas (1981) critiques modern Western theology for replacing the biblical vision of the *ekklesia*—a community of shared life, with the moralism of autonomous individuals seeking private virtue.

Eurocentric individualism was not only philosophical but also missionary and ecclesial in expression. When Western missionaries arrived in Africa, they brought along not only the gospel but also the sociocultural values of Victorian domestic life. The Christian family was modelled after the European nuclear household: husband, wife, and children. The extended family system; an institution deeply embedded in African cosmology, was often viewed as "pagan" or "primitive." As Kwame Bediako (1995) and Lamin Sanneh (2009) have shown, the Western missionary agenda unconsciously universalized its cultural forms as the normative Christian experience, thereby marginalizing indigenous communal structures. The result has been the internalization of an individualistic Christian consciousness that often undermines African kinship values and erodes the sense of interdependence that once defined family relations.

Thus, Eurocentric individualism, when uncritically absorbed into African Christianity, disrupts the holistic vision of life and family. It fragments the social and spiritual cohesion that once bound generations together and weakens the moral responsibility that extended family members owe one another.

2.2 African Communal Anthropology

By contrast, African communal anthropology views the human person as essentially relational. In the words of John Mbiti (1969:108), *"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."* Personhood is not an inherent individual possession but a dynamic quality achieved through participation in the life of the community. Every individual belongs to a web of relationships involving the living, the dead (ancestors), and the yet unborn. The family, therefore, is not limited to parents and children but includes uncles, aunts, cousins, elders, and even distant relatives who share social and spiritual obligations.

African theologians such as Laurenti Magesa (1997) and Benezet Bujo (1998) describe this worldview as vital participation, which is the idea that life gains meaning through communion and shared existence. This ontology of interconnectedness manifests in collective child-rearing, communal resource-sharing, and social responsibility. Within such a system, neglecting family members or ignoring kinship duties is seen not merely as social failure but as moral and spiritual brokenness.

However, modernization, urban migration, and the pressures of neoliberal capitalism have diluted these communal values. Families increasingly adopt nuclear structures, with individual progress replacing communal welfare as the dominant aspiration. The resulting fragmentation of extended family ties leaves the elderly neglected, children socially isolated, and kinship solidarity diminished. From a theological perspective, this trend calls for a re-contextualization of Christian teaching that recovers the biblical affirmation of community as central to faith and life.

2.3 Theoretical Lens: Contextual Theology and Intercultural Biblical Hermeneutics

This paper employs contextual theology and intercultural biblical hermeneutics as its theoretical frameworks. Contextual theology insists that theology must arise from within specific cultural and historical experiences, not be imported wholesale from foreign traditions (Bevans, 2002). It recognizes that divine revelation engages human culture and that local worldviews shape the interpretation of Scripture. For African Christianity, this means reading the Bible through the lens of African communal life, hospitality, and kinship.

Intercultural biblical hermeneutics, as developed by scholars such as Hans de Wit and Gerald West and started gaining prominence in the late 1990s and early 2000s, promotes dialogue between the biblical text, Western interpretation, and the lived experiences of non-Western readers. It does not reject Western theology outright but subjects it to critique and transformation through the insights of local contexts. In this study, the intercultural approach allows for a conversation between biblical communal ethics and African kinship ontology, revealing convergences that challenge the dominance of Eurocentric individualism.

Theologically, this framework is grounded in a relational Trinitarian model; the understanding that God's own being is communal (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and that humanity, created in God's

image, is called to mirror this relational existence. The early church's emphasis on *koinonia* (Acts 2:42–47) reflects this divine pattern of mutual sharing and interdependence. Therefore, the erosion of extended family bonds in Africa is not merely a sociological problem but a theological contradiction of the divine nature itself.

In sum, this framework establishes a dialectic between two competing anthropologies: the Eurocentric individualist, which defines existence in terms of autonomy and self-interest, and the African communal, which defines existence in terms of relationship and mutuality. The task of theology in Africa today is to reconcile Christian faith with the indigenous sense of community without compromising biblical integrity. By reading Scripture through African eyes, the church can rediscover the theological roots of extended family life and reimagine itself as a household of faith that embodies the divine communion it proclaims.

3. The African Extended Family System: A Cultural-Theological Overview

3.1 The Nature of the African Extended Family

The extended family is one of the most defining features of African social organization. It functions not merely as a biological unit but as a communal structure embodying the African worldview of relationality and interdependence (Mbiti, 1969). In most African societies, kinship extends beyond the nuclear family to include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and even distant relatives who share social and moral responsibilities. According to Gyekye (1997), the African understanding of personhood is inherently relational—"I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am." This communitarian ethos forms the foundation of what many scholars describe as African humanism or Ubuntu (Shutte, 2001).

Within this framework, the family serves as the primary institution for socialization, economic cooperation, and moral education. Children are raised collectively by the community, and kinship obligations define moral virtue and identity. As Nussbaum (2003) notes, Ubuntu-based family structures emphasize compassion, mutual care, and reciprocity as essential to human existence. Consequently, the extended family operates as both a social safety net and a moral community which is a system of belonging that reflects the African conviction that life is lived *with* and *through* others (Tangwa, 1996).

3.2 Communalism as a Theological Motif

African communalism is not only a cultural reality but also bears profound theological implications. Mbiti (1970) argues that African religion and culture perceive humanity as intrinsically bound to community and to God through a web of spiritual and social relationships. This worldview mirrors the biblical notion of covenant community, where identity and morality are grounded in collective responsibility (Kärkkäinen, 2002). The African extended family, therefore, provides a natural context for understanding the corporate dimensions of biblical theology, especially the concepts of covenant, body of Christ, and *koinonia*.

In African Traditional Religion (ATR), the family is not limited to the living but includes ancestors as vital members of the community (Idowu, 1973). This trans-generational continuity resonates with the biblical understanding of the communion of saints (Heb. 12:1). Theologically, it portrays life as a sacred continuum where the living, the dead, and the unborn share a divine destiny. As Setiloane (1986) observes, African ontology is deeply participatory such that every human being is linked to others in visible and invisible dimensions of existence. This worldview fosters a theology of relationality that can enrich Christian reflection on the church as a family of faith.

4. The Vanishing Bonds of Family in Modern Nigeria: Causes and Theological Concerns

The traditional African extended family system once functioned as the nucleus of social cohesion, moral formation, and mutual support. In Nigeria, as in much of sub-Saharan Africa, family relationships historically extended beyond the nuclear structure, encompassing a wide network of kinship relations defined by shared ancestry, responsibilities, and solidarity (Akinyemi,

2017). However, the forces of modernity including urbanization, globalization, and Western individualism have profoundly eroded these bonds, creating what scholars now describe as a crisis of communal identity (Iruonagbe, 2010). The decline of family bonding has far-reaching social, moral, and theological implications, as it affects not only kinship structures but also the moral imagination of Christian communities in Nigeria.

4.1 Socioeconomic and Cultural Drivers of the Decline

One of the most significant factors contributing to the weakening of extended family bonds in Nigeria is urbanization. The postcolonial migration from rural to urban centers in search of economic opportunities has led to the dispersal of family members, thereby reducing interpersonal contact and traditional family rituals (Adepoju, 2019). In urban contexts, the nuclear family model, often influenced by Western lifestyles, becomes dominant due to spatial and economic constraints. Adegoke (2018) observes that city life promotes self-sufficiency and privacy, undermining traditional communal values of interdependence and mutual obligation.

Globalization has further intensified this shift by promoting individual achievement, material success, and consumerist culture. Ehusani (1991) argues that the penetration of Western cultural ideals has reshaped African notions of personhood, replacing the communal "we" with the individualistic "I." This transformation affects the younger generation in particular, many of whom now prioritize personal aspirations over family solidarity. In some cases, digital media and global connectivity have replaced physical interactions, resulting in emotional disconnection within kin networks (Adediran & Akinola, 2022).

Economic hardship also plays a major role. The pressures of unemployment, inflation, and social inequality have made it increasingly difficult for individuals to sustain traditional family responsibilities. In the past, communal sharing provided a safety net for widows, orphans, and the unemployed. Today, however, financial stress has led to selective support systems, where kinship obligations are often neglected (Okon, 2012). The economic strain has shifted family values from collective survival to individual survival, further fragmenting relational ties.

4.2 Western Christianity and the Rise of Individualistic Theology

The Christian church in Nigeria, while thriving numerically, has not been immune to the cultural shift toward individualism. The Euro-American missionary legacy emphasized personal piety and nuclear family ideals, often at the expense of African communal values (Oduro et al., 2008). This theological orientation reinforced a privatized spirituality that prioritized personal salvation and nuclear domesticity, sidelining the extended family as a locus of moral and spiritual life (Kalu, 2008).

Modern Pentecostalism, with its emphasis on prosperity, individual destiny, and self-realization, has inadvertently deepened this orientation. Ukah (2020) notes that prosperity theology in Nigerian Pentecostalism often redefines success in individual terms, measuring divine blessing by personal achievement rather than communal wellbeing. The result is a Christianity that celebrates independence but neglects interdependence—a contradiction to both African tradition and biblical teaching.

This individualistic turn within Christianity undermines the theological foundations of ***koinonia***, the New Testament vision of shared life in Christ (Acts 2:42–47). By focusing on the individual believer's relationship with God, churches often fail to nurture communal belonging that reflects the Trinitarian nature of divine fellowship. Orobator (2008) argues that this Eurocentric theology of individualism contradicts African religiosity, which sees salvation, morality, and identity as inherently communal realities. Thus, Nigerian Christianity must be re-theologized to recover its communal and relational essence.

4.3 Technological Modernity and the Loss of Interpersonal Communication

In the contemporary digital age, technology simultaneously connects and isolates. The proliferation of smartphones, social media, and online communities has redefined the meaning of relationship and proximity. While digital communication enhances connectivity, it also reduces the quality of embodied interactions essential to African communal life (Onwubiko, 2021). Children increasingly grow up without physical contact or shared experiences with cousins, uncles, and extended kin—relationships that were once central to identity formation.

Scholars describe this as the rise of the **"virtual family,"** where relational bonds exist primarily through mediated platforms rather than tangible communal presence (Edewor, 2018). Theologically, this development raises concerns about the loss of *incarnational relationships*—the tangible embodiment of love and fellowship modelled in the person of Christ (John 1:14). Christian theology affirms that true fellowship is not abstract but lived through bodily presence and shared experience (Volf, 1998). Hence, digital isolation, though often unintentional, poses a threat to the lived expression of Christian community and African kinship.

4.4 Theological Implications: From Relational Ontology to Ecclesial Crisis

The vanishing bonds of the extended family carry deep theological implications. First, they challenge the African ontology of relational personhood, which holds that being human is defined through belonging and participation (Menkiti, 2004). As this worldview erodes, there is a growing existential crisis—individuals experience alienation, loneliness, and moral dislocation. Second, the decline in family solidarity has translated into ecclesial fragmentation, where churches mirror social isolation rather than offer a countercultural model of fellowship. The church, once viewed as an *extended family of God* (Eph. 2:19), is increasingly perceived as an institution rather than a household of faith. This is due to the fact that organisational structures, bureaucracy, and administrative concerns now overshadow genuine spiritual fellowship, communal care, and relationa ldiscipleship among believers.

Furthermore, the neglect of extended kinship weakens the moral fabric of society. The extended family traditionally functioned as a moral regulator, enforcing discipline, respect for elders, and care for the vulnerable. Its decline has created a vacuum now filled by impersonal state institutions or unregulated social influences (Obasi, 2015). From a theological standpoint, this represents a loss of *embodied moral theology*, where ethics was once lived and taught through relational mentorship within the family (Iroegbu, 2005).

In summary, the disintegration of the extended family in Nigeria is not only a sociological problem but a theological crisis that calls for re-engagement with biblical and African communal visions of humanity. Reconstructing the theology of family from an African perspective may thus offer a prophetic corrective to the current cultural drift toward atomization.

5. Biblical and Exegetical Foundations for Communal Life

5.1 Genesis 4:9: "Am I My Brother's Keeper?": The Ethics of Responsibility and Relationality

The earliest ethical crisis in the biblical narrative emerges in Genesis 4:9, when Cain, having murdered his brother, poses a defiant question to God: *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* The Hebrew word ***(shamar)***, meaning "to keep, watch, or guard," implies active responsibility rather than passive concern (Brueggemann, 1982). Cain's denial of relational duty represents humanity's first act of social alienation, signifying a rupture in both divine-human and human-human relationships (Westermann, 1984).

Exegetically, the passage portrays sin not merely as moral failure but as the disintegration of relational solidarity. God's confrontation of Cain underscores that moral life is grounded in community; individual autonomy detached from moral responsibility leads to violence and estrangement. As von Rad (1972) observes, Genesis 4 establishes a paradigm where brotherhood defines human identity—its negation signals rebellion against the Creator's social order.

From an African theological perspective, the question *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* resonates deeply with the erosion of communal ethics in modern society. Traditional African ontology affirms that a person's wellbeing is inseparable from the wellbeing of the community (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 2004). Hence, the biblical mandate to be one's brother's keeper aligns with the African ideal of relational personhood, which views care, empathy, and solidarity as constitutive of humanity. The text challenges contemporary Nigerian Christians to resist imported models of individualism and reclaim the biblical ethic of custodial responsibility; the moral obligation to safeguard the life and welfare of others as a reflection of divine fellowship.

5.2 Acts 2:42–47: The *Koinonia* of the Early Church as Paradigm of Communal Life

The depiction of the early Christian community in Acts 2:42–47 offers the New Testament's clearest expression of communal discipleship. Luke's account highlights four defining practices: devotion to apostolic teaching, fellowship (*koinonia*), breaking of bread, and prayers. The statement that "all who believed were together and had all things in common" (v. 44) reflects an intentional socio-spiritual reordering of life around shared belonging (Marshall, 1980).

Linguistically, the Greek term **κοινωνία (*koinonia*)** encompasses notions of participation, partnership, and sharing (Fitzmyer, 1998). The imperfect tense verbs used in verses 44–45 (e.g., *ἦσαν καὶ εἶχον πάντα κοινά* — "they were having all things in common") indicate continuous communal practice rather than isolated acts. Luke's portrayal thus emphasizes ongoing fellowship and mutual support as essential marks of Christian identity.

This early Christian ethos mirrors the African extended family system, where kinship ties ensure shared resources and mutual protection (Gyekye, 1997). Both communities understood life as a collective enterprise sustained by relational interdependence. Yet, modern Nigerian Christianity, often shaped by Western ecclesial models, has drifted toward institutional and individualistic expressions of faith. Orobator (2008) argues that African churches must recover *koinonia* as the central ecclesial identity—a living experience of divine and human communion that mirrors both Trinitarian fellowship and African communal life. Theologically, Acts 2 invites the African church to embody the church not as a bureaucratic structure but as a spiritual household (*oikos tou Theou*) where generosity, hospitality, and mutual care reflect God's inclusive love. In this sense, *koinonia* is not optional but constitutive of the church's being (Volf, 1998).

5.3 Galatians 6:2 — "Bear One Another's Burdens": A Pauline Theology of Mutual Care

Paul's exhortation in Galatians 6:2—*"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* encapsulates the Pauline vision of mutuality and interdependence. The Greek verb **βαστάζετε (*bastazete*)**, meaning "to carry or endure," conveys the image of sharing another's heavy load (Lightfoot, 1892). The phrase *"law of Christ"* points back to the commandment of love (John 13:34–35), indicating that Christian ethics is essentially communal and participatory (Bruce, 1982). Exegetically, Paul presents burden-bearing as the concrete expression of grace within the believing community. By emphasizing mutual responsibility, he subverts Greco-Roman ideals of self-sufficiency and honour that defined virtue in his time (Malina & Neyrey, 1996). For African theology, this aligns with the communitarian principle that *"a person is a person through other persons."* The call to bear one another's burdens resonates with the African ethic of Ubuntu, which stresses compassion, relational obligation, and shared destiny (Shutte, 2001).

In contemporary Nigerian Christianity, this text challenges the prevalence of self-centred spirituality and prosperity-oriented theology. The Pauline vision redefines Christian maturity as the capacity to share in others' sufferings and participate in communal care. Such mutual responsibility transforms the church into a redemptive family, restoring the essence of both African kinship and New Testament fellowship.

5.4 Synthesis: Toward a Theology of Relational Restoration

Across these texts, Scripture affirms a coherent theology of relational restoration; a divine call to recover humanity's communal vocation. Genesis exposes the sin of isolation; Acts embodies redeemed fellowship; and Galatians teaches burden-bearing as love's fulfilment. Together, they affirm that authentic Christian life is fundamentally communal and covenantal (Kärkkäinen, 2002). For African theology, this biblical vision validates the communitarian ontology embedded in traditional culture. The church in Nigeria must thus move beyond Western individualism to embody a relational ecclesiology that integrates kinship, hospitality, and shared responsibility. The restoration of family bonds is not merely cultural nostalgia, it is a theological imperative grounded in the very nature of God, who exists as a triune communion of love.

Conclusion

The vanishing bonds of extended family relationships in contemporary Nigeria reflect a deeper theological and cultural crisis. This study has shown that the infiltration of Eurocentric individualism; both through colonial modernity and Westernized Christian theology, has profoundly altered African social consciousness. The African extended family, once the nucleus of moral formation, communal support, and identity, is gradually being replaced by an individualistic ethos that prizes autonomy over solidarity. Unfortunately, the church, rather than countering this cultural shift, has often reinforced it through teachings that overemphasize personal salvation, private prosperity, and self-realization.

From an exegetical and theological standpoint, however, the Christian faith is inherently communal. The New Testament's vision of *koinonia* (Acts 2:42–47) and Pauline injunctions such as "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2) affirm that the body of Christ is a family bound by shared responsibility. Therefore, Christianity in Africa must be re-envisioned in ways that affirm the interdependence, hospitality, and relational ethics embedded in African communal life.

To restore vanishing family bonds, the African church must recover its social theology; one that integrates biblical *koinonia* with indigenous communal values. Practical theology should emphasize collective care, intergenerational mentorship, and shared stewardship. Furthermore, theological education and pastoral ministry should critique the dominance of Western individualism and promote contextual models of discipleship that prioritize community over isolation.

In conclusion, reversing the erosion of extended family ties in Nigeria requires both cultural and theological renewal. The church must reclaim its role as a community of belonging where faith nurtures relationships, and relationships embody faith. Only through this reintegration of theology and culture can African Christianity resist the atomizing effects of Eurocentric individualism and foster a faith that truly mirrors the communal heart of both the African worldview and the gospel of Christ.

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THE DIDACTIC ROLE OF IGBO PROVERBS IN CHILD UPBRINGING AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION

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Abstract

Language plays significant roles in human society. People's way of life is handed down from one generation to another through language. The Igbo language is very rich in the use of proverbs as part of its oral tradition and cultural heritage. For cultural transmission and preservation in Igbo land, proverbs remain powerful and veritable tools. They are believed to provide channels for the intergenerational transfer of moral values from older to younger members of the society. The motivation for this study stems from the growing concern over the gradual erosion of moral values and cultural identity among Igbo children in contemporary society. Anchored on the theories of Didacticism and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, the study examines Igbo proverbs in relation to cultural preservation and their pragmatic force as didactic instruments in child upbringing. Data were collected from oral speeches in both formal and informal settings, as well as books and radio broadcasts on proverbs. Proverbs that center on teaching morals were selected, categorized under targeted moral lessons, and then translated into English. The moral lessons were carefully matched to social contexts, with each explained in detail. Findings reveal that proverbs are the bedrock and potential means of inculcating in younger generations the moral lessons that would make them responsible individuals in society. Based on these findings, the study recommends that proverbs be meaningfully employed by all concerned stakeholders in fostering good parenting in Igbo children, thereby sustaining Igbo cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Igbo, proverbs, Didacticism, Sociocultural Theory, child upbringing, culture preservation*

Introduction

Language has remained a very important instrument in the building of human character. This notion is acknowledged by Nwankwo (2015), who states that language plays a vital role in the formation of human character and child upbringing. Language transmits societal norms and values from one generation to another by inculcating into the child the mores of the people. One of the ways of transmitting these societal values is through proverbs. Proverbs have been identified as a powerful means of inculcating moral values in younger members of society. They constitute a rich linguistic heritage of a people, and the Igbo are no exception. The Igbo largely employ proverbs in their various traditional settings to communicate, educate, and preserve their cultural heritage. According to Nwoga (1976), "a proverb is the wisdom of many and wit of one," suggesting the experience and wisdom of several ages summed up in a single expression. The Igbo love proverbs as a sign of the socio-cultural and historical dignity of their people. For them, proverbs are a way of life, and the force of persuasion and encouragement they embody goes a long way in impacting morals in children. This study is driven by the urgent need to re-evaluate the educational and cultural significance of Igbo proverbs as didactic tools for child upbringing and as mechanisms for safeguarding the continuity of Igbo heritage. It seeks to analyze, and highlight how proverbs function as instruments for moral instruction and how their revival can contribute to sustainable cultural development and value reorientation in contemporary Igbo society.

Nwachukwu-Agbada (2002) observes that the didactic force obviously gives strength and direction to the imaginative construction of proverbs. The imagery evoked may come from everyday life, but it is designed to reflect society's accepted norms in the form of advice, warning,

instruction, or caution. Against this background, the concern of this paper is to explore Igbo proverbs that are designed to teach morals, examine how they are used in context, and demonstrate their contributions to the preservation and promotion of Igbo culture.

Literature Review

Several studies have examined the roles of proverbs in African societies. Egenti and Okoye (2015) investigated Igbo proverbs in conflict resolution and reconciliation, showing their significance in crisis management. Mmadike (2014) analyzed sexist proverbs and noted how they reinforce male domination. Oha (1998), Meshesha (2016), and Chikwelu (2019) explored cultural stereotypes ingrained in proverbs, especially those signaling prejudice against women. Beyond Igbo, scholars such as Falade, Akinlola, and Adejube (2009) studied Yoruba proverbs as instruments of moral and social learning, while Turkur and Hayan (2009) recommended Hausa proverbs for moral inculcation. Oyinloye (2009) further stressed the integration of proverbs in counseling and value transmission.

Despite these contributions, few studies have provided a detailed account of how Igbo proverbs specifically function as didactic tools for raising responsible children with a direct link to cultural preservation. While Oboko (2020) examined proverbs that teach respect and honor from a pragmatic point of view, this study goes further by identifying, categorizing, and analyzing proverbs under targeted moral lessons. It therefore fills the gap in scholarship by explicitly connecting the didactic role of proverbs in child upbringing with the broader project of cultural preservation.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Didacticism and Sociocultural Theory. Didacticism, which dates back to classical antiquity and is associated with Aristotle (384–322 BCE) and Horace, emphasizes that art and literature must not only entertain but also instruct and morally guide. In African oral traditions, this principle is reflected in the use of proverbs, which are concise, memorable sayings employed to transmit ethical standards and social values. Igbo proverbs are not mere linguistic ornaments but instruments of correction, persuasion, and moral guidance (Okoroafor, 2016; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2002).

Sociocultural Theory, propounded by Vygotsky (1978), complements this view by emphasizing that learning is socially mediated and culturally situated. Vygotsky holds that children acquire higher mental functions through interaction with more knowledgeable members of their community, with language serving as the mediating tool. Within the Igbo cultural context, proverbs are such mediational tools. They enable children to internalize societal norms and values, thus becoming culturally competent and morally responsible individuals.

Didacticism and Sociocultural Theory together explain how Igbo proverbs function as both didactic instruments and sociocultural artifacts. They teach morals while simultaneously preserving and transmitting the cultural identity of the Igbo people.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is built on three interrelated pillars:

Proverbs as Didactic Instruments: Proverbs guide behavior through lessons on humility, respect, diligence, and caution. For example, the Igbo proverb *"Nganga buru ụzọ ọdịda esoro ya n'azụ"* (Pride goes before a fall) discourages arrogance and promotes humility.

Child Upbringing as a Cultural Process: In Igbo society, child upbringing is communal. Proverbs are employed as tools for correction, encouragement, and discipline, enabling children to learn morals in dignified ways.

Culture Preservation through Oral Tradition: Proverbs serve as cultural archives that safeguard Igbo philosophy, worldview, and moral systems. By learning and using proverbs, children acquire linguistic competence and inherit the epistemological foundations of their culture.

These three elements are cyclical: proverbs instruct moral lessons → moral lessons shape child upbringing → child upbringing preserves culture → preserved culture sustains proverbs. Proverbs

serve as didactic tools that shape moral upbringing, which in turn ensures cultural continuity, sustaining the proverbs themselves. This framework highlights that proverbs are not mere sayings but dynamic instruments for moral development, cultural identity, and heritage preservation.

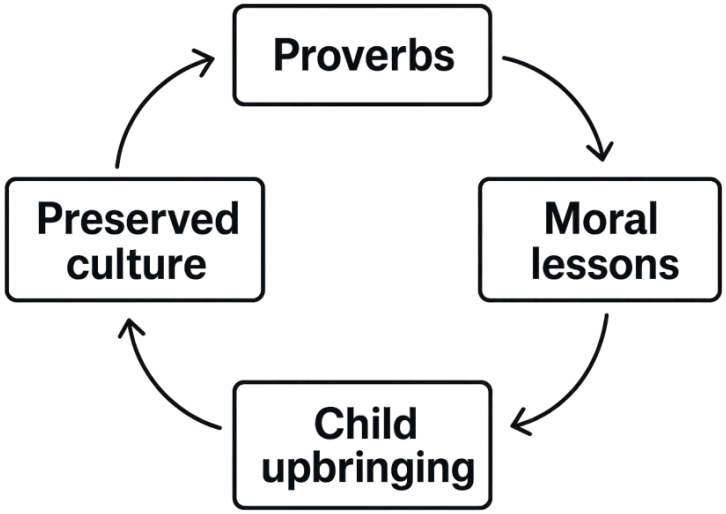


Figure 1: Diagram depicting the cyclical relationship among proverbs, child upbringing, and cultural preservation.

Methodology

Data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources, and the choice of data restricted to proverbs that have didactic function. A total of thirty proverbs relevant to our topic of study were collected and strategized under various moral lessons meant to be achieved. Information was extracted from the speeches of elders in Onitsha and environs both in formal and non-formal settings. A famous radio programme on "Igbo proverbs" by Rev. Fr. Dr. F.O.F. Onwudufor (Okenye) in Radio Sapientia, Onitsha between 8.00pm and 9.00pm every Sunday was constantly listened to, and the presenter also visited in person and interrogated.

Books on Igbo proverbs; Onwudufor, (2008) and Onwudufor, (2018) were also consulted including other Igbo texts that focus on teaching morals to children, and vital proverbs that are relevant to this study such as Onyekonwu, (1980) were collected. The data so strategized were translated into English and their literal and intended meanings given too, including their contextual applications. Each of the moral lessons assigned to particular strata is clearly explained before the listing of other proverbs associated to it.

The Didactic role of Igbo Proverbs in Child Upbringing

In literature and language studies, Didacticism is both a theory and a function. As a theory, it posits that all forms of communication, including stories, proverbs, poems, and songs, should serve to teach or reinforce moral and social values. As a function, it describes the role of texts or expressions that instruct, advise, warn, or correct behavior. Didactic options can come in different forms such as flogging, apprenticeship or proverbs. Behaviour of a child determines the didactic option to apply. Proverbs as a didactic option can come in the form of admonition, praise, scolding, warning, instruction etc. Igbo as a people has a special way of using proverbs to achieve a particular purpose in their everyday life. Below are some Igbo proverbs categorized under the appropriate targeted ethical values with their literal and intended meanings given in both English and Igbo: Here, special attention is paid to the context where the proverbs are applied.

First Moral Lesson: Advice against Pride *(Mpako/Nganga)*

One displays pride when he places himself higher above what he actually is.
An Igbo adage goes, *'Nganga buru ụzọ ọdịda esoro ya n'azụ'* which means that pride goes before a fall.
Pride attracts many vices like disrespect, excessive quest for possessions etc.
Igbo people discourage children not to be excessively proud in order to avoid its dangerous result.
They advise children against the unhealthy attitude with proverbs such as:
Igbo Proverb: *Hapụ mkpi ka o soro onye nwe ya na-agba afụ ọnụ, e mechaa ka a mara onye ga-akpụ ibe ya gaa ahịa.*
English Translation: Let the he-goat continue to grow beard alongside his owner, on the market day, it shall be decided who will drag the other to the market place.
Intended Meaning: *Mgbe ihe mmadụ ji karị ibe ya dapụtara, onye ọbụla aghaghị ịmata onye ọ na-eso na onye o kwesịrị inye nsọpụrụ.*
English Translation: There are different occasions for one to really know who is more capable than the other.
Context: It can be applied in a situation where a son is neglecting the father either because he is not educated like himself or that he is more buoyant than the father.
Second Moral Lesson: Caution/Warning *(Ịdọ aka na ntị)*

Caution/Warning helps one to maintain good behavior as well as being careful in doing some things.
With caution one can avert an impending trouble.
Caution and admonition is left for elders and those who have more experience than others.
In Igbo, parents and elders adopt proverbs that give warning when a child or less experienced person is derailing from the right part.
They use such proverbs as:
Igbo Proverb: *Onye atụ gburu nna ya adighị ekwe eji mpi atụ aṅụ mmanya*.
English Translation: A person whose father was killed by a buffalo does not accept to drink with buffalo's horn.
Intended Meaning: *Ọ bụ naanị onye nzuzu na-ekwe ka ihe butere ọdachi na mbụ mekwaa ya nke ugboro abụọ.*
Context: This proverb can be used in situation whereby children that have not experienced a war are warming up to drag for a community land that caused war in the past, the elders can use it to warn and admonish them against the impending destruction.

Third Moral Lesson: Respect and Honour *(Ugwu na Nsọpụrụ)*

Showing respect and honour for the elders is a good virtue.
It is quite beneficial to the society at large when this attitude is inculcated in children.
In Igbo communities, parents and elders make sure that the younger ones learn this moral value. This is actualized using proverbs such as:
Igbo Proverb: *Onye fee eze*, *eze eruo ya*.
English Translation: If one worships a king, he will definitely become a king.
Intended meaning: *Onye ọbụla na-asọpụrụ okenye ne-enweta ugwu na nsọpụrụ n' aka ndi ọ tọrọ.*
English Translation: One who shows respect to elders will equally receive respect from others.
Context: It can be used when a child is not obedient and respectful to the parents.

Fourth Moral Lesson: Diligence and Slot *(Ịgba mbọ na adighị ike ọrụ)*

An Igbo adage says, '*Aka aja aja na-ebute ọnụ mmanụ mmanụ'*. This means that diligence puts food on the table.

There is no dignity for lazy man in Igbo community because they believe strictly that it is when you work that you will eat. Equal position is given to a foolish man and a lazy man in Igbo community. To raise responsible children in their community, Igbo people make sure that children are taught that hard work brings success and honour. The following proverb is such that can be used to inculcate this moral value in them:

Igbo Proverb: *Ọ bụ naanị ụkwụ gbara apịtị na-eri ihe gụrụ ya.*
English Translation: It is only that leg that is soiled with mud that enjoys whatever it likes.
Intended Meaning: *Onye tara ahụhụ kpokọba akụ mgbe ike di ya, o nweghị mgbe nri na-akọ n'ụlọ ya.*
English Translation: There is great reward for hard work.
Context: It can be applied to a situation where a child chooses to be idle and likes eating from other people's proceeds.

Fifth Moral Lesson: Praise and Encouragement *(Otito na Ịgba Ume)*

In Igbo community, it is said that when a hero is praised for his great fist, he sets to do more (*e too dike na nke o mere o mee ọzọ).*
When a child does what is right, he deserves to be praised and encouraged to do more.
Igbo people can use proverbs such as the one we have below to praise and encourage good performance in children:
Igbo Proverb: *Ọ gbọrọ ihe ewu na- eri.*
English Translation: He gathers the right grass for the goats.
Intended Meaning: *O mere ihe n'usoro o si kwesi.*
English Translation: *He performed excellently well.*
Context: It can be applied where a child does something exactly the way it should be.

Findings

The analysis shows that proverbs remain central to moral upbringing in Igbo society. They serve as figurative but persuasive tools for transmitting values such as humility, caution, respect, diligence, and encouragement. Proverbs also reinforce communal responsibility for child upbringing, where every elder plays a role in moral instruction. Ultimately, proverbs serve as cultural archives, ensuring that Igbo values, philosophy, and traditions are preserved for future generations.

Conclusion

Igbo proverbs are more than linguistic embellishments; they are cultural instruments for moral development and social continuity. Anchored on the principles of Didacticism and Sociocultural Theory, this study demonstrates that proverbs play a dual role: they instruct children in ethical behavior while also preserving Igbo cultural identity. By categorizing proverbs into moral lessons, the study highlights how proverbs function systematically in child upbringing and cultural preservation.

Families, schools, and religious institutions should deliberately employ proverbs in teaching morals to children. Scholars should further investigate proverbs across other Nigerian languages for documentation and cross-cultural comparison. Radio and digital platforms should be used to popularize Igbo proverbs among younger generations.

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A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF BOLANLE AUSTEN-PETERS' *HOUSE OF GA'A*

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Abstract

Semiotics, which is the study of signs and symbols and how they generate meaning, provides a valuable lens for understanding how films communicate cultural values, ideologies, and emotions beyond spoken language. This study is motivated by the need to deepen critical insight into the ways Nigerian historical films, especially Bolanle Austen-Peters' House of Ga'a, employ visual, auditory, and narrative symbols to reflect Yoruba cosmology, moral balance, and political consciousness. The motivation also stems from the increasing recognition of Nollywood as a space for cultural reclamation and the limited scholarly attention given to the semiotic interpretation of indigenous signs in African cinema. The major objective of this study is to carry out a semiotic analysis of House of Ga'a using the theoretical perspectives of Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas. The study further seeks to interpret the film's signs and symbols, examine how elements such as the throne, blood, rituals, regalia, and family relationships convey ideological meanings, and explore how these visual and narrative codes mirror Yoruba philosophical values and postcolonial experiences. Also, the study aims to show how Austen-Peters transforms historical events into a philosophical reflection on leadership, morality, ambition, and justice. Through a semiotic reading, this research establishes that House of Ga'a transcends its historical narrative to become a moral and cultural text that redefines African storytelling and reinforces Yoruba aesthetics within the global cinematic space.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Yoruba cosmology, Nollywood, power and ambition, moral corruption, cultural reclamation, African cinema.*

Introduction

African cinema has long been recognized as a vital space for cultural expression, historical reclamation, and philosophical reflection. Since its emergence in the mid-twentieth century, African film has evolved beyond entertainment into an instrument of education, cultural memory, and ideological transformation. Filmmakers across the continent have used cinema to engage with the complexities of colonialism, postcolonial identity, gender relations, and the moral tensions that shape African societies. Through the creative use of narrative, performance, and imagery, African cinema continues to redefine how Africans see themselves and how the world perceives Africa.

In countries such as Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, and Nigeria, film has become an essential means of preserving indigenous values and contesting Western representations. Early African filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene in Senegal and Souleymane Cisse in Mali established a tradition of politically conscious cinema that spoke to the struggles and aspirations of ordinary people. Their works, such as *Xala* and *Yeelen*, reveal how film can function as a language of resistance and a platform for cultural introspection. Contemporary African directors, including Kunle Afolayan, Akin Omotoso, Tsitsi Dangarembga, and Bolanle Austen Peters, continue this legacy by merging indigenous aesthetics with modern cinematic techniques to communicate deeply rooted philosophical and spiritual themes.

In the Nigerian context, Nollywood has become one of the most dynamic and influential film industries in the world. Beyond its commercial success, Nollywood serves as a cultural archive where folklore, rituals, proverbs, and traditional wisdom are visually reimagined. Films such as Kunle Afolayan's *Anikulapo*, Jade Osiberu's *Ayinla*, and Bolanle Austen Peters' *Funmilayo Ransome Kuti* have demonstrated how indigenous narratives can be reinterpreted for contemporary audiences. These works draw attention to the moral and social fabric of African life, using symbols, costumes, gestures, and language to convey meaning. Such symbolic richness underscores the importance of semiotic analysis in African film studies. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols and how they generate meaning, offers a systematic approach to understanding how African filmmakers embed cultural, moral, and ideological messages in their visual and narrative choices.

Within this broad cinematic landscape, Bolanle Austen Peters' *House of Ga'a* provides a fertile ground for semiotic interpretation. While the film recounts the historical rise and fall of Bashorun Ga'a in the Oyo Empire, its deeper significance lies in the way it transforms historical memory into a moral and philosophical meditation on power, justice, and divine order. Through its visual and auditory symbols; such as the throne, blood, regalia, and rituals, the film speaks to the enduring Yoruba belief in moral balance, human limitation, and cosmic justice.

The central aim of this study is to conduct a semiotic analysis of *House of Ga'a* by applying theoretical perspectives drawn from Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas. In doing so, the study seeks to interpret the visual, auditory, and narrative signs in the film and to explain how they convey ideological meanings rooted in Yoruba cosmology and African moral philosophy. It also aims to explore how these signs reflect broader social concerns, including leadership, ambition, corruption, and justice, thereby situating the film within a continuum of African cinematic tradition. Another objective of this study is to highlight the cultural and philosophical contributions of Nollywood to the decolonization of African storytelling. By examining *House of Ga'a* through semiotic theory, the study hopes to reveal how contemporary Nigerian filmmakers reclaim indigenous histories and reframe them within a global cinematic language that privileges African values and aesthetics. The research ultimately seeks to show that African cinema, through its symbolic and visual grammar, continues to serve as a moral text that articulates the aspirations, fears, and wisdom of the continent.

In essence, this study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that views African film as a living system of signs. Through the lens of semiotics, it becomes possible to understand how African filmmakers translate cultural knowledge into cinematic language, transforming local narratives into universal statements about humanity, morality, and power.

Synopsis of the Film *House of Ga'a*

House of Ga'a (2024) is a Nigerian historical drama directed by Bolanle Austen-Peters, set in the 18th-century Oyo Empire. The film chronicles the rise and tragic fall of Bashorun Ga'a (portrayed by Femi Branch), a ruthless and ambitious leader and kingmaker who wields immense political influence, eventually surpassing the authority of the kings (Alaafins) he installs. The story begins with Ga'a's appointment as Bashorun after a victorious campaign against the Nupe people, marking his ascent from a fierce warrior to a tyrannical powerbroker. Driven by personal vendettas and an unquenchable thirst for dominance, Ga'a manipulates the throne, enthroning and dethroning four successive Alaafins through deceit, voodoo rituals, and brutal force. Central to the narrative is Ga'a's complex family dynamics. His son Oyemekun (Mike Afolarin), the film's narrator, is a reluctant heir lacking his father's warrior spirit and ambitions, preferring peace over conquest. Oyemekun's ill-fated romance with Princess Agbonyin (Bridget Nkem) draws him into the web of intrigue, highlighting themes of love, loyalty, and unintended consequences. As Ga'a's paranoia escalates, he turns on perceived threats, including within his own household, unleashing a cycle of betrayals, alliances, and violent reprisals. The plot builds to a climactic showdown within the House of Ga'a, where shifting loyalties and internal rebellion culminate in a bloody confrontation that exposes the perils of unchecked ambition. Ga'a's empire of terror unravels through the very blood he seeks to control, leading to his downfall and a transformative upheaval in the Oyo Kingdom. Amidst the gore of battles and political machinations, the film explores justice, the corrupting

nature of power, and the enduring legacy of tyranny, blending epic spectacle with intimate family drama.

Featuring an ensemble cast including Funke Akindele, Toyin Abraham, Lateef Adedimeji, and Bimbo Manuel, *House of Ga'a* premiered on Netflix on July 26, 2024, and has been praised for its cinematography, costumes, and performances while drawing some critique for historical inaccuracies in military depictions and timelines.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in semiotic analysis. Drawing on primary data from the film *House of Ga'a* (2024), the methodology involves close textual reading of cinematic elements, including mise-en-scene, cinematography, sound design, costume, and narrative structure. Theoretical frameworks from key semioticians; Saussure (signifier-signified dyad), Peirce (icon-index-symbol triad), Barthes (denotation-connotation-myth), Eco (cultural codes), and Greimas (actantial model) are integrated to dissect signs at denotative, connotative, and mythic levels. The analysis proceeds thematically, focusing on principal sign systems (throne, blood, rituals, regalia, family dynamics) through scene-by-scene breakdowns, supported by visual references (figures from the film). No empirical data collection is involved; instead, the method relies on hermeneutic interpretation to uncover cultural and ideological meanings, ensuring alignment with Yoruba cosmological and Nollywood evolutionary contexts.

Literature Review

The Relevance of Semiotics to African and Nollywood Film Studies

The relevance of semiotics to African and particularly Nollywood film studies cannot be overstated. African cinema has historically served as a medium for reclaiming identity, preserving cultural memory, and resisting colonial narratives. As Akinwale (2023) observes, African films are sites of meaning production where visual and oral traditions converge to communicate collective worldviews. Semiotics provides the tools for decoding these layers of meaning, enabling scholars to analyze how filmmakers employ symbols, colors, gestures, and dialogue to articulate African experiences and philosophies.

In the case of Nollywood, semiotics helps to unpack the ways in which contemporary directors embed traditional cultural signs within modern cinematic techniques. Scholars such as Agyei (2024) and Adeniyi (2024) argue that the revival of indigenous language films has transformed Nollywood from a commercial industry into a cultural movement that reinforces African values while questioning postcolonial realities. Through the lens of semiotics, films such as *Anikulapo* (2023) and *House of Ga'a* (2024) can be seen as cultural dialogues that merge folklore with social commentary.

For instance, in *House of Ga'a*, the Yoruba language is not merely a means of communication but a signifying system that carries spiritual and philosophical weight. When characters utter incantations or proverbs, they are not just speaking; they are activating cultural codes that express Yoruba beliefs about destiny, morality, and communal balance. The proverb, *"The elephant does not dance in the market lest it trample its own young"*, is a semiotic condensation of the film's central theme: the destructive nature of pride.

Semiotics also highlights how Nollywood films function as counter-narratives to Western depictions of Africa. According to Nwachukwu (2022), Nigerian cinema reclaims visual sovereignty by creating indigenous systems of representation that challenge Eurocentric aesthetics. Austen-Peters' *House of Ga'a* exemplifies this movement by replacing colonial depictions of African kingdoms as primitive with complex portrayals of political systems, moral dilemmas, and cultural sophistication.

Furthermore, the semiotic analysis of African films reveals how symbols evolve over time while maintaining cultural continuity. For example, the motif of blood in *House of Ga'a* signifies both violence and ancestral justice, linking traditional beliefs with contemporary concerns about political corruption and the moral decay of leadership. The throne, another central sign, functions as a metaphor for contested power, resonating with Nigeria's postcolonial struggle for ethical

governance. In summary, semiotics offers a comprehensive framework for studying African cinema as a living system of signs that reflect and shape cultural consciousness.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Semiotics, often described as the science of signs, is concerned with the study of how meaning is produced and communicated. At its core, semiotics examines the relationship between a sign and what it represents within a cultural or communicative system. The term "semiotics" derives from the Greek word *sēmeion*, meaning sign. The foundation of modern semiotic theory can be traced to Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, whose approaches laid the groundwork for later developments by scholars such as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas.

Saussure's approach conceptualizes language as a system of signs composed of two parts: the *signifier* and the *signified*. The signifier refers to the form a sign takes, such as a word, sound, image, or gesture, while the signified refers to the concept or idea that the sign expresses. Saussure's model emphasizes that meaning does not reside in individual words or symbols but in the relationships between them within a structured system. For instance, in *House of Ga'a*, the image of the throne functions as a signifier that evokes the concept of authority, yet its precise meaning changes depending on how it relates to other symbols in the film such as blood, regalia, or ritual space.

Peirce's theory expands on Saussure's by introducing a triadic model that defines the sign in relation to three components: the *representamen* (the form of the sign), the *object* (what the sign refers to), and the *interpretant* (the meaning derived from it). Peirce categorizes signs into three main types: icons, which resemble their objects; indexes, which have a direct or causal link to their objects; and symbols, which depend on cultural conventions. In Austen-Peters' film, the recurring image of the elephant operates as an iconic sign of strength and dominance, an index of Ga'a's power over others, and a symbolic representation of pride and self-deification.

Roland Barthes advanced semiotic theory by distinguishing between *denotation* (the literal meaning of a sign) and *connotation* (the associated or cultural meaning). He also introduced the concept of *myth*, through which ordinary signs are transformed into carriers of ideological meaning. In Barthesian terms, *House of Ga'a* constructs a myth about the dangers of unchecked ambition and the fragility of human morality. When Ga'a refuses to bow before the Alaafin, the gesture denotes arrogance, but connotatively, it represents rebellion against divine and moral order, transforming the act into a mythic statement about pride and downfall.

Umberto Eco expanded semiotics into a theory of culture, arguing that meaning emerges within a network of interpretive codes that are historically and socially determined. According to Eco (2020), every cultural artefact operates as a text whose signs interact with the collective consciousness of a society. In this sense, Austen-Peters' film becomes a cultural text that communicates Yoruba cosmological values, moral philosophy, and political history. The film's semiotic system depends on viewers' familiarity with Yoruba proverbs, ancestral rituals, and visual codes of authority to generate full meaning.

Algirdas Julien Greimas introduced structural semiotics and the *actantial model*, which identifies six roles or functions within a narrative: the subject, object, sender, receiver, helper, and opponent. This model enables the mapping of relationships between characters and their goals. In *House of Ga'a*, Bashorun Ga'a functions as the *subject* seeking the *object* of ultimate power. His helpers include his warriors, charms, and rituals, while his opponents are the Alaafin, his own son Oyemekun, and the moral laws of the gods. This structure reveals that Ga'a's downfall is not merely personal but cosmological, symbolizing the destruction that occurs when human ambition seeks to rival divine authority. Through the integration of these theoretical models, this study interprets *House of Ga'a* as a cinematic text that encodes moral, political, and cultural meanings within a web of signs. Each theoretical approach complements the others: Saussure explains the linguistic and visual relationships of signs; Peirce emphasizes their pragmatic and interpretive dimensions; Barthes uncovers their ideological and mythic layers; Eco situates them within a cultural framework; and Greimas reveals their narrative dynamics.

Semiotic Analysis of Bolanle Austen-Peters' *House Of Ga'a*

In *House of Ga'a*, semiotics operates on multiple levels of interpretation. On the surface, the film presents a historical narrative of political intrigue and betrayal. On a deeper level, it constructs a symbolic discourse on morality and power. The throne, for example, functions as both a literal seat of authority and a metaphorical symbol of human ambition. Its repeated appearance throughout the film from Ga'a's first enthronement ceremony to his final downfall serves as a visual refrain that ties together the themes of power, pride, and retribution.



Fig. 1. A first look at Bashorun Ga'a as depicted in *House of Ga'a*

The ritual scenes, which feature chanting, and sacrificial offerings, illustrate how traditional Yoruba spirituality is represented as a living semiotic system. The visual motif of fire connotes both purification and destruction, signifying the dual nature of power. In the climactic sequence, when Ga'a was burnt alive, the flames operate as an index of divine retribution, signaling the restoration of cosmic balance. This scene also echoes Yoruba mythic narratives where moral transgression invites punishment from the gods. Through these visual and auditory symbols, Austen Peters constructs a cinematic language that communicates Yoruba cosmology in accessible and emotionally resonant forms. The film does not simply represent history; it interprets it, using semiotics to engage with moral and philosophical questions that remain relevant in contemporary Nigeria.

Bolanle Austen Peters' *House of Ga'a* is an embroidery of visual and auditory symbols that work together to communicate themes of power, ambition, corruption, and moral consequence. The film's semiotic complexity emerges through its synthesis of Yoruba cultural codes and cinematic techniques that transform historical narrative into a moral allegory. Each object, gesture, and sound in the film carries layered meanings that reveal both the psychology of characters and the broader ideological undercurrents of society. Through semiotic reading, *House of Ga'a* can be interpreted as a moral discourse on the corruption of power, conveyed through the interplay of five principal sign systems: the throne, blood, rituals, regalia, and family dynamics. These elements function as interconnected symbols that both construct and deconstruct Ga'a's authority.

The throne in *House of Ga'a* is not merely a piece of furniture; it is the central symbol of power, legitimacy, and moral responsibility. In the Saussurean sense, the throne operates as a *signifier* whose *signified* varies depending on the scene. Denotatively, it represents the seat of royal governance in the Oyo Empire. Connotatively, it signifies the fragility of authority and the corruption of leadership when ambition overshadows justice.

One of the most symbolically charged moments occurs when Bashorun Ga'a forces a subordinate to deliver a calabash containing parrot eggs to Alaafin Labisi. This act, drawn from 18th-century Yoruba political tradition, functions as a powerful semiotic sign within the film's narrative of tyranny and resistance. Known as *igba iwa* in Yoruba culture, the presentation of parrot

eggs in a calabash is not a mere object but a coded message of rejection, demanding the king's suicide. Rooted in the *aroko* system of non-verbal communication, this ritual object relies on shared cultural knowledge to convey authority and inevitability. The scene is a masterclass in visual and symbolic storytelling, transforming ordinary items into instruments of political and spiritual power. At the level of denotation, the sign appears deceptively simple: fragile parrot eggs nestled inside a hollowed gourd. The calabash, a common household vessel in Yoruba material culture, is typically associated with sustenance, fertility, and ritual containment. Parrot eggs, being rare and delicate, suggest vulnerability and potential life. Yet, within the cultural context of the Old Oyo Empire, their connotation is far more severe. In Yoruba political tradition, presenting these eggs to a king signifies that the Oyo Mesi; the council of nobles led by the Bashorun has withdrawn its support. The message is unambiguous: the king's rule is broken, and he must "break his crown," a euphemism for ritual suicide to preserve the empire's balance. The eggs thus become a metaphor for the monarch's fragile legitimacy, easily shattered by communal will. The choice of parrot eggs is particularly significant.

Parrots in Yoruba cosmology are linked to wisdom, speech, and divine messaging, sometimes seen as intermediaries between humans and the gods. Their eggs, therefore, carry a sacred weight; something precious, rare, and untouchable. To offer them in judgment is to invoke spiritual authority, transforming a political act into a divinely sanctioned verdict. The calabash, often used in offerings to ancestors or orishas, further sacralizes the gesture, framing the rejection not as mere politics but as a cosmic decree. In Ga'a's hands, however, this sacred symbol is corrupted. What was meant to check royal despotism becomes a weapon of personal vengeance, exposing the fragility of tradition when wielded by ambition. This visual emphasis mirrors the king's impending fate; fragile, contained, and doomed. The act of opening the calabash becomes a moment of revelation, a syntagmatic climax where meaning unfolds irreversibly. Drumming, costume, and posture reinforce binary oppositions: Ga'a's towering presence versus the Alaafin's isolation, tradition versus betrayal, life versus death. For Yoruba audiences, the symbol is immediately legible; for others, the film provides narrative relay through dialogue and reaction, ensuring the weight of the gesture is felt.

In the early sequence, the camera frames the throne in a low-angle shot as the newly installed Alaafin ascends to power. The lighting is warm and golden, connoting divine approval. However, as Ga'a begins to manipulate the rulers he appoints, the throne's lighting shifts to cooler, dimmer tones, suggesting the moral darkness surrounding it. This transformation visualizes Barthes' notion of myth, where the sign of kingship is converted into an ideological critique of tyranny.



Fig.2. Depiction of Alaafin Labisi in *House of Ga'a*

In the coronation scene, Ga'a's hand lingers on the throne as he installs his first puppet king, a gesture symbolizing his desire to possess the authority it represents. The camera pans slowly from the throne to Ga'a's face, visually aligning his body with the seat of power. Through this juxtaposition, Austen Peters constructs a visual metaphor that equates Ga'a's ambition with usurpation. The throne reappears as a recurring motif in later scenes of betrayal and rebellion. When Ga'a's soldiers kneel before him in the council chamber, the camera captures the throne from a tilted angle, destabilizing its visual balance and thereby symbolizing the instability of Ga'a's reign.

Blood is a central recurring sign in *House of Ga'a*, functioning as both a literal and symbolic motif that connects violence, kinship, and divine retribution. Within Yoruba cosmology, blood signifies both life and covenant. In Austen Peters' visual narrative, it becomes the ultimate sign of moral consequence. The film's opening war sequence establishes blood as an indexical sign that links the human body to the brutality of power. The camera captures close-up shots of crimson splatters across warriors' faces, using slow motion to intensify the visceral effect. The sound of rhythmic drumming merges with the cries of battle, creating a sensory experience that aligns the viewer's emotions with the chaos of violence. Here, blood denotes conquest but connotes the contamination of moral integrity.

Rituals in *House of Ga'a* are central to the film's semiotic architecture. They serve as moments of transition, where human actions intersect with spiritual authority. These ritual scenes are rendered with striking attention to detail, evoking the performative essence of Yoruba cosmology. In the enthronement sequence, Ga'a conducts a ritual surrounded by priests, drummers, and courtiers. The mise en scene features flickering torches, hanging charms, and rhythmic chanting in Yoruba, creating an atmosphere of sacred tension. Each element operates as a sign within a larger semiotic network: fire connotes purification and divine energy; herbs denote spiritual protection; and the circular arrangement of participants signifies unity under spiritual authority. The soundscape of these scenes enhances their semiotic depth. The steady beat of drums functions as an auditory code that links the mortal world to the spiritual. The chants, though linguistically simple, are culturally rich, expressing the Yoruba belief in the potency of spoken words. The line "The gods watch the hearts of men" emphasises the tension between human ambition and divine judgment.
Rituals in the film also expose Ga'a's internal contradiction. While they appear to affirm his authority, they simultaneously reveal his dependence on unseen forces, suggesting that his power is borrowed rather than inherent. This duality aligns with Barthes' concept of myth, where ritual becomes both a performance of faith and a critique of human arrogance.

Costume design in *House of Ga'a* functions as a complex signifying system through which social identity, status, and psychological transformation are communicated. In Yoruba culture, attire is a language of its own, encoding messages about lineage, morality, and social hierarchy. Austen Peters employs this cultural code with deliberate precision. At the beginning of the film Ga'a wears a simple warrior's wrapper made from aso-oke fabric, signifying humility and valor. As his power grows, his attire becomes progressively elaborate. In the coronation scene, he wore a crimson agbada embroidered with cowries and gold beads. The crimson color denotes vitality but also connotes bloodshed and pride. The cowries serve as indexical signs of wealth and divine favor, while the gold ornamentation symbolizes his proximity to the gods.

Oyemekun's attire provides a visual counterpoint. His simple indigo tunic and plain beads symbolize purity, peace, and self-control. The contrast between father and son, expressed through costume, reinforces the moral polarity that drives the film's narrative. Similarly, Ga'a's wives and Princess Agbonyin's transformation from brightly colored royal garments to subdued earthy tones after her defiance of Ga'a visually narrates her moral awakening. Austen Peters uses costume as what Eco (2020) calls an interpretive code; a visual system that guides the audience's understanding of character development. The visual exaggeration of Ga'a's regalia mirrors his psychological inflation, while the gradual darkening of his wardrobe signifies the descent of his moral state.

The costumes in *House of Ga'a* are not only visually aesthetic but also historically accurate, reflecting the rich textile traditions of the Yoruba people. The director of *House of Ga'a*, Bolanle Austen-Peters, made sure that every character's clothing appropriately reflected their social class, role, and cultural background. The Alaafin, Bashorun Ga'a, and other noble characters are depicted wearing agbadas, which are large, flowing robes made from Aso-Oke, a traditional Yoruba woven cloth. These agbadas are often embroidered with gold or silver threads, reflecting the wearer's wealth and status. The use of beaded crowns (Ade) and other royal clothing is also accurate, highlighting the importance of symbols of power in Yoruba culture.



Fig. 3. The Alaafin's full clothing, crown and Staff



Fig. 4. The costumes of the Alaafin, the chiefs and Oyomesi (in white robes)

The wives of the Bashorun are historically and culturally referred to as "Ayinba" just like the wives of the Alaafin are called "Ayaba". This is because "Aya" refers to "wife" in Yoruba; the Alaafin is referred to as "Oba" in Yoruba while Bashorun is called "Iba" (Iba and Osorun makes "Bashorun"). The Bashorun's wives also dress royally with beads on the hair and neck. They also wear Aso Oke, mostly tied as a wrapper, tied to the waist and as a shoulder covering.



Fig. 5. The costumes of Bashorun Ga'a's wives (also called "Ayinba")

The film's portrayal of warriors is not entirely accurate according to oral traditions, particularly during battle scenes. The traditional Yoruba armour and weaponry is mostly accompanied with charms which are quite physical. Charms worn on the neck, waist, arms and ankles mostly accompany the cotton fabrics worn by soldiers in Old Oyo Empire, according to oral history. Warriors in the film are shown wearing leather tunics, which aligns with historical accounts of Yoruba military attire. The use of weapons such as swords, spears, and shields are consistent with the historical period and adds to the film's authenticity. But the costumes are more aesthetic than historic since the use of charms and anklets are mostly absent. Only cowries are added to the costumes of the soldiers.



Fig. 6. Costumes of the soldiers as portrayed in *House of Ga'a*

The costume of the Nupe soldiers are accurate historically. The Nupe soldiers are known for the long robes and *Rawani* turban. This is due to their downfall to the Sokoto Caliphate in 1820 which fostered Islamic traditions amongst them. Mallam Dendo was crowned the Emir after the capture and the Bida Emirates was established. *House of Ga'a*'s depiction follows this historical perspective.



Fig. 7. The depiction of Nupe Warriors in *House of Ga'a*

The family dynamics in *House of Ga'a* reveal how power extends beyond politics into the domestic and emotional spheres. Austen Peters constructs family relationships as symbolic microcosms of empire, where authority, loyalty, and rebellion are constantly negotiated. Oyemekun, the narrator of the story, represents conscience and continuity. His love for Princess Agbonyin symbolizes a generational desire for reconciliation and peace. Their relationship scene are filmed in soft, natural light, suggesting sincerity and emotional purity. Yet, their love is constantly

undermined by Ga'a's obsession with control, which turns the family home into an arena of tyranny.

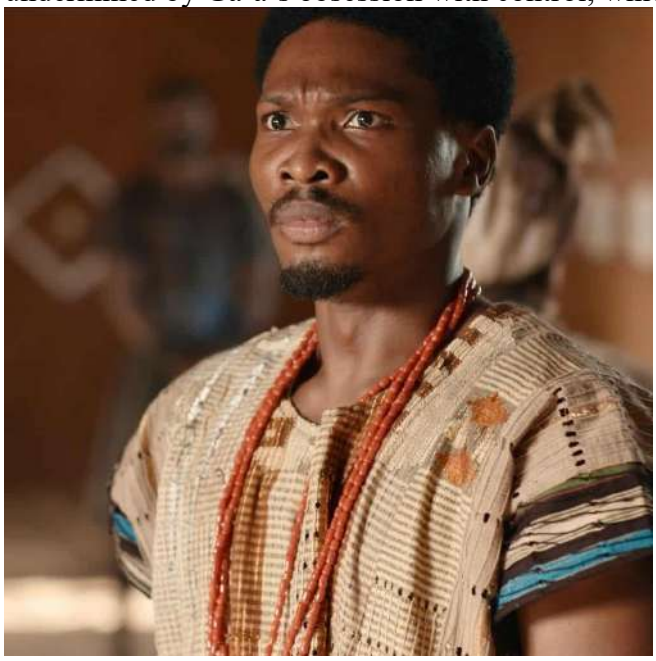


Fig. 8. The image of Oyemekun

The semiotics of gender in the film reveal how women, though confined by patriarchal systems, wield moral authority through speech and emotional intelligence. Characters like Agbonyin and Ayinba (Funke Akindele) resist oppression through their actions. In the climactic family confrontation, when Oyemekun stands against his father, the composition of the frame reflects the collapse of hierarchy. The son's upright posture contrasts with Ga'a's slouched figure, visually signifying the inversion of power. The moment encapsulates the film's moral message: power divorced from virtue inevitably leads to self-destruction.

Conclusion

This study examined Bolanle Austen Peters' *House of Ga'a* through the theoretical and interpretive framework of semiotics to uncover the cultural, ideological, and philosophical meanings embedded in its visual and narrative symbols. The research applied the semiotic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Algirdas Julien Greimas to decode the film's signs and explore how they reflect Yoruba cosmology and moral values.

The application of these theories provided a comprehensive foundation for understanding the film's symbolic depth. Saussure's dyadic model clarified the relationship between signs and meanings; Peirce's triadic approach illuminated how icons, indexes, and symbols operate in Yoruba cultural expression; Barthes' concept of myth revealed the ideological dimensions of ambition and pride; Eco's theory of cultural codes explained how Yoruba traditions generate meaning; and Greimas' actantial model exposed the moral and narrative dynamics within the film. Through these frameworks, *House of Ga'a* emerges as a layered cinematic text that merges history, morality, and philosophy.

The analysis demonstrated that the throne functions as a symbol of authority and moral responsibility, blood represents both kinship and divine retribution, rituals convey spiritual tension, regalia expresses social identity and transformation, and family relations mirror the broader political and ethical order. These signs collectively reflect the Yoruba belief in moral balance and the inevitability of justice, revealing that Austen Peters' film goes beyond historical narration to engage in moral and philosophical reflection on leadership and power. By anchoring her work in Yoruba language, mythology, and visual symbolism, Austen Peters contributes significantly to Nollywood's ongoing process of cultural reclamation and self-definition. The film reinforces the idea that African cinema serves as a moral and intellectual archive where tradition and modernity intersect.

In summary, the study achieved its aim of interpreting *House of Ga'a* through semiotic theory and demonstrated how the film communicates deep ideological meanings about power, morality, and justice. The research confirms that contemporary African filmmakers are not only storytellers but also philosophers of culture who use cinema to question authority, affirm identity, and preserve the moral imagination of their societies.

Recommendations

The following are recommended:

- Nollywood filmmakers should prioritize indigenous-language productions like *House of Ga'a* to further cultural reclamation, incorporating accurate historical elements (e.g., traditional charms in warrior costumes) to enhance authenticity and educational value.
- Educational institutions in Nigeria should integrate films such as *House of Ga'a* into curricula on Yoruba history and semiotics, fostering critical media literacy and cultural preservation among students.
- Funding bodies and platforms like Netflix should support projects emphasizing decolonial narratives, providing resources for research into oral traditions to minimize historical inaccuracies in depictions of military and ritual practices.
- Future research could investigate audience reception of semiotic elements in *House of Ga'a*, using surveys or focus groups to assess how Yoruba and non-Yoruba viewers interpret signs, bridging gaps between cultural insiders and global audiences.

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THE BENEFITS OF INCORPORATING AI TOOLS IN CHURCHES' CONTEXT: APPRAISING THE POSITIONS OF THE CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT DENOMINATIONS

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Abstract

Through the lens of faith and spirituality, the Catholic and Protestant church denominations have developed their very positions on AI (Artificial Intelligence) as compared to the general perception of the concept. Descriptive and analytical approaches were employed to understand the Roman Catholic and Protestant preferences and opinions in the use of AI for Church's activities. The findings of this study underscores that many Protestant leaders emphasize the importance of theological reflection and discernment when using AI. They stress that AI should not replace human judgment and decision-making, especially in matters of faith and morality. The Roman Catholic Church on the other hand, views AI, however, as a tool that requires careful consideration for human dignity and common good. According to Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV, AI should be developed and used in ways that benefit humanity, promote human dignity, and serve the disadvantaged. However, bulk of the data were collected through secondary sources like books (published and unpublished). Moreover, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty pastors and church leaders across churches from Protestant to Catholic churches in Awka, Anambra state, Nigeria to collect data for the study. The Population of this study was the Catholic and Protestant Churches in Awka capital territory, Anambra State, Nigeria. The researcher chose the area because of its high concentration of Christian communities. The study recommends that the use of AI in church programmes can help create personalized worship and prayers. AI-powered resources can provide personalized discipleship plans, Bible studies, and prayer guides. By embracing AI in a thoughtful and intentional way, churches can enhance their ministry and further their mission.

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the use of computers and algorithms to perform tasks traditionally done by humans. It is a powerful tool that can help one get the most out of one's church's digital presence and grow one's faith-based community and it is becoming increasingly important for churches looking to stay connected with church goers and reach new audiences.

According to Beaidoin (2012), when internet was introduced to the general public in the early 1990s, it was met with a mix of emotions. Some were enthralled by the idea of being able to easily connect with others online and access vast amounts of information. Others remained skeptical, concerned and about the trustworthiness, reliability and privacy, many held a genuine curiosity. Now, it is hard to imagine life without the internet. It has fundamentally changed communication, media and daily life.

However, the invention of AI (Artificial Intelligence) has exploded into the public eye as tools which give everyday people a glimpse of how science can help them generate a lot of

information in a brief amount of time. According to Au Nnonyelu (Oral Communication, April 8, 2025), "AI could probably be used in a multitude of ways to help run local churches, especially those with little or no staff…the ethical and spiritual considerations however, have made some Christians disappointed to learn that their church is using AI". Modebelu (Oral Communication, July5th, 2024),The Artificial intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing both the way churches connect with congregations and bring in new members. Offering the potential to engage members more effectively, develop more personalized outreach strategies, and create new and innovative ways to foster community growth. In line with the above submissions, Harris (2023) affirms, "Churches that adopt AI technologies will find themselves ahead of the curve"(p.23).

This paper has considered the intersection of artificial intelligence and Christian religious practices, stating the evolving nature of spirituality in the digital age. The paper looked into how AI is being applied to various aspects of Christian religious life, from enhancing spiritual experiences to improving access to religious teachings and guidance. The paper discussed the diverse ways in which AI is shaping Christian programmes and services. The adoption of AI in Christian religious contexts has the potential to foster global connections among believers, and provide new forms of worship in religious expression(Udogu, 2021). Preserving cultural heritage and ensuring inclusivity should be central considerations in embedding AI into Christian religious life.

Empirical Review

As Hawken (2022), once said "The future belongs to those who understand that doing more with less is compassionate, prosperous, and enduring, and thus more intelligent, even competitive."(p.43).Drawing from semi-structured interviews with twenty pastors and church leaders conducted by Nwokocha (2025) across churches from mainline to new generation churches in Anambra state Nigeria,the random selection using ordinary least square (OLS) research analysis on the survey data indicated that both the Protestant and Catholic church denominations view AI technology as a tool that requires careful consideration for human dignity and common good. The findings from the 20 pastors interviewed from the selected protestant churches, collaborates with the position of the Vatican that AI applications promotes the common good of man. However, some 25% of the pastors interviewed in and around Awka in Anambra State, Nigeria raises ethical concerns, such as ensuring that AI-generated content aligns with the church's core beliefs and values. Some are of the view that over reliance on AI can lead to atrophy in pastoral skills, such as exegeting and illustrating scripture. However, greater percentage of New Generation Church members see AI as a time-saver, suggesting chatbots for routine questions such as service times; algorithms to match congregants to groups and events; and robotic monitoring of facility maintenance (Justin, 2020, Ramelow, 2023 and Monanu, 2024).

Pope Francis (2024) and Pope Leo XIV (2025) asserts that AI should be developed and used in ways that benefit humanity, promote human dignity, and serve the disadvantaged. Here, the Catholic church acknowledges the potential for AI to displace jobs, emphasizing the need for retraining programmes.

Consequently, Pope Francis (2024) in the International Convention on Generative Artificial Intelligence and Technocratic Paradigm organized by Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Vatican Foundation, reaffirms that artificial intelligence must only be used to benefit humanity. Lubov (2024) reported Pope Francis to have addressed the G7 Session in Bari, Italy, on artificial intelligence, reaffirming that AI must be used ethically, to serve humanity, and that its inherent risks must be mitigated. The Pope's words on AI maintains that technology should remain a tool in human hands.

Lavner (2024) noted Pope's words in analyzing the opportunities and risks related to the development and use of AI. He made reference to the Pope's warning against the tool acting autonomously and perpetrating 'throw away culture' favouring inequality and making decisions outside of its purview. In his words, "AI is, and must remain a tool" in human hands.

The points above from the Vatican and responses from the Pastors interviewed indicate an agreement from the two parallel submissions. The summary of their arguments states that the

purpose of AI must promote human dignity. As given by Wendorf (2023) who remarked that the use of AI should be continuously be re-examined to ascertain the true purpose of AI

However, it could be said that both the Catholic and Protestant church denominations recognize and appreciate the relevance of AI technology for the future of humanity.

As a cautionary measure, Bradbury (2023) questioned whether the technology is actually an intelligence as it is being referred to. He wondered if it is not a misuse of the word, "intelligence", being that the technology when understood in that sense is capable of shortchanging human intelligence by surrendering same to the tool's technocratic power.

Pope Francis and Vatican's Position on AI

The Vatican have expressed several concerns and opinions regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Here are the two key points of the church's position:

- **Human dignity**: The Catholic church's position promotes a human-centric approach to AI development, prioritizing human dignity, well-being, and safety. The Vatican emphasize the need for responsibility and discernment in AI development and use, ensuring that AI benefits humanity as a whole. The church emphasizes the importance of protecting human dignity in the development and use of AI. Pope Francis has stated that "no machine should ever choose to take the life of a human being". The church advocates for an ethical framework to govern AI development and use, prioritizing human well-being, transparency, accountability and respect for human rights.
- **Lethal autonomous weapons**: Pope Francis in 2024 urged artificial intelligence leaders to protect human dignity. Pope Francis, to an AI ethics conference in Hiroshima Japan, with leaders from Microsoft, IMB, Cisco, the United Nations, and representatives from all major world religions, underlined that artificial intelligence has implications for the future of war and peace in the world. The Pope called for a ban on lethal autonomous weapon systems-a class of weapons that use computer algorithms to independently target and employ weapons without manual human control of the system. Lubov (2024) in presenting the Vatican's position on the matter reported that the church strongly opposes development and use of lethal autonomous weapons, emphasizing the need for human control over AI systems. The Pope and the Vatican have expressed concerns about AI's potential to manipulate truth and authenticity, highlighting the importance of promoting media literacy and critical thinking. The church advocates for AI policies that prioritize the common good, dignity of the human person, and respect for truth.

  The Rome call (2024) a document by the Pontifical Academy for life, underlines the need for the ethical use of AI according to the principles of transparency, inclusion, accountability, impartiality, reliability, security and privacy. Pope Francis chose artificial intelligence as the theme for his 2024 peace message, which recommends that global leaders adopt an international treaty to regulate the development and use of AI. At the G7 summit, the Pope stressed that human dignity requires that the decisions of artificial intelligence (AI) be under the control of human being

Protestant Churches' Positions on AI

Protestant church positions on AI vary, but most leaders tend to be cautious and skeptical about its use in pastoral care and core theological duties. On the use of AI in Administrative Tasks, Protestant church leaders generally accept the use of AI for administrative tasks, such as data management and communication support. They see AI as a tool to improve efficiency and knowledge management (Appiah, 2024).

On the reservations about AI in Pastoral Care, many Protestant leaders are hesitant to use AI in pastoral care, citing concerns about the lack of human connection and empathy. They believe that AI cannot truly grasp the nuances of interpersonal communication and the search for meaning (Kintz, 2022).

Gable (2022) further hinted on the Church's positions on AI-generated Sermons, he reported that some Protestant denominations, like the Southern Baptist Convention, advise caution when using AI-generated content, emphasizing the importance of human involvement and attribution. While some pastors find AI helpful for research and sermon preparation, others worry about the potential loss of personal touch and authenticity.

On the theological concerns, Marga (2020) maintained that Protestant leaders emphasize the importance of theological reflection and discernment when using AI. They stress that AI should not replace human judgment and decision-making, especially in matters of faith and morality.

Following the differing views among Pastors and Protestant Christians, research shows that pastors and Christians have varying views on AI, with some seeing it as encouraging and constructive, while others are more skeptical. A majority of pastors believe that God can work through AI, but they also express concerns about its potential risks and limitations (Smart, 2020, Cool hus, 2021, Hawken, 2022, Harris, 2023,).

Consequently, some notable Protestant denominations and their stances on AI include:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: This denomination has issued guiding principles for the use of AI, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and the importance of human connection. They believe that AI should be used to support and not supplant spiritual connection(Smart, 2020).

Lutheran Church: Some Lutheran pastors use AI for sermon preparation and research, but they also emphasize the importance of human involvement and discernment (Harris, 2023).

Evangelical Friends Church: Pastor Paul Hoffman questions whether AI can truly comprehend lived human experiences and emotions, highlighting the limitations of AI in pastoral care (Appiah, 2024).

Responses from Faith-Based Groups on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

As awareness of artificial intelligence grows, many Christians are wondering about its use, in personal and professional life and also in church ministry. Are there ethical concerns? Is it different from other time-saving technology? What does the Bible have to say? The launch of chatbot programs and image generators, such as Open AI's ChatGPT, made AI accessible to average computer users and has drawn a wide spectrum of responses from ministry leaders and faith-based groups. Gloo, a technology platform dedicated to building connections and collections might cut across the faith community, worked with several partners, including Barna Group, to conduct an "AI & the Church" survey.

However, an experiment by the campaign showed the importance of feeding AI the right information: Asking an image generator to illustrate "love," led to disappointing, flowery-looking results; but when prompts were provided using Jesus' words about love, the images seemed deeper and more thoughtful. "You must ask the right questions," says Mostert (2021), "Given direction about who you are and who your audience is, AI can limit its search to appropriate sources." (p.45). For example, AI can quickly create a comprehensive resource for lawyers that even surpasses the huge volumes seen in offices, but the technology must be directed to appropriate sites for precedents, legislation, etc. "The hard work is in the limiting," says Mostert. "It's a huge IT undertaking." The Church Digital, (CD), a resource to help churches function in the digital space, shares content such as "Beginner's Guide for Using AI for Image Generation." Some posts are themselves generated by AI, with guidelines input by editors. The Church Digital sees AI as a time-saver, suggesting chatbots for routine questions such as service times; algorithms to match congregants to groups and events; and robotic monitoring of facility maintenance. As Mostert said that institutions are researching and receiving guidance on the impact of ChatGPT and similar programs on education, particularly Christian higher education. Anecdotally, a teacher who asked ChatGPT to write a secondary school student essay found it very similar to student essays in her experience, showing that educators at all levels will need to limit student access to AI during testing. Excluding inappropriate content is also a concern. On the positive side, carefully-designed AI-

assisted education could potentially revolutionize remote areas. Excessive use of AI isolates people from vital socialization and relationships (Gable,2022).

Research Methodology

The study, however, adopted descriptive survey research design method. The method assists the researchers to collect mixed factual information suitable in the data collection of both qualitative and quantitative study. The area of study covers Catholic and some selected Protestant churches. The researchers selected the churches and the respondents using ordinary least square (OLS) research analysis on the survey data .

The Population of the Study

The Population of this study is the Christian religion, Catholic and Protestant Churches in Awka capital territory, Anambra State, Nigeria. The researchers chose the area because of its high concentration of Christian communities.

The Table below has the figures of the aforementioned Protestant churches.

Table 1: Population size of the selected Protestant churches.

S/N	Name of the church and host community	No of Respondents	Total
1	St. Faith Anglican Cathedral, Awka	10	10
2	Holy Trinity Methodist Church, Awka	5	5
3	St. Peters Anglican Church, Amawbia	10	10
4	The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Dominion Arena, Awka	7	7
5	Assemblies of God Church, 133 Zk Avenue, Awka	6	6
6	Dominion City, Awka	5	5
7	Living Faith Church, Awka	10	10
8	Foundation Faith Church, Awka	7	7
9	Church of Pentecost, Awka	10	10
10	City of Transformation, Awka	9	9
	Total	79	79

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 1b: Population of the selected Catholic Churches in Awka

S/N	Name of Church and host community	No. of Respondents	Total
1	St. Mary Catholic Church, Awka	6	6
2	St. Gabriel's Catholic Church Okpuno, Awka	7	7
3	St. Anthony Catholic Church IfiteAwka	10	10
4	St. Joseph the worker Chaplaincy, Awka	6	6
5	St. Patrick's Cathedral, Awka	7	7
6	St. Jude Thaddeus Catholic Church, Awka	6	6
7	St. Thomas Catholic Church, Awka	7	7
8	Annunciation Catholic Church, Awka	10	10
9	St. John's Catholic Church, Awka	10	10
10	St. Felix Church Nise	10	10
	Total	79	79

Field Survey 2025

Table 2b: Population size of the selected Churches in Awka (Catholic and Protestants)

S/N	Name of Church denomination	No of Respondents	Total
1	Protestant Church denomination	79	79
2	Catholic Church denomination	79	79
	Total	79	79

Field Survey, 2025

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Due to inability of the researcher to study the whole population, the sample size was assessed using Taro Yamani Formula 1997. The sample size for the research work is 138 comprising 113 protestant church denominations and 25 Catholic churches

The sample size is determined as follows:

$$N = \frac{N}{1+N(e)2}$$

Where; N=Population of the study (190)
n= Sample size
e=level of significance (0.5)
=constant
Therefore:

$$n = \frac{190}{1+190\ (0.05)3}$$

$$n = \frac{190}{1+190\ (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{190}{1+0.375}$$

$$n = \frac{190}{1.375}$$

n=138

Data presentation of Analysis

The responses from the questionnaires were distributed in tabular forms and were analyzed and converted to frequencies and percentages. Likert scale measures the extent to which AI technology have benefitted the church to which an individual respondent agrees or disagrees with the question (Information Technology Services 2010). Agree, Strongly Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree and undecided. A total of 138 questionnaires were distributed to each of the selected churches (Catholic/Protestant). The questionnaires were properly filled and returned.

Below are the frequency tables:

Bio-Data of the Respondents

S/N	**Variables**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
1	**(Sex)**		
	Male	**90**	**65**
	Female	**48**	**35**
	Total	**138**	**100**
2	**Age**		
	Below 30 years	**20**	**14**
	31-40 years	**40**	**29**
	41-50 years	**30**	**25**
	51-60 years	**18**	**7**

	60 years and above	**30**	**25**
	Total	**138**	**100**
3	**Marital status**		
	Single	**70**	**51**
	Married	**68**	**49**
	Divorced	**……..**	**……**
4	**Educational qualification**		
	FSLC	**……..**	**……..**
	WAEC	**……..**	**……..**
	OND/NCE	**40**	**29**
	HND/B.Sc	**60**	**43**
	M.Sc/M.A	**38**	**28**
	Total	**138**	**100**

Source: Field Survey 2025

The above table shows that 65% of the respondents are male, while 35% of them are female. Their age brackets are below 30 years. 31-40 years, 41-50 years, 51-60 years, and above. This represents the percentage value of 14%, 29%, 25%, 7% and 25% of the respondents are single, while 49% are married. Moreover, 29% of the respondents obtained OND/NCE, 43% got HND/B.Sc and 28% bagged M.Sc/MA

Table 4.1 Respondents opinion suggesting that AI Platforms are beneficial to church services and programmes

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Agree	58	42
Strongly Agree	60	43
Disagree	4	3
Strongly Disagree	…….	……..
Undecided	16	12
Total	138	100

Source: Field Survey 2025

The above table shows that 42% of the respondents agreed that AI Platforms are beneficial to church services and programmes, 43% strongly agreed, 3% disagreed and 12% undecided.

Table 4.2 Respondents opinion suggesting that AI Platforms contributed to the facilitation of church administration and management.

Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Agree	60	43
Strongly Agree	58	42
Disagree	…….	…….
Strongly Disagree	…….	……..
Undecided	20	15
Total	138	100

Field Survey, 2025

From the table above, it was observed that 43% of the respondents agreed that AI Platforms contributed to the facilitation of church administration and management, 42% Strongly agreed while 15% undecided.

Table 4.3:Respondents on the opinion of AI having potential for opportunity

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	70	51
Strongly Agree	60	43
Disagree	……..	…….
Strongly Disagree	……..	……..
Undecided	8	6
Total	138	100

Field Survey, 2025

The table indicates that 51% of the respondents Agree that AI have potential for opportunity, 43% strongly agreed while 8% are undecided.

Discussion on the Respondents Opinion on the Benefits and Opportunities of AI Applications in the Church's Context

Based on the respondent's opinions on the benefits of AI applications reveals on how it can enhance various aspects of church ministry and community engagement. It was gathered that AI-powered tools can help create personalized worship playlists, lyrics, or prayers. AI-Powered chatbots can assist with routine communication, such as responding to frequently asked questions or scheduling appointments (Peck, 2019) AI-powered analysts can help churches understand member engagement, indentify trends, and develop targeted outreach strategies. Above all, the use of AI can enhance the overall ministry of the church by engaging their communities to further their mission (Justin, 2020,Cool Hus 2021, Gable 2022,and Wendorf,2023). Below are some of the identified benefits of AI Programmes:

(i). Automated Sermon Creation Assistance

The key word is 'assistance.' AI will never replace the passion, deep biblical knowledge, and in-depth understanding pastors bring to sermons. Crafting your weekly sermon takes extensive energy, dedication, and time. Where AI has a key role to play in sermon creation is by assisting the preacher in his/her research and topic generation. AI can read thousands of books and articles in a fraction of the time a person does, making AI a great partner in finding sources of inspiration to craft sermons that deeply resonate and yield a positive result. AI can also help one draft an outline that fits the time-frame that one have, meaning less practice and editing for one's in depth study of God's word (Afolabi, 2018, Duncan, 2019 and Vega, 2021).

(ii). Digital Congregation Support

Churches will be doing an amazing job working through all of the questions their Congregation and the community at-large sends their way. Adding an AI-driven chatbot can lessen the load– and Chatbots are 'always on.' That means when someone interested in learning more about a given church lands on the church's website and find the desired answers they need in real-time, Chatbots can also provide an automated yet personalized greeting to visitors as soon as they enter a church's website, complete with information about services, upcoming events, and contact information for church staff, leading to higher touch points \throughout the lifecycle (Gable, 2022).

AI-enabled data analysis provides one with valuable insight into how one's congregation members are engaging with church activities, giving one the opportunity to tailor support services and events to meet the changing needs of one's ever-growing congregation. With AI analyzing trends in a church, presenting one insights on attendance patterns and online engagement, one will be able to lean into topics a congregation is most interested in hearing about (Vega, 2021 and Wendorf, 2023).

Churches can be visited in their website dedicated to AI for Church Marketing where one will find dozens of free resources to help one use AI to improve efficiency and drive engagement at a given church. Blogs, AI tool reviews, faith-based AI stacks, can be useful Sermon AI Apps (Bradbury,2023 and Appiah, 2024).

With AI one can create digital campaigns tailored specifically to a selected target audience. For example, in the case of Church Bible Camp for kids, AI can leverage data analytics to Help create a targeted campaign to help in reaching out members in the community with kids. And AI can help customize the messaging of the campaign. A huge bonus is that many AI technologies offer scoring modules in showing the likelihood that a language will resonate with the selected audience.

(iii). Blog And Content Creation

AI can be used to create relevant content tailored to a specific target audience, such as blogs and articles about a church and its services. It can also be used to create visually appealing digital advertisements for churches that reach out to potential members, using targeted messaging and demographic data to ensure maximum impact! (Cool huh (2021).

From data entry to marketing outreach, every church faces a wide range of repetitive tasks.

A church can automate some of these items and free up precious time for the congregation to focus on more important projects. Like spending time in reading the Bible and prayer. A virtual assistant is one example here. Virtual assistants can schedule meetings and manage Emails (Smart, 2020 and Lavner, 2024).All of these work toward driving church growth. AI-driven analytics tools can uncover trends, like which age group is more likely to attend events or which campaigns resonate the most with one's congregation. This helps one focus on the strategies that will have the biggest impact.

Above all, AI enables a church to focus more on the high needs area where the church is situated. It can help them in scheduling counseling, guiding, and spending time one-on-one with congregation. New AI tools that support church marketing efforts are launching daily – many of them can help one bring more people to Christ. In other words, the Church can better spread the Gospel of Christ to its members more effectively through an artificial intelligence. AI is useful in transforming church marketing, and to spread the Gospel more effectively than ever before (Marga,2020, Monstart, 2021 and Bradbury, 2023).

Results/Findings

AI is creating crossroads for pastors and church leaders across denominations. The results of the survey conducted by Nnatuanya (2025), indicate that many respondents see value in AI as a time-saving tool, but 54% stated they are "quite" to "extremely" concerned about ethical or moral issues related to its use in church ministry; another 40% are "slightly" to "somewhat" concerned. Broadly, common responses and concerns from 50% respondents from New Generation churches selected from the major cities in Nigeria are summarized thus: AI is a tool that can save time, but must be used within an overall Biblical framework. About 20% says that AI can help pastors stay updated about member concerns, allowing for more personalized pastoral care. The other 30% says that church leaders must strike balance between leveraging AI for efficiency and maintaining the personal touch that is essential ministry.

Moreover, about 45 respondents interviewed from Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches, 38 of them were of the view that AI should supplement, not, replace, the rational and spiritual role of pastors and church leaders. About 7 of them say that churches should regularly evaluate the impact of AI on their ministry and make adjustments as needed. Consequently, about 55% respondents, drawn from both mainline and New Generation churches maintained that providing training and support for staff and volunteers can effectively help them integrate AI into their work while maintaining a human centred approach. In summary, the majority of the respondents, both pastors and lay Christians affirmed that AI can help pastors automate routine tasks like scheduling data entry, and communication, freeing up pastors and volunteers to focus on meaningful interactions and spiritual support. Below is the statistics that summarized the views of 20 pastors (Catholic and protestant churches) as regards to the use of AI in church administration and management. Based on their submissions as shown by the statistical report, the greater percentage of the respondents affirm that usefulness of AI-powered platforms, insisting that AI should supplement, not replace, the relational role of pastors and church leaders.

Table 1:Data analysis on the **Benefits of Incorporating AI tools in Churches Context**

S/N	Item Description	No of Pastors in Agreemennt	Total number of Pastors	Decision
1	**AI platform can support church communities and guarantee church growth**	**14**	**20**	**SA(Strongly Agree)**
	AI can help churches tailor their needs and preferences	**15**	**20**	**A (Agree)**
3.	**AI is a distraction to the church and can impede spiritual connection**	**8**	**20**	**D (Disagree)**
4	**AI should supplement, not replace, the relational and spiritual role of pastors and church leaders**	**15**	**20**	**SA (Strongly Agree)**

Field Survey, 2025

The inference from the table means that 14 out of 20 pastors interviewed strongly agrees that AI Platform can support church communities and guarantee church growth. A total number of 15 pastors agrees that AI can help churches tailor their needs and preferences. 8 pastors disagrees that AI is a distraction to the church and can impede spiritual connection while 15 of them strongly Agrees that AI should supplement and not replace, the relational and spiritual role of pastors and church leaders.

Table 2: Key Respondents (Oral Communication)

S/N	Name	Occupation	Age	Date Interviewed
1	Augustine UzonduNnonyelu	Civil Servant	48	8/04/2025
2	Moses Damian Modebelu	Contractor	66	5/7/2024
3	Paul UzoamakaOkoye	Retired Civil Servant	70	12/12/2024
4	Rev. GeophreyNwezeoku	Clergy	67	12/12/2024
5	Timothy OsonduNwankwo	Retired Teacher	65	8/1/2025
6	Dr. Boniface Ekweremadu	Lecturing	69	5/8/2023
7	Pastor. Enem Ignatius	Clergy	54	6/7/2022

Conclusion

While AI certainly offers many benefits and has unlimited potential, it also presents challenges that we need to carefully navigate. By addressing these concerns head-on, promoting transparency, ethics, and collaboration, we can harness the power of AI to drive innovation, improve efficiency, and create a better future. Issues and challenges in artificial intelligence must be approached with caution but should not be a blocker to all of its benefits.

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INSECURITY AND AGRICULTURAL DECLINE: A CASE STUDY OF YAM PRODUCTION IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA (2015–2023)

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Abstract

This study critically examined the impact of prolonged insecurity on yam production in Benue State, Nigeria, from 2015 to 2023. Drawing from the human security theory, the research explored how persistent conflict—particularly farmer-herder violence—has contributed to agricultural decline in one of Nigeria's most vital food-producing regions. Unlike previous studies that adopted broad analyses of rural insecurity, this research focused specifically on yam, offering a more detailed understanding of the disruptions in its production cycle. Using a qualitative methodology, data were collected from secondary sources and supplemented with 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with key informants, including security personnel and journalists. Content analysis was employed to interpret the findings. The study revealed a marked decline in yam output directly linked to ongoing insecurity, with rural communities experiencing severe livelihood disruptions and economic losses. Furthermore, it identified critical policy and security gaps that have hindered agricultural recovery efforts. These findings highlighted that insecurity in Benue State is not merely a security issue but a significant barrier to food security, rural development, and national economic sustainability. The study concluded with policy recommendations aimed at reinforcing security infrastructure, supporting displaced farmers, and developing integrated agricultural-security frameworks centered on peace building and resilience.

Keywords: *Insecurity, Agricultural Decline, Yam Production, Benue State, Nigeria, Food Security*

Introduction

Insecurity has become one of the most pervasive threats to agricultural productivity in Nigeria, especially in regions that historically served as the nation's agricultural hubs (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Adewumi & Adebayo, 2020). The Middle Belt region, particularly Benue State—regarded as the "Food Basket of the Nation"—has been severely affected by incessant violent conflicts, ranging from herder-farmer clashes to rural banditry and communal violence (International Crisis Group, 2017; Ezeani, 2018). Between 2015 and 2023, Nigeria witnessed an alarming increase in the

frequency, intensity, and geographical spread of violent attacks, many of which occurred in rural farming areas (Nte, 2020). Internal insecurity, particularly herdsmen and farmers clashes in the country, has become the defining characteristic of the Nigerian political scene which takes a recurring turn on the very fabrics of the Nigerian State (Okeke, 2022a). The development has triggered a downward spiral in agricultural production, particularly in yam cultivation, which is a staple crop and economic mainstay for many farming households in Benue.

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED, 2022), Benue State recorded over 800 conflict-related fatalities and dozens of internally displaced persons (IDPs) between 2015 and 2022 due to violent herder-farmer clashes. The Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA, 2021) estimated that over 1.5 million people in Benue have been displaced by conflict-related violence since 2016, with the majority being rural farmers. These displacements have had severe implications for yam production, given that yam farming is labor-intensive and dependent on land accessibility, stability, and secure rural settlements (Mbachu, 2021). When communities are forced to flee their lands due to insecurity, farmlands are abandoned, harvests are disrupted, and the entire agricultural value chain is negatively affected.

Yam remains one of the most significant crops cultivated in Benue State, contributing to both food security and local economic stability. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), Nigeria is the largest producer of yam globally, accounting for over 60% of global production, with Benue State alone responsible for over 35% of the nation's yam output. However, by 2021, yam production in Benue declined by more than 20% compared to 2015 levels, a decrease linked largely to insecurity, as reported by the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (2022). This decline is not merely a statistical concern but a significant developmental threat, as it compromises food availability, farmer incomes, and the state's agro-based economy.

The rise of armed herdsmen attacks and the proliferation of illegal arms in Nigeria have worsened the insecurity challenge. Between 2016 and 2018, over 400 deaths were attributed to herder-farmer conflicts in Benue alone, with the deadliest attack occurring in January 2018, leading to the death of over 70 people in Logo and Guma local government areas (Vanguard, 2018). This incident prompted the Benue State Government to implement the Anti-Open Grazing Law in 2017, aimed at curbing nomadic herding and reducing farmer-herder clashes. However, rather than alleviating the situation, the law was met with resistance and further escalated tensions in the state, leading to retaliatory violence and increased insecurity (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015).

In addition, the broader context of Nigeria's failure to decisively address rural insecurity through policy intervention and security sector reforms has compounded the problem. The internal insecurity challenges have shown no signs of abating while efforts to tackle them have yielded little or no results (Okeke, 2022b). As noted by Ezeoha (2022), the federal government's inadequate security presence in volatile rural communities, coupled with limited access to justice and ineffective intelligence gathering, has left many farming communities vulnerable to attacks. These structural weaknesses create an enabling environment for armed groups and criminal elements to thrive, thereby driving down agricultural productivity. Consequently, the collapse of agricultural infrastructure and the abandonment of farms have become defining features of rural life in Benue, undermining national food security and rural development (Ajibo, 2020).

The magnitude of the crisis is further amplified by the fact that yam farming in Benue is not only a subsistence activity but also an economic enterprise that supports trade, transport, and rural livelihoods. Mbachu (2021) notes that a decline in yam production directly affects household income, local markets, and agricultural exports. With the growing threats of climate change, economic instability, and insecurity, the resilience of rural agriculture in Nigeria faces increasing challenges, particularly in conflict-prone areas like Benue.

Understanding how yam farmers have experienced and responded to the insecurity crisis, as well as identifying the patterns of agricultural decline, is essential for designing responsive policies, promoting food security, and ensuring the sustainability of rural livelihoods in Nigeria. This study, therefore, seeks to provide a comprehensive case analysis of how insecurity has reshaped yam

production in Benue State over the past eight years and the implications for broader national agricultural development goals.

Literature Review

The Dynamics of Insecurity and its Socioeconomic Impact on Rural Agrarian Communities

Insecurity in rural agrarian communities presents one of the most critical challenges to sustainable agricultural development in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria being a prime example. Over the past decade, Nigeria has witnessed an alarming escalation of violence, particularly in its agrarian zones where farming remains the mainstay of livelihoods. The rural communities of Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation," epitomize this challenge, especially in the context of yam production, which is both a cultural staple and an economic backbone for millions (Ajibo, 2020; Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2020).

The impact of insecurity on the socioeconomic well-being of rural communities cannot be overstated. Agrarian households, whose survival depends almost entirely on the cultivation of crops such as yam, maize, and cassava, have borne the brunt of these conflicts. Yam, in particular, holds a unique place in the economy and culture of Benue State, accounting for over 60% of total agricultural output in the region and contributing approximately 15% to Nigeria's national yam production (Ajibo, 2020; National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). However, the disruption caused by insecurity has led to a staggering decline in yam production, with NBS data indicating a reduction of about 30% in yam yields from 2015 to 2020 in Benue State's major yam-producing local government areas such as Guma, Kwande, and Ukum (NBS, 2022). This decline is largely attributable to the destruction of farmlands, restricted access to farming inputs, and the forced migration of farming populations due to violent attacks (FAO, 2020).

Moreover, insecurity impacts not only agricultural output but also the broader rural economy. The destruction of infrastructure—rural roads, storage facilities, and marketplaces—further constrains the ability of farmers to access inputs and bring produce to markets. This logistical challenge inflates production costs and reduces profit margins, pushing many smallholder farmers into poverty (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). For example, market disruptions during violent episodes in 2018 and 2019 led to a 20-25% increase in yam prices in Benue's capital, Makurdi, exacerbating food insecurity among vulnerable urban and rural populations (United Nations Development Programme \[UNDP], 2019). This inflationary trend also impacts national food security since Benue supplies yam to multiple Nigerian states and neighboring countries.

Institutional responses to insecurity in Benue State have been inconsistent and, at times, inadequate. In 2017, the Benue State government promulgated the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law, aiming to curtail clashes by banning open grazing and promoting ranching (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). However, enforcement has faced resistance from pastoralist groups and has sometimes escalated tensions, complicating conflict resolution efforts. Security agencies have been criticized for their slow response and lack of presence in remote agrarian areas, undermining confidence among rural populations (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The lack of effective policing and judicial mechanisms has allowed impunity for perpetrators of violence, fueling a cycle of insecurity and retaliation. As Okeke (2024) puts it, development cannot be achieved where there are conflicts, yet achieving national development remains a goal of successive Nigerian governments (Okeke, 2020).

The socioeconomic implications extend to rural poverty and food insecurity. Benue State, while rich in agricultural potential, paradoxically experiences high rates of poverty among rural populations, largely attributed to the cyclical nature of insecurity and agricultural decline (World Bank, 2021). The United Nations Development Programme (2019) reports that food insecurity indicators in Benue rose by 15% between 2016 and 2020, with rural households bearing the brunt of this increase. The decline in yam production not only reduces food availability but also diminishes household incomes, limiting access to health, education, and other essential services. This situation perpetuates a vicious cycle where poverty and insecurity reinforce each other.

Governmental and non-governmental interventions aimed at resolving insecurity and revitalizing agriculture have met with mixed success. While security operations have been intensified in affected areas, the lack of community trust and coordination has limited their effectiveness (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Development programs often struggle to penetrate insecure zones, restricting access to critical inputs and extension services necessary for yam production enhancement (FAO, 2020). Additionally, the absence of comprehensive land reforms and effective conflict resolution mechanisms perpetuates competition over resources, making sustainable peace elusive. Climate change further complicates this dynamic by exacerbating resource scarcity since Benue State has experienced erratic rainfall patterns and prolonged dry seasons in recent years, reducing water availability and arable land (Igbokwe & Adeosun, 2021). These environmental stresses intensify conflicts between farmers and herders, who compete for dwindling resources, thereby deepening insecurity and agricultural decline. The nexus between environmental degradation, insecurity, and agricultural productivity highlights the multidimensional nature of challenges facing Benue's rural agrarian communities.

Determinants and Consequences of Agricultural Decline in Conflict-Affected Regions

Agricultural decline in regions afflicted by conflict represents a complex interplay of structural, social, and political determinants that ultimately disrupt food systems and rural livelihoods. In the context of Benue State, Nigeria, the sustained insecurity largely stemming from ethno-communal clashes, farmer-herder conflicts, and militant activities has had a profound impact on yam production, a staple crop critical to both local sustenance and the regional economy (Adeniyi, 2019). Understanding the determinants of agricultural decline in such conflict-affected areas is crucial to grasping the broader socioeconomic consequences faced by rural communities.

One of the primary determinants of agricultural decline in conflict zones is direct physical destruction of farmland and farming assets. Armed clashes often result in the burning of crops, destruction of irrigation infrastructure, and damage to farm equipment, leading to immediate losses in productivity (Ezeani & Nweze, 2021). In Benue State, multiple incidents between 2015 and 2023 have been documented where farms were deliberately targeted in violent raids, resulting in millions of naira worth of damage. For instance, the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that over 30% of farming households in affected areas lost significant portions of their yam farms to conflict-related destruction between 2018 and 2021. Such devastation not only reduces the current harvest but also compromises future planting cycles due to the loss of seeds and soil degradation.

Another determinant lies in the displacement of farming communities. The violence has forced thousands of farmers to flee their homes and lands, sometimes for prolonged periods, disrupting farming calendars and labor availability (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021), Benue State experienced an estimated 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) at the peak of farmer-herder conflicts between 2017 and 2019. These displacements interrupt access to farmland and agricultural inputs, reduce labor force participation, and erode social capital essential for collective farming activities. Consequently, yam production, which is labor-intensive and dependent on timely planting and harvesting, suffers significant setbacks.

The breakdown of rural infrastructure and market systems further compounds agricultural decline. Conflicts in Benue State have impaired access roads and transportation networks, limiting farmers' ability to bring produce to markets (World Bank, 2021). With inadequate security, many traders avoid conflict zones, reducing market access and depressing prices for agricultural goods. This economic disincentive discourages farmers from investing in production or diversifying crops, leading to stagnation or decline. The Food and Agriculture Organization (2020) highlights that market disruptions in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria have caused post-harvest losses of up to 25%, severely impacting farmers' incomes. Additionally, insecurity disrupts the provision of critical agricultural services such as extension, credit, and input supply. Extension workers and agricultural support agencies often avoid insecure areas, creating a vacuum in knowledge transfer and technology dissemination (NBS, 2022). Furthermore, financial institutions may hesitate to lend to

farmers in volatile regions due to perceived risks, limiting access to capital for purchasing seeds, fertilizers, and equipment (Ajibo, 2020). The cumulative effect is a decline in agricultural productivity and innovation, particularly in yam cultivation, which requires specialized knowledge for disease control and optimal yield.

Environmental degradation exacerbated by conflict also plays a determinative role. Shifts in land use patterns, often driven by displacement and uncontrolled grazing, lead to soil depletion and reduced fertility (Igbokwe & Adeosun, 2021). The open grazing of cattle in farmlands not only destroys crops but also depletes the topsoil necessary for yam tuber growth. Climate variability, including erratic rainfall and prolonged droughts, intersects with conflict to intensify these environmental pressures (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). The combined effect is a gradual but sustained decline in agricultural productivity, posing long-term risks to food security. The consequences of agricultural decline in conflict-affected regions are multifaceted and profound. At the household level, reduced yam production directly threatens food availability and nutrition, as yam remains a dietary staple in Benue State and much of Nigeria (National Population Commission, 2020). Decreased yields lead to food shortages, higher prices, and increased reliance on food aid. The World Food Programme (2022) indicates that conflict-affected households in Benue experienced a 20% rise in food insecurity between 2017 and 2021, a clear reflection of declining agricultural outputs.

Economically, agricultural decline translates into diminished rural incomes and heightened poverty. Agriculture employs over 70% of Benue's rural population, making it the backbone of local economies (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Declining yam production reduces household earnings, limits reinvestment in farming activities, and curtails spending on education and healthcare. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break without comprehensive interventions. The World Bank (2021) notes that poverty rates in conflict-affected rural areas of Nigeria are approximately 15 percentage points higher than in more secure regions, a disparity closely linked to agricultural performance.

On a broader scale, agricultural decline in conflict zones poses national food security challenges. Nigeria, as Africa's largest producer of yam, contributes significantly to regional food markets and export potentials (Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2020). Declines in production in Benue, a key yam-producing state, have ripple effects on national food supplies and trade balances. According to the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (2022), yam exports declined by 10% between 2017 and 2021, partly attributed to production losses in conflict-affected states like Benue. Such trends threaten Nigeria's goal of agricultural self-sufficiency and rural economic development. In addition to immediate impacts, the decline in yam production has broader implications for rural development and national economic goals. Agriculture constitutes about 23% of Nigeria's GDP, with yam production representing a significant share of crop output, particularly in Benue, known as Nigeria's "food basket" (National Population Commission, 2020). The reduction in yam yields due to conflict-related disruptions undermines efforts to promote agricultural commercialization and rural income diversification. Between 2015 and 2023, agricultural GDP growth in Benue lagged behind the national average by approximately 4%, partly due to insecurity (National Bureau of2022). This gap hinders poverty reduction efforts and stalls progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those targeting zero hunger and economic growth.

Economic, Cultural, and Food Security Implications of Yam Production in Benue State

Yam production holds a pivotal position in the socioeconomic and cultural fabric of Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation" in Nigeria due to its rich agricultural endowment (National Bureau of Statistics \[NBS], 2022). The prominence of yam in this region transcends mere agricultural activity, embedding itself deeply within the local economy, cultural identity, and food security matrix. This analysis examines the multifaceted role yam production plays in Benue State, contextualized within the broader research topic of insecurity and agricultural decline, with a focus on how yam production influences economic livelihoods, cultural heritage, and the state's food security profile.

Economically, yam production in Benue State is a cornerstone for rural livelihoods and local markets. The crop contributes substantially to household incomes, employment, and trade. According to NBS (2022), agriculture accounts for approximately 70% of employment in Benue, with yam farming constituting a significant portion. It is estimated that Benue produces over 2.5 million metric tonnes of yam annually, making it one of the largest yam-producing states in Nigeria (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021). The commercial value of yam extends beyond local consumption, as surplus production is traded across Nigeria and exported to neighboring countries, thereby contributing to state revenue and rural development (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015).

The economic significance of yam is further highlighted by its role in sustaining agro-based industries such as yam processing, storage, and marketing. Small-scale industries that process yam into flour, chips, and other derivatives provide additional employment opportunities and enhance the value chain, which is vital for poverty alleviation in rural Benue (FAO, 2021). However, these economic gains face serious threats from insecurity-induced agricultural decline. The recurring violence and herder-farmer conflicts have disrupted production cycles, leading to a decline in output and income losses. Between 2015 and 2023, reported attacks in farming communities led to an estimated 30% reduction in yam yield in affected areas, translating into significant economic setbacks for farmers and traders alike (Benue State Agricultural Development Programme, 2023).

The diminished yam production has profound implications for livelihoods and poverty levels in the region. Most farmers in Benue operate at subsistence levels with minimal capital investment, making them highly vulnerable to the shocks of violence and crop losses (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015). The United Nations Development Programme (2020) reports that more than 60% of rural households in Benue rely primarily on yam farming for their income. With the repeated destruction of farms and forced migration, many households have faced decreased earning power and increased poverty, exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities. Women and youth, who constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labor force, have been disproportionately affected, often lacking alternative income sources or social safety nets (FAO, 2020). The consequences of agricultural decline in yam production extend beyond immediate food shortages and economic losses. They contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty, migration, and further conflict. Displaced farmers often move to urban areas or other rural communities, increasing pressure on limited resources and sometimes sparking new tensions over land and livelihood opportunities (UNDP, 2020). Furthermore, the decline in agricultural productivity may increase dependency on food imports, weakening local food systems and undermining national food sovereignty (Okoli & Atelhe, 2015).

Culturally, yam is more than a food crop in Benue State; it is a symbol of identity, tradition, and communal cohesion. The annual New Yam Festival, celebrated with great fervor, marks the end of the farming season and the beginning of harvest. This festival, deeply entrenched in Tiv and Idoma cultures, not only serves as a thanksgiving event to deities and ancestors but also reinforces social bonds and collective identity (Iro & Nduka, 2019). Yam holds spiritual significance, symbolizing prosperity and fertility, and features prominently in rituals, marriages, and communal ceremonies. The cultural weight of yam production makes any disruption in its cultivation more than an economic loss—it signifies a threat to cultural continuity and social stability (Okpara & Achi, 2020). The relationship between yam production and cultural identity also implies that insecurity, which leads to agricultural decline, indirectly erodes cultural practices and traditions linked to the crop. Displacement of farming communities due to violence has disrupted the cycle of planting and harvesting and consequently affected traditional festivals and communal activities (Ezeani & Nweze, 2021). The loss of such cultural expressions further weakens community resilience and social capital, elements critical for peacebuilding and sustainable development in conflict-prone regions.

Theoretical Framework

In the course of this study, the researchers adopted the human security theory to succinctly explain the study. The human security theory was popularized by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report, emphasizing the security of individuals over states. Key proponents include Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen, and Kofi Annan, who contributed to the theory's development and application.

The human security theory provides a significant theoretical framework in political science, emphasizing a shift from traditional, state-centric security concerns to a people-centered approach. Unlike traditional security, which prioritizes the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, human security seeks to safeguard individuals from chronic threats, including poverty, disease, and political violence (UNDP, 1994). This perspective emerged from a growing recognition of the limitations of state-centric frameworks, especially in contexts where internal threats, such as ethnic conflicts, environmental disasters, or economic crises, present more immediate dangers to individuals than interstate wars (Tadjbakhsh & Chenoy, 2007).

Fundamentally, human security is rooted in the idea that security cannot be fully achieved without addressing the underlying vulnerabilities that make individuals susceptible to harm (King & Murray, 2001). This framework expands the notion of security to include economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security. Such an inclusive definition highlights how human security operates on multiple fronts, pushing for a holistic approach that addresses the intersections of security threats (Alkire, 2003). Political science scholars have noted the theory's applicability across various domains, making it versatile for understanding issues ranging from global poverty and humanitarian crises to refugee flows and terrorism (Paris, 2001).

The adoption of human security in political science also underscores the responsibility of states and international organizations in ensuring the well-being of individuals, aligning with humanitarian principles and human rights agendas. For instance, the United Nations' promotion of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine reflects the influence of human security by prioritizing the protection of individuals over sovereignty concerns when states fail to shield their populations from mass atrocities (Evans & Sahnoun, 2001). However, critiques argue that human security's broad scope may dilute its conceptual clarity, potentially making it difficult to operationalize (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006). Nevertheless, the human security theory continues to serve as a valuable tool in political science for addressing the evolving nature of global and domestic security challenges in the 21st century.

Application of the Theory

The human security theory offers a highly relevant and insightful framework for analyzing the research topic, "Insecurity and Agricultural Decline: A Case Study of Yam Production in Benue State, Nigeria (2015–2023)." Applying human security theory to this research allows a comprehensive examination of how insecurity transcends conventional militarized violence to encompass broader socio-economic vulnerabilities that affect farmers' livelihoods and food systems. In Benue State, repeated attacks by armed groups, clashes between herders and farmers, and general lawlessness have heightened personal insecurity, disrupted farming cycles, and destroyed farmlands and infrastructure (Adesoji, 2020). These disruptions not only threaten physical safety but also erode economic security by reducing agricultural productivity and income, thus exacerbating poverty and food shortages (Obi, 2021). The theory's focus on economic and food security is particularly pertinent, as yam production in Benue State is a vital source of livelihood, cultural identity, and nutrition for millions of people. The decline in yam farming due to insecurity directly compromises community well-being and regional food security, highlighting the inseparability of these dimensions of human security.

Furthermore, human security theory highlights the role of the state and international actors in protecting individuals from harm and ensuring conditions for sustainable development (King &

Murray, 2001). In Benue State, the failure of state institutions to effectively manage insecurity and protect farmers reflects a governance deficit that worsens vulnerabilities (Adebayo, 2019). The inability to provide adequate security creates a climate of fear that discourages agricultural investments and innovation, thereby deepening the cycle of decline. Additionally, the theory's recognition of the interconnectedness of security threats draws attention to environmental security issues, such as land degradation and resource competition, which are often exacerbated by conflict and contribute to agricultural decline (Onuoha, 2017). By situating insecurity within a broader web of social, economic, and environmental challenges, human security theory advocates for integrated policy responses that address both immediate protection needs and structural causes of vulnerability.

Research Methodology

This study employed qualitative research method, specifically utilizing explanatory research design to explore the topic. It adopted documentary mechanism of data collection and utilized content analysis method to identify and interpret specified characteristics of messages within documents.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Insecurity and Yam Production in Benue State

Between 2015 and 2023, yam production in Benue State declined sharply as a direct consequence of persistent insecurity, primarily driven by violent conflicts between farmers and herders. Benue State, often referred to as Nigeria's "Food Basket," traditionally contributed over 40% of the nation's yam supply. However, according to agricultural reports, yam output in the state dropped by nearly 35% from 2017 to 2022. The years 2018 and 2020 marked peaks in violent clashes, especially in areas such as Guma and Logo local government areas, where over 25,000 hectares of yam farms were reportedly destroyed or abandoned. These conflicts resulted in the displacement of approximately 100,000 farming households, many of whom fled their farms to avoid attacks, thereby disrupting planting and harvesting cycles. The diminished yam yield not only affected local consumption but also threatened food security across Nigeria and neighboring countries that depend on Benue's agricultural produce for supply.

Economic Losses and Livelihood Disruptions among Benue Farming Communities

The decline in yam production had far-reaching economic consequences for rural communities in Benue State. Between 2015 and 2023, it is estimated that losses in the yam sector exceeded ₦15 billion (approximately \$40 million), factoring in lost harvests, damaged infrastructure, and increased expenses related to security measures and displacement. The repeated destruction of farms caused many farmers to abandon their traditional livelihoods, forcing at least 70,000 individuals into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, particularly in the 2018 conflict surge. The scarcity of yam led to price increases of up to 50% in regional markets by 2021, negatively impacting household food budgets and creating inflationary pressures. The migration of farming laborers further diminished the agricultural workforce, weakening productivity and delaying recovery efforts. The disruption of yam farming also affected ancillary economic activities such as transportation, processing, and trade, which supported thousands of households, thereby deepening rural poverty and food insecurity. Furthermore, insecurity adversely affects agricultural investments and innovations, critical components for improving productivity in Benue State's yam sector. Farmers are generally reluctant to invest in improved seeds, fertilizers, and mechanized farming techniques due to fears of losing assets to violence or displacement (FAO, 2020). According to a 2019 survey by the Nigerian Agricultural Extension Service, over 45% of farmers in conflict-affected areas of Benue reported a decline in the adoption of improved yam farming practices compared to 2015 (NBS, 2022). This stagnation compromises the sector's ability to meet growing food demands and adapt to environmental changes such as soil degradation and shifting rainfall patterns.

Inadequate Security Measures and Agriculture Policy Gaps

Efforts by the Nigerian government and security agencies to mitigate the impact of insecurity on yam production between 2015 and 2023 were largely reactive and insufficient. In 2018, military operations such as "Operation Safe Haven" aimed to restore peace but were only partially effective, as conflicts persisted in critical farming zones. Agricultural policies, including subsidy programs and extension services launched under the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture, struggled to reach displaced or at-risk farmers, with reports showing less than 30% program penetration among affected communities by 2022. The failure to establish a coordinated strategy between security agencies and agricultural authorities meant that farmers received little protection or support to rebuild their livelihoods. Additionally, lack of investment in conflict resolution mechanisms or community-based peacebuilding efforts left the root causes of insecurity unaddressed. As a result, yam production recovery remained fragile and sporadic, with significant vulnerability to renewed violence continuing through 2023.

The inability of successive Nigerian governments to effectively address rural insecurity has exacerbated this trend. For instance, the herder-farmer conflict in Benue escalated sharply in 2016, peaking in January 2018 with the killing of over 70 people in Guma and Logo Local Government Areas by suspected herdsmen (Vanguard, 2018). These attacks led to the mass displacement of thousands of yam farmers, the destruction of barns, and the abandonment of vast tracts of arable land (NEMA, 2021). Despite the enactment of the Benue State Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law in 2017, violent reprisals have continued, indicating a deeper systemic failure to manage the security-agriculture nexus effectively (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Furthermore, insecurity has significantly altered the traditional seasonal farming calendar, created food supply chain disruptions, and worsened poverty among yam-farming households. According to Ajibo (2020), many farmers now live in IDP camps or urban slums where they are unable to engage in productive agricultural activities. The long-term implications of this situation include food inflation, increased dependence on food imports, rising unemployment, and growing malnutrition in both rural and urban areas (Olaniyan & Okeke-Uzodike, 2018). These issues are compounded by a lack of targeted state intervention, weak rural infrastructure, and minimal support for farmers affected by conflict.

Conclusion

Insecurity remains a profound challenge undermining agricultural productivity and food security in Benue State, particularly impacting yam production. The persistent conflicts, especially between farmers and herders, have led to widespread displacement, destruction of farmlands, and significant economic losses for rural communities. This research underscores the urgent need for a multidimensional approach to addressing the nexus between insecurity and agricultural decline. Strengthening security infrastructure tailored to rural agrarian zones, alongside community policing initiatives, is essential to protect farmlands and farmers during critical agricultural seasons. Additionally, economic support programs targeting displaced farmers can restore livelihoods, promote resilience, and stabilize food supply chains. Moreover, integrated policy frameworks combining security, agricultural development, and peacebuilding efforts offer a promising path toward sustainable resolution. By fostering collaboration among government agencies, local communities, and security forces, Benue State can better manage conflicts and revitalize yam production. Ultimately, addressing insecurity in agricultural areas is not only vital for the economic well-being of farmers but also crucial for ensuring food security and social stability in the region. A concerted effort grounded in human security principles can transform these challenges into opportunities for inclusive growth and lasting peace.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Strengthen Security Infrastructure and Community Policing in Agricultural Zones
To mitigate the severe decline in yam production caused by insecurity, particularly in hotspots like Guma and Logo local government areas, there is an urgent need to enhance security measures focused on protecting agricultural zones. For example, the establishment of local vigilante groups, supported by formal security agencies, has shown promise in parts of southern Kaduna, where community policing helped reduce herder-farmer clashes by approximately 40% between 2019 and 2021. Implementing similar models in Benue could improve surveillance and early warning mechanisms, helping to prevent violent incidents during critical farming periods. Data from the Nigerian Security Tracker reveals that rural violence spikes during planting (April–June) and harvesting (September–November) seasons; thus, focused security deployment during these times could protect an estimated 25,000 hectares of yam farms. This approach can significantly reduce displacement and crop losses, helping to stabilize production levels.

2. Implement Economic Support and Livelihood Restoration Programs for Displaced Farmers
There is need to expand outreach to farmers through mobile extension services and cash transfer programs as a way to restore livelihoods more effectively. Targeted cash grants and distribution of yam seedlings to 10,000 displaced farmers in affected areas could boost planting capacity by up to 20%, helping to stabilize supply and reduce price inflation, which surged by 50% during periods of acute scarcity.

3. Develop Integrated Security and Agricultural Policy Frameworks with Emphasis on Peace building
The Peace and Security Framework adopted in Plateau State which integrates security enforcement with community dialogue and agricultural support can be utilized to provide a blueprint for Benue state. Also, establishing a task force that comprising officials of the Ministry of Agriculture, security agencies, and civil society organizations can assist to improve policy coherence. Investing in conflict resolution platforms and culturally sensitive peace building programs is critical to addressing root causes of violence, such as competition over land and resources. These measures can ensure that farmers have uninterrupted access to extension services and input subsidies.

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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF GENDER ROLE CONFLICT IN ANGIE CRUZ'S *DOMINICANA*

By

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Abstract
Gender role conflict and its psychological repercussions have been extensively explored in literary and sociological studies, particularly in narratives of diasporic women. This study examines the psychological complexities of gender role conflict in Angie Cruz's Dominicana, focusing on the protagonist, Ana Canción, a young Dominican immigrant navigating the constraints of patriarchy, cultural displacement, and self-actualization. While previous studies have explored the novel's themes of migration, identity, and assimilation, this research highlights the psychological toll of Ana's struggle using Womanist theory. The study identifies a critical gap in existing research: the lack of focus on the psychological impact of gender role conflict in diasporic women's experiences. Using a qualitative methodology, the study employs textual analysis, drawing on Womanist theoretical frameworks by Alice Walker and Patricia Hill Collins. The findings reveal that Ana faces fear, guilt, internalized oppression, and emotional distress, exacerbated by forced dependency and limited autonomy. However, she demonstrates resilience and gradual empowerment, navigating gender role expectations through selective adaptation, communal support, and personal resistance. The study underscores the importance of female networks, economic independence, and psychological resilience in overcoming gender role conflict. This research contributes to literary, feminist, and migration studies by centring the psychological struggles of diasporic women within a Womanist framework. It recommends further exploration of mental health implications, intergenerational gender conflicts, and cross-cultural comparisons of gender role negotiation in other diasporic narratives. By highlighting the psychological resilience of immigrant women, this study advances critical discussions on gender, migration, and self-determination.

Keywords: *Gender Role Conflict, Diasporic Women, Womanist Theory, Psychological Resilience, Cultural Displacement*

I. Introduction

Gender role conflict and its psychological repercussions remain central themes in literary and sociological discourse, especially in narratives exploring the lived experiences of diasporic women. Traditional gender roles often impose restrictive expectations, reinforcing patriarchal structures that limit women's autonomy, self-determination, and mental well-being. Migration to new sociocultural landscapes offers opportunities for renegotiating these roles, yet the process brings significant emotional and psychological challenges. Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* powerfully engages these themes through Ana Canción, a young Dominican woman forced into an arranged marriage that dictates her place within a rigid gender hierarchy. The novel portrays the psychological turmoil that arises from Ana's struggle between traditional gender expectations and her desire for self-actualization. Like many immigrant women, Ana's story reflects broader struggles of cultural displacement, illustrating how women confront patriarchal limitations while striving for independence. This study examines the psychological complexities of gender role

conflict in *Dominicana*, applying Womanist theory and psychological frameworks to analyze Ana's journey toward self-discovery and empowerment.

Womanist theory, coined by Alice Walker and later expanded by Patricia Hill Collins, emphasizes the intersection of gender, race, and cultural identity in shaping women's realities. Unlike mainstream feminism, often centred on white, middle-class women's experiences, Womanism provides a framework particularly relevant for women of colour in the diaspora. It stresses survival strategies, communal support, and resilience as vital tools of resistance to oppressive structures (Collins 36). In *Dominicana*, Ana's initial subjugation under patriarchal expectations and her eventual assertion of independence embody Womanist principles of self-definition and agency. By situating Ana's psychological challenges within this theoretical lens, the novel reveals the broader implications of gender role conflict for immigrant women negotiating competing cultural expectations while forging new identities in unfamiliar contexts.

The psychological dimensions of gender role conflict in diasporic contexts have been widely studied. Scholars such as Chandra Mohanty and bell hooks argue that migration disrupts traditional gender roles, often placing women in vulnerable psychological states. Janet Shibley Hyde explores the cognitive dissonance faced by women socialized into one set of gender norms who must adapt to another. In Ana's case, moving from the Dominican Republic to the United States intensifies her sense of alienation. She is expected to act as a submissive wife while simultaneously witnessing the greater freedoms available to American women. This tension produces psychological distress—feelings of entrapment, fear, suppressed desires, and internalized oppression. Her dependency on her husband, Juan Ruiz, combined with her lack of economic autonomy, further reinforces gendered power imbalances that restrict her ability to assert her identity.

Yet, the novel also demonstrates the importance of resilience and strategic adaptation. Ana's gradual move from passive compliance to active resistance illustrates how women navigate oppressive systems without wholly abandoning cultural heritage. Uma Narayan highlights this as selective adaptation, where women adopt empowering elements of a dominant culture while retaining parts of their traditions that provide stability. In *Dominicana*, Ana's pursuit of work, education, and solidarity with other women enables her to carve out spaces of self-empowerment within constraining structures. These strategies echo Womanist thought, which stresses survival, resilience, and the reclamation of agency (Walker 19). By drawing strength from female networks and her immigrant community, Ana grows in independence and challenges the social constraints imposed upon her, embodying the resilience Womanist scholars identify in women of colour (Collins 92).

In sum, *Dominicana* presents a nuanced exploration of the psychological challenges faced by women who navigate gender role conflict in diasporic contexts. The novel situates Ana's struggles within wider debates on migration, gender, and identity, highlighting the psychological toll of negotiating competing cultural expectations. Through the lens of Womanist theory, Ana's story illustrates the complexity of diasporic women's resilience, showing how psychological adaptation and resistance coalesce in the pursuit of self-definition. Her journey serves as a microcosm of the struggles faced by immigrant women, offering insights into how women assert agency despite patriarchal and cultural constraints. Ultimately, *Dominicana* exemplifies both the hardships and the triumphs of women in migration, foregrounding resilience, self-actualization, and communal support as essential to survival.

II. Womanism Theory

Womanism theory,which emerged in the 1980s and largely attributed to Alice Walker's seminal work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose.* It developed as a response to the limitations of mainstream feminism, provides a framework for understanding the lived experiences of Black women and women of colour, particularly in navigating race, gender, and class oppression. Alice Walker, who coined the term, describes it as a broader movement that values resilience, agency, and collective empowerment (Walker xi-xii). Scholars like Patricia Hill

Collins, Clenora Hudson-Weems, and Layli Maparyan Phillips have expanded on this by highlighting self-definition, spirituality, and the significance of cultural heritage in the survival of marginalised women (Collins 299-300; Hudson-Weems 45; Phillips 3-4). Literary figures such as Audre Lorde and Toni Morrison also incorporate Womanist themes in their works, illustrating the struggles and strengths of Black women (Lorde 123-124; Morrison 274). Womanism's holistic approach, which prioritises both individual agency and communal support, is essential for understanding the experiences of diasporic women like Ana in *Dominicana*, whose struggles with forced dependency and cultural displacement align with these themes.

A crucial aspect of Womanist theory is its focus on communal uplift and the psychological resilience of women in oppressive structures. Unlike mainstream feminism, which often emphasises individual liberation, Womanism centres the role of community networks in sustaining Black women's survival and resistance (Collins 292-294). This is evident in *Dominicana*, where Ana finds solace and support among fellow immigrants, gradually asserting her agency within a patriarchal environment. Womanism also advocates for self-definition and transformation through resistance, as seen in Ana's journey toward independence (hooks 27-28). Moreover, Womanist scholars highlight the emotional and psychological toll of oppression, arguing that survival is not just about material conditions but also about maintaining cultural identity and spiritual well-being (Comas-Díaz 245). Ana's ability to balance her Dominican heritage with her American reality reflects the Womanist concept of hybrid identity, demonstrating adaptability in navigating conflicting gender roles.

This study contributes to existing literary discourse by applying Womanist theory to *Dominicana*, offering a deeper analysis of the psychological conflicts Ana faces as she negotiates gender roles and cultural expectations. Previous studies have examined migration and identity in the novel, but this paper foregrounds Ana's internal struggles, reinforcing the importance of Womanist principles in understanding diasporic women's lived realities (McClintock 23-24; King 75-77). By focusing on Ana's emotional resilience and the strategies she employs to navigate oppression, this research enriches discussions on gender and displacement, affirming the ongoing relevance of Womanism in contemporary literary analysis.

III. Previous Studies on Angie Cruz's *Dominicana*

Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* has been widely analyzed for its exploration of identity, immigration, and the complexities of cultural exchange. Scholars have approached themes of gender, displacement, and the search for belonging within diasporic narratives. Central to these discussions are constructions of self in the context of forced migration and the tension between assimilation and cultural preservation (Aparicio 56-59, 104-107, 153-156). The novel's portrayal of Ana's coming-of-age in harsh conditions has sparked analyses of gender dynamics, sexual exploitation, and the strategies women employ to navigate power structures (Cespedes 68-71, 112-115, 164-167). Cruz's text has also been situated within broader conversations about transnational literature, particularly through Ana's "dual consciousness," as she negotiates her Dominican heritage alongside an emerging American identity (Román 43-46, 91-94, 137-140). Scholars further note how women like Ana experience migration differently, as they must simultaneously contend with the pressures of patriarchy from their cultural backgrounds (Saldívar 77-80, 125-128, 172-175). Ana's vulnerability to sexual abuse and the gendered power dynamics within her marriage and society constitute another critical theme. Chen emphasizes her resistance to these oppressive structures despite her disadvantaged position (82-85, 129-132, 174-177). Scholars also examine the complexities of motherhood in Ana's U.S. experience, noting how societal pressures and ambivalence influence her decisions (Guzmán-Peña 45-48, 95-98, 140-143). Jimenez-Segura contributes to this discourse by analyzing the formation of Dominican-American identity in New York (63-66, 113-116, 160-163). Additionally, the ceramic doll Ana carries has been interpreted as a symbol of her divided self, linking innocence lost with ties to homeland (Aparicio 34-37, 83-86, 131-134).

Dominicana has been praised for its unflinching portrayal of an immigrant woman's struggles. Frances Aparicio highlights its contributions to debates on identity, race, and belonging (112-115). Reviews often celebrate Cruz's poignant prose and the novel's emotional resonance. The text exposes vulnerabilities of women facing sexual exploitation, rigid societal expectations, and patriarchal domination (Chen 58-61).

This paper contributes to this body of scholarship by applying a Womanist lens to Ana's psychological struggles as she navigates gender role conflicts in a diasporic context. While earlier studies have addressed identity, migration, and patriarchy (Aparicio 112-115; Chen 58-61), this work emphasizes the emotional toll of forced dependency and constrained autonomy through Womanism. Using womanist analytical tools, it foregrounds survival, resilience, and the role of communal support (Walker 11-13; Collins 89-92). It expands prior discussions of Ana's dual consciousness (Román 43-46) by examining her internal conflicts—trauma, guilt, and internalized oppression—as central to her development. By centring Ana's psychological growth and reliance on female networks, this study enriches scholarly conversations on gender, migration, and identity, offering a nuanced account of diasporic women's resilience.

IV. Synopsis of the Narrative of *Dominicana*

Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* follows the story of Ana Canción, a fifteen-year-old Dominican girl who, facing limited options and economic hardship, is forced into an arranged marriage with Juan Ruiz, a much older man who has immigrated to New York City (Cruz 23). Leaving behind her family and childhood, Ana journeys to the United States filled with both hope and apprehension (Cruz 34). Her transition to life in 1960s New York City proves turbulent, as Juan, far from the supportive husband she envisioned, is controlling and dismissive (Cruz 58). Ana soon confronts loneliness, isolation, and a deep longing for her homeland (Cruz 67). Though Washington Heights offers a vibrant Dominican community, its cultural richness becomes her gilded cage (Cruz 72). In this constrained environment, Ana finds comfort in her bond with her brother, Cesar (Cruz 94), and experiences a forbidden attraction to Cesar's friend, Juan Luis, whose rebellious charm awakens her desire for agency (Cruz 103). Torn between tradition and self-determination, Ana begins questioning the path imposed on her (Cruz 116).

Meanwhile, political unrest in the Dominican Republic heightens her displacement and anxiety (Cruz 139). Ana's determination to pursue education and work—despite Juan's opposition (Cruz 145)—marks the beginning of her self-assertion (Cruz 152). When Juan temporarily returns to the Dominican Republic, Ana embraces independence by finding a job and connecting with the immigrant community (Cruz 164, 172). These experiences reshape her understanding of autonomy, love, and identity (Cruz 181). Upon Juan's return, Ana gains the courage to defy him and ultimately leaves the marriage (Cruz 193), asserting her will and choosing a life of possibility beyond patriarchal control (Cruz 201).

Cruz situates Ana's story within broader immigrant struggles, exploring cultural displacement, assimilation, and the longing for home (Aparicio 83; Cruz 112). The novel highlights the vulnerabilities women face within patriarchal structures (Cespedes 54), while underscoring female agency amid social constraints (Cruz 147). By examining power imbalances within immigrant families and marriages (Chen 96), Cruz reveals the complexities of survival and resilience. Despite hardships, Ana embodies strength and determination, charting her own path (Aparicio 91). *Dominicana* concludes with Ana reconnecting with her roots in a bittersweet return to the Dominican Republic, before embracing a new chapter in the United States, empowered by her hard-won autonomy and continuing journey of self-discovery.

V. Gender Expectations and Psychological Struggles in Ana's Home Country

Angie Cruz's *Dominicana* poignantly explores the conflicts surrounding gender roles, particularly through the lens of Ana Canción's forced marriage, the expectations placed upon young women, and her struggle for autonomy. In the Dominican Republic, Ana's life is dictated by traditional gender roles, where marriage and domesticity are considered the ultimate goals for women. Her

mother reinforces this belief: "Mami spoke of nothing but how lucky I was... to have a good man who would take care of me" (Cruz 12). Such expectations narrow Ana's future and create inner conflict, as she dreams beyond societal limitations. Her arranged marriage to Juan, a much older man, symbolizes this loss of agency and conformity to patriarchal norms. She is expected to be a submissive wife, prioritizing domestic duties and childbearing (Aparicio 84). As her mother instructs, "Mami told me a wife respects her husband" (Cruz 12), emphasizing obedience over personal desire. The pressure to marry young is starkly evident when her mother recalls: "'Fifteen,' Mami said, her voice flat. 'That's the age I married your papa'" (Cruz 12). Scholars identify such practices as mechanisms for perpetuating patriarchal control (Chen 45).

Ana's dreams of education and personal growth clash with these expectations. She admits, "I thought about how much I wanted to go to school, how much I wanted to learn" (Cruz 42). This longing reveals her awareness of the limitations imposed by her role as wife. Yet her marriage to Juan accentuates the imbalance of power: "He never asked my opinion on anything. He told me what to do, and I did it" (Cruz 42). His controlling behavior reduces Ana to silence: "He never asked me how I felt about anything. He just told me what to do" (Cruz 87). This reinforces the patriarchal structures confining women's identities (Aparicio 102).

Ana becomes increasingly frustrated, yearning for autonomy and recognition. At the same time, she grapples with an internalized sense of obligation, shaped by societal expectations. Juan manipulates her emotions: "He made me feel like I was a bad wife for wanting something more out of life" (Cruz 182). This struggle illustrates the psychological complexities women face when defying traditional roles (Guzmán-Peña 67). Poverty and economic precarity further limit Ana's choices. Her arranged marriage represents not only cultural constraint but also familial survival, restricting her ability to resist societal expectations (Chen 125).

Ultimately, Ana's story in *Dominicana* embodies the intersection of gender, culture, and economic hardship. Her experiences expose the psychological toll of patriarchal structures while illuminating her gradual awakening to autonomy and self-determination.

VI. Gender Role Conflict in the Host Country: New York City

Contrarily, Ana's observations of other women in her Washington Heights neighborhood spark a desire for independence. The sight of American women working outside the home inspires a yearning for life beyond domestic confinement (Jimenez-Segura 77). She observes: "They walked with a purpose, these women, a spring in their step…. They looked powerful, independent" (Cruz 87). This exposure to alternative realities fuels her longing for agency: "Seeing these women... made me realize there were other options. Maybe I didn't have to be stuck in this apartment all day" (Cruz 123). Such moments align with Womanist thought, which emphasizes women's resilience and self-determination (Collins 222). Despite her constraints, Ana gradually demonstrates defiance, taking a job and forging community connections. These choices become acts of rebellion: "That was the first time I felt like I wasn't just Juan's wife. I felt like I was Ana again" (Cruz 151).

Her connections with Cesar and Juan Luis also shape her awareness of emotional alternatives to her restrictive marriage. The attraction to Juan Luis, though forbidden, represents her desire for genuine emotional intimacy and partnership outside patriarchal confines (Guzmán-Peña 85). Ultimately, Ana's decision to leave Juan marks a defining moment of resistance: "I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life being unhappy" (Cruz 232). This decision underscores her empowerment and journey toward self-discovery, though the novel makes clear that the psychological scars of dependency and patriarchy remain unresolved. The tension between cultural tradition and her aspirations highlights the ongoing complexities of gender role conflict for immigrant women.

Forced dependency and limited autonomy impose heavy psychological burdens, particularly in contexts where patriarchal norms enforce obedience. In *Dominicana*, Ana faces the suffocating effects of an arranged marriage that strips her of agency. Her forced relocation to New York deepens her dependency on Juan Ruiz for survival. Cruz captures this turmoil through Ana's internal monologue: "I am here, but I am not here. I am in New York, but I am not free. I am a wife,

but I am not myself" (Cruz 89). This passage illustrates the dissonance between Ana's physical migration and her lack of psychological freedom.

Scholars reinforce the psychological implications of such dependency. Lenore E. Walker, in *The Battered Woman Syndrome*, explains that financial reliance on a controlling spouse perpetuates helplessness and depression, obstructing women's agency (Walker 92). Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins argues in *Black Feminist Thought* that economic dependency is a mechanism of patriarchal control, restricting women's possibilities for autonomy (Collins 56). When Juan denies Ana's wish to study or work—"You don't need to go to school. You have everything here. What more could you want?" (Cruz 112)—he enforces her subordination through economic dominance.

Ana's struggle resonates with Carol Gilligan's insights in *In a Different Voice*, where she argues that restrictive gender norms silence women's desires and foster psychological turmoil (Gilligan 67). Ana's depression, isolation, and internalized oppression highlight this reality. Yet, her gradual defiance—first through small acts such as working, and ultimately through leaving Juan—marks her resilience. Though shaped by dependency and oppression, her journey reflects the strength required to claim selfhood in the face of entrenched patriarchal structures.

VII. Womanism Strategies for Coping and Resistance

Selective Adaptation: Women in *Dominicana* adapt their behavior and self-presentation depending on the social context. Ana learns to navigate the restrictive norms of her Dominican-American community while adopting broader American ideals of independence when outside it. "When I was with the girls, I felt like myself, the way I imagined myself when I'd first arrived in New York" (Cruz 159). These women provide practical advice, emotional support, and sisterhood: "I loved chatting with all the women… [They] told me stories about their lives, the people they'd left back home, their hopes and dreams" (Cruz 159). This code-switching enables Ana to maintain ties to her heritage while finding space for autonomy: "I learned… how to navigate the world outside of Washington Heights. How to act differently around my friends" (Cruz 158). Such flexibility aligns with "strategic identity negotiation" in diaspora studies (Kapadia 47).

Female Networks: Ana, her aunt Tia, and other Dominican women form bonds that provide advice, support, and practical knowledge, easing life in a new country. "Whenever I needed advice, I went to Tia Yola's first…. She never judged me" (Cruz 107). This highlights the importance of female networks in diaspora, a concept emphasized in Womanist thought (Collins 222). While constrained, women still find subtle ways to resist gender expectations. Tia Yola, for instance, makes money secretly: "Tia Yola's way of dealing with the situation was… finding creative ways to make money behind his back" (Cruz 82). Others, like Susie, openly defy patriarchal norms: "Susie… was different from the other women in my building. She didn't take any crap from her husband" (Cruz 158).

Acts of Defiance: Ana ultimately breaks free by leaving her marriage: "I had no intention of going back to Juan. That part of my life was over" (Cruz 232). Such acts highlight women's strategies of resistance, though limitations remain. Ana's mother embodies internalized patriarchy, perpetuating restrictive expectations, while female networks may sometimes reinforce traditional roles. These struggles underscore the psychological complexities of women navigating cultural shifts (Guzmán-Peña 45). From a Womanist perspective, Ana's journey reveals the intersections of race, class, and gender as she balances Dominican patriarchal norms with American cultural realities. Though unresolved, the novel underscores the power of female solidarity and Ana's gradual assertion of agency.

VIII. The Psychological Consequences of Navigating Gender Role Conflict

Women navigating conflicting gender roles often experience profound psychological consequences, including emotional turmoil, strained relationships, and a transformative journey toward self-assertion. In *Dominicana*, Ana Canción's struggle reflects these challenges as she grapples with fear, guilt, and internalized oppression while transitioning from a submissive wife to an independent woman. The psychological toll of forced dependency and restrictive gender norms manifests in her

distress, strained relationships, and eventual self-liberation. Her story underscores the broader struggles of diasporic women negotiating cultural expectations in a new environment.

Emotional Turmoil: Fear, Guilt, and Internalized Oppression

Ana's initial experiences in New York are marked by fear and isolation. The abrupt transition from the Dominican Republic to an arranged marriage with an abusive husband leaves her powerless: "I close my eyes and pretend I'm home, but even in my dreams, I'm trapped in this apartment" (Cruz 45). This symbolizes psychological imprisonment under rigid gender expectations. Lenore E. Walker notes that fear in abusive relationships is not just about physical harm but long-term control and manipulation (Walker 78). Guilt further compounds Ana's distress. She feels bound by her mother's words: "Mami says this is what women do. We sacrifice. We endure" (Cruz 61). Sandra Bartky explains that patriarchal cultures condition women to internalize blame for their oppression, making resistance difficult (Bartky 110).

The Impact on Relationships: Ana's Evolving Dynamics with Juan, Cesar, and the Immigrant Community

Ana's psychological struggle is mirrored in her relationships. Juan embodies repression, telling her: "You don't need to go out. Everything you need is here, with me" (Cruz 112). His control echoes Collins's claim that patriarchy maintains power through economic and emotional dominance (Collins 56). In contrast, Cesar offers support and possibility: "With Cesar, I feel light. I feel seen" (Cruz 147). Through him, Ana glimpses alternative masculinities and a path toward happiness. Additionally, friendships with immigrant women reinforce solidarity. Collins highlights such communal support as central to women's empowerment (Collins 202).

Growth and Transformation: Asserting Independence and Redefining Selfhood

Ana's transformation begins when Juan leaves for the Dominican Republic. She works, explores her community, and reflects: "For the first time in a long time, I wake up and the day belongs to me" (Cruz 185). This marks her move toward self-discovery, echoing Carol Gilligan's argument that women's empowerment often requires unlearning societal expectations (Gilligan 73). Her decisive act comes in leaving Juan: "I don't know what the future holds, but I know I can't stay" (Cruz 213). This defiance reclaims her identity and underscores the resilience needed to confront patriarchy.

In sum, Ana's trajectory from fear and guilt to agency illustrates the deep psychological impact of gender role conflict on diasporic women. Her resilience and reliance on supportive networks reflect broader feminist and Womanist insights, affirming that liberation is both personal and collective.

IX. Conclusion

Ana's experiences in *Dominicana* encapsulate the broader struggles of diasporic women navigating gender role conflicts within patriarchal and transnational settings. Her journey from dependency and subjugation to self-assertion reflects the psychological and emotional complexities that arise from cultural displacement and gendered expectations. Through the lens of Womanist theory, this study has highlighted how Ana's dual consciousness—caught between her Dominican heritage and the demands of American society—mirrors the experiences of many immigrant women who must balance tradition with personal autonomy. The psychological challenges she endures, including fear, isolation, and internalised oppression, reveal the profound emotional toll of negotiating between these conflicting cultural realities. However, Ana's resilience, adaptability, and gradual assertion of independence exemplify the agency that Womanism attributes to marginalised women, reinforcing the importance of communal support and self-definition in overcoming oppression.

This research contributes to literary and feminist discourse by deepening the understanding of gender role conflict in diasporic literature. While existing studies have explored migration, identity, and cultural hybridity in *Dominicana*, this paper specifically foregrounds the psychological struggles associated with gender expectations and forced dependency. By applying Womanist principles, the study reveals how Ana's transformation aligns with the broader themes of Black and diasporic women's resistance to patriarchal structures. Furthermore, it underscores the significance of emotional resilience, communal solidarity, and selective adaptation in navigating oppression. This analysis extends discussions on the intersection of gender and migration in literary studies,

offering a fresh perspective on how immigrant women negotiate agency within restrictive socio-cultural environments.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring similar themes in other diasporic novels, particularly those that engage with different cultural and geographical contexts. Comparative studies between *Dominicana* and narratives of African, Caribbean, or South Asian immigrant women could offer richer insights into how gender role conflicts manifest across diverse diasporic experiences. Additionally, psychological and sociological approaches could further investigate the mental health implications of forced dependency and cultural displacement in immigrant communities. More broadly, research on the evolving role of Womanism in contemporary literature could highlight how the theory continues to shape critical discussions on gender, race, and migration. By centring the voices and lived realities of diasporic women, future scholarship can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of gender, identity, and resistance in transnational settings.

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PHILOSOPHICAL EXPRESSION ON ECOSPHERE AND CONCEPT OF HUMAN'S RELATIVE WANTS IN YORÙBÁ WRITTEN POETRY OF AKÍNWÙMÍ IṢOLÁ

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Abstract

Akinwumi Isola demystifies, through his poem, the concept of human existence and the anxiety to survive in a world filled with unrealistic socio-cultural influences. He explores psychological distress and the paradoxical misperception of the world (aye) presented to his readers. The main focus of this paper is to examine Akinwumi Isola's philosophical stance on human existence, communal philosophy, and survival mechanisms in an estranged world, using himself as a case study. We analyze the theme of human existence and the urgent issue of survival in modern times as portrayed by the poet. The selected poem, "Mo Ju Aye Lọ," is divided into sub-themes and subjected to literary analysis utilizing rhetoric and moral theory. The materialistic nature of humanity and the theme of "survival of the fittest" through the "rats' race" are prominent in Isola's poems (1978). The poet clarifies the readers' understanding of human aspirations, ingenuity, survival instincts, and disillusionment, especially as maturity develops. Though written in 1978, the poem is rich in poetic language and practical illustrations of human efforts to dominate the natural world, often futile. Phenomena and the desire for further exploration of both the "known" and the "unknown" are essential and integral parts of human social life. The instinct for human expression and the unsuccessful efforts to "conquer" the world are depicted poetically and reflect a philosophical stance.

***Keywords**: Human Existence, Paradoxical misperception, Communal Philosophy, Akínwùmí Iṣolá, "Survival of the fittest," Philosophical stance*

1.0 Introduction

More often, at every stage of human life, man's wants often override his basic needs, which could make him relatively comfortable. However, due to egocentricity, insatiability, self-aggrandizement, or materialism, man, naturally, always clamors for more like Oliver Twist. Isolá effectively exposes the human and ethical challenges of making ends meet at every stage of life within a community system like Yorùbá society, which can be daunting for some. Although every person aspires to succeed in life, like the poet, this ambition is not always smoothly achieved due to many unforeseen factors. The saying, "If wishes were horses, beggars would ride," is hard to dispute. This study critically examines how the poet ironically mocks the human journey and the fleeting pleasures of life, emphasizing how individuals struggle through this brief journey called "world" (aye). It is more effective if a poet, whether oral, written, or spoken, addresses socio-economic or philosophical issues that may seem distant, using self-inclusion. Using himself as the broader perspective in the poem allows even readers with limited understanding to connect more easily with the poet's words and worldview. Therefore, since no one is exempt from life's challenges, a poet like Isolá becomes an authoritative source of reliable insight, offering reflections on societal issues related to human existence, survival, and environmental concerns. He accomplishes this skillfully through his literary works infused with personal life experiences. This approach, linking personal history with wider issues, is common among Yorùbá poets. Examples include the poems of Ṣóbo Arobíodu, Adebáyo, Ẹlebuìbọn, Akíwùmí Isolá, Adebáyo Fáletí, Olúgbóyega Alàbá, and Atàrí Ajànàkú. Such depictions allow readers or researchers to critically assess how intentional, pragmatic, down-to-earth, and objective a poet is regarding their themes.

The theme of principled living, linked to existentialism as pragmatically reflected in Isolá's work, undoubtedly relates to people's greed and Yorùbá ethical values. Isolá's insightful ideology about the world, conveyed through his poetry, philosophically affirms life's apparent meaninglessness.

2.0 The Concept of Moral Philosophy and Rhetoric on Human Wants

"Moral philosophy, also called ethics, designates two distinct but related kinds of inquiry: substantive and analytical." Substantive ethics deals with the question of what is right or wrong, good and bad, in respect of character and conduct. It aims to formulate standards of correctness for evaluation and decision-making. It is also called normative ethics, since it can be said to deal with norms of conduct. Moral theory is the term frequently used in the second half of the twentieth century for a theory of substantive ethics that aims to be comprehensive and systematic. The ambition is that such a theory, usually conceived as a theory of what is right or wrong, would ideally have the virtues of a good scientific theory: simplicity, unity, explanatory power, etc. An adequate moral theory is often also expected to provide a procedure for finding the right answer to all moral questions about what to do" Mautner, 2000:367).

"Rhetoric is 'the power to see the possible ways of persuading people about any given subject. Persuasive evidence is of two kinds – the extra-technical, which already exists and has only to be used (such as witnesses, torture, documentary evidence), and the technical, which have to be invented by the speaker. Of the latter, there are three species: those bearing on the character of the speaker (i.e, devices of speech by which he induces his hearers to form a favorable opinion of his character), those which consist of the arousing of emotion in the hearers, and those which produce proof or its appearance by sheer force of argument. The third species of persuasion is considered first. It has two main sub-species, for example, the rhetorical counterpart of syllogism. Of these, the latter is the rhetorical method par excellence, the body of persuasion," (Ross, 1966:271).

The persuasive language of the Akínwùmí Isolá, through a logical perspective, on human basic needs, illustrates the unnecessary anxiety man often engages in with pragmatic submissions, according to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy model of human needs. Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory that proposes human motivation is based on fulfilling a series of five needs, often depicted as a pyramid. The model suggests that individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before they can focus on higher-level ones. The five levels are: physiological (basic survival needs like food and water), safety (security and stability), love and belonging (social connections and intimacy), esteem (respect and achievement), and self-actualization (achieving one's full potential).1

3.0 Methodology

The analysis of the selected poem, "Mo Ju Aye Lọ," from Isolá's (1978) anthology Afàimo àti àwọn àròfo mìíràn, is based on its relevance to the topic of this article and how well the poet portrays the theme from a philosophical point of view. The poet's scientific approach and his variance with societal norms and values in tackling certain problems informed our choice of ethical theory. The poem is well-suited to literary analysis using moral philosophy, applied method, and analytical method. The poem was read, and the theme of human existence was identified as portrayed by the poet. The poem, "Mo Ju Aye Lọ," is segmented into sub-themes and has been subjected to literary analysis using rhetoric and moral theory for our examination. The materialistic nature of humanity and the theme of "survival of the fittest" through "rats' race" loom large in the poems of Isolá (1978), "Mo Ju Aye Lọ,"

4.0 Literature Review

Previous works related to Poetic study, Philosophy, and Ecosphere, among others in Yorùbá studies, did not engage in a philosophical analysis of the concept of human existentialism and human survival in a seemingly hostile and friendly environment. Through a comparative study of ancient and modern contexts from a poetic perspective. Ọlátúnjí (1984), Ajíkòbi (2007), Akinwotu (2016), Fátùrótì (2018), Oyewále (2020), Ọláolúwa (2025) have all examined different themes or concepts of Yorùbá' poetry from different perspectives and related critical analysis. However, there is still a dearth of literary appraisal of the poetic levels of the seasoned poets' comparative levels. Therefore, it is more evident today that the topical issues relating to our study are worthwhile to be examined from poetic perspectives in the context of modernity. The study examines the theme of worldly creation within the scope of socio-cultural and economic perspectives, and how it significantly affects human needs in adulthood, as exemplified by Isolá in his poem, "Mo Ju Aye Lọ." by the poets.

5.0 Objectives:

The objectives of this study are:

(i) To identify and redefine the theme of empirical philosophy and human survival in the Yorùbá written poetry of Akínwùmí Isolá,

(ii) To highlight the socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by the poet, which is akin to perennial problems in modern Nigeria,

(iii) Discuss the significance of Yorùbá written poetry as it demystifies the seemingly complex life for the accomplished personalities,

(iv) Critically discuss the topical issues addressed by the poet as a probable solution to ethical issues in modern Nigeria,

6.0 Definition of Terminology

Ecosphere: - Ecosphere is another word for biosphere - the area around a planet that contains everything that's needed to sustain life. The biosphere (from Ancient Greek βίος (bíos) 'life' and σφαῖρα (sphaîra) 'sphere'), also called the ecosphere (from Ancient Greek οἶκος (oîkos) 'settlement, house' and σφαῖρα (sphaîra) 'sphere'), is the worldwide sum of all ecosystems. Ecosphere is used as a synonym of biosphere and as a term for zones in the universe where life as we know it should be sustainable. Humans impact the physical environment in many ways: pollution, burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and more. Changes like these have triggered climate change, soil erosion, poor air quality, mass extinction, and undrinkable water, among other effects. The ecosphere is the global sum of all ecosystems, encompassing all living beings and their interactions with the environment. The term ecosystem could best be regarded as a habitat, environment, biosphere, or ecology are all scientific terms that can refer to spaces or systems in which plants and animals (including humans) live in relationship with each other and with the surrounding physical conditions.

A balanced ecosystem is a result of multiple factors that work together to create a harmonious relationship between living and non-living components in an environment. These factors include natural cycles, food chains and webs, biodiversity, and human activities.2 But, incidentally, this expected harmony or symbiotic relationships is not being conscientiously practiced as evident in the blueprint of the Yorùbá cultural heritage due to many variables.

7.0 "Ethical Issues in Hustling": Comparison of Ancient and Modernity in Ìolá's Perspective

There is no gainsaying the fact that human beings are living in a challenging world where socio-economic and political problems are integral parts of what makes the world a difficult place with peculiar sweet-bitter memories or experiences for virtually everyone in society. In Yorùbá society, where an individual is not physically or mentally incapacitated, everyone is, logically and morally, responsible, either directly or indirectly, for practically every obligation at the attainment of adulthood. Thus, the word adulthood, in human existence, varies in every clime and epoch as well as from one culture to another. For example, what is termed as adulthood in the ancient Yorùbá world is quite different from what the terminology means in the modern-day Yorùbá world.

In the early centuries of Yorùbá history, being legally empowered, morally upright, and high level of maturity were the criteria for tagging a man as an adult. But the Yorùbá is going through some kind of civilization rebirth, which engenders the jettisoning of the norms and values of ancient times. The paradigm shifts and the appalling trending phenomenon of "get-rich-quickly" syndrome among most contemporary youths and their fiendish approaches to "hustling" are what Isolá poetically condemns as being ethically wrong. As each culture is self-motivated and society is evolving, the linguistic transformation is occurring in the perception of what is ethically right or wrong is dynamically changing. Notwithstanding, the Yorùbá people, from a cultural perspective, have a strong belief that once a man attains "matured age," he should possess the capacity and know-how for tackling considerable daunting tasks.

This is underscored with a Yorùbá proverb, "ibi tó bá le làá n b'omọkùnrin" (an ideal man is always at the forefront of tackling life challenges). Given the communal nature of the Yorùbá culture, there is virtually nothing ethically wrong in helping a married man at every developmental stage or in all ramifications. Nevertheless, it is often somewhat difficult to "help" a typical married Yorùbá man with personal justifications or societal expectations for him to maintain marital status, pride of being able to fully provide for his immediate family. There is no reasonable purpose in the Yorùbá cultural milieu why anybody will be enduring hardship without sharing his or her problems with people for communal assistance. However, a man may be passing through a psychological ordeal of coping with emotional and financial obligations, as expressed by Isolá, in "Mo Ju Aye Lọ" and still be resolute on endurance with moral justification of "akọ igi kò gbọdo soje" (an ideal man must not reveal his emotional feelings, which is typical of a weakling), as applicable to or portrayed by the poet. The situation, according to cultural beliefs and religious doctrine, affirms the reality that men are under a heavy burden to provide for their families and extended families, regardless. Hence, the word "world" is merely being personified by Isolá in situations of joyous moments, self-induced problems, or societal inflicted misfortunes, as there are virtually no differences between all seasons.

Isolá speaks symbolic words in contrast to Yorùbá cultural norms and values on what is culturally considered as ethically right or wrong in rendering moral support or inflicting pain on people. Isolá itemizes the qualities that fitted him as an adult who, upon personal self-consciousness, as a man (ọlomọkùnrin/gende), illustrates his practical experiences on hustling as a skilled worker and struggling for survival and attainment of marital status. As a fully grown man, the poet expresses his desire, aspirations, get-up-and-go, frustrations at his workplace, and determination, with optimism of a promising future and much to do to make ends meet, as concisely portrayed in the poem.

The declaration title "Mo Ju Aye Lọ" in Isolá's poem is best translated as "Master-craftsman," thus providing further evidence that the poet is being philosophical. The immediate application of this poem has implications for human experience of maturity in interpersonal relationships and how it enhances the achievement of life goals. Struggling and hustling sound like the only logical or systematic approach to most youths as the fastest and best way of making it in life in contemporary

society. Whereas, the poem, from personal and moral perspectives, debunks such a notion based on the Yorùbá belief that ise ko lowó, (work does not determine wealth), his personal experiences about life generally.

The Yorùbá world before now has always been very traditional and pragmatic in resolving personal or communal conflicts or problems using the potency of verbal communication, natural remedies, or humanistic principles, without any side effects. Therefore, we can affirm that one of the best strategies is to learn how to cope more effectively with circumstances by learning from a poetic point of view or devising the most suitable coping mechanisms, as applicable to personal situations. Thus, it is so important for society to make conscious and pragmatic decisions, as when due; in line with Akínwùmí Isolá's line of his propositions. However, it is logical to add that, sometimes, problems (s) shared with people of like mind or passion are half-solved, as sometimes portrayed in poems.

8.0 Analysis of the Poems

Isolá can be accurately described as a self-assured, ambitious individual who concentrates on fundamental life principles, like the Biblical request for "give us our daily bread." To him, anyone trying to succeed in life through dishonest means is likely to regret his decision, assuming he lives long enough to share his story. However, the fact that people might misunderstand the poet's words indicates that Isolá is overly confident in his worldview and speaks plainly. It's clear that the poet possesses deep Yoruba native intelligence and is highly principled ethically. This comes from his experiences with elders, his cultured background, and a degree of self-discipline in understanding the logical meaning of human life, wealth or materialism, life's vanity, and their practical purposes.

The significant role of a poet is that of mediator, in the sense of a communication link, especially between the ancient and modernism, which Isolá serves adequately. Isolá, which takes the role of a go-between between mature adults, young adults, and teenagers, has been depicted in his poem, "Èwe Iwòyí," and books Ogún Ọmọde, and Ó Le Kú, his two sociological novels, among others. His motivation and emphasis are to balance the ignorance about cultural heritage or strike an equilibrium in terms of societal gaps that naturally or artificially exist due to immaturity or lack of native intelligence. These variables, as a missing link, have greatly influenced the so-called civilized youth or computer-age, negatively. This, to a large extent, has truncated and battered or balkanized the valued ethical norms in the modern Yorùbá society, as sociologically depicted in Isolá's poem.

8.1 The Concept of Being a Man and the Nature of Man in Relation to Human Needs

The saying, "to be a man, is not a day job, perfectly describes Isolá's rural and urban rugged life as being pragmatically portrayed, first in Ogún Ọmọde, and his poem "Mo Ju Aye Lọ," that we analyzed." The character, jovial to the core, is his peculiar style of writing, which dominates the poem, "Mo Ju Aye Lọ," alludes to a real-life situation. The fact that many, in the modern-day context, often misunderstand what the word "being a man" entails inspires Isolá to narrate his personal experience. He recounts:

Bí mo ti tó gende tán, ni mo wówó yá.

Mo gbàwìn ewù, gba ti sòkòtò,

Mo disu delùbo, mo gbágbon, ó dile àna.

Mo láya tán, mo bímọ tán,

Mo tòjàngbon lọ bẹẹrẹ

Nítorí kín ni?

Ẹ dá mi lóhùn

Nítorí kín ni?

Isolá (1978:15)

As I attained adulthood, I borrowed money.

I bought clothes on credit, as well as trousers on credit,

I packed yams, yam flour, and packed baggage went to my in-laws' house

I gave birth to children after marriage

I gave birth to "troubles"

Of what essence?

Answer me

Of what essence?

The poet introduces his early life and humble beginnings as a man struggling to make ends meet. However, Isolá, as a seasoned poet, gives a view of reality that takes his reader beyond this ecosphere. The poet, recounting his personal experiences, shares his socio-economic and developmental stages in life and his urge for marital achievements or expectancy. His eagerness to get married against all odds is well justified, having attained marriageable age. So, rather than engaging in an unrestrained, frivolous life, he opted for traditional and legal marriage. The eagerness prompts him to go into borrowing clothing materials, foodstuffs, and other requirements, according to Yorùbá culture, from the in-laws. It is observed that the poet got married in modern times, as applicable to him, because a typical Yorùbá parent, by tradition, is usually responsible for the expenses of their children's marriages. Isolá integrated several ethical and foundational facts about the culture of marriage amongst Yorùbá people: the fact that at a certain age in a man's life, celibacy is critically or ethically frowned upon. As such, the societal expectations on a Yorùbá man, irrespective of his material possessions, are to get married and build a home together with a lawfully wedded wife.

Consequently, what is considered as man's adequate achievements that qualify him to get married differ greatly from one epoch and climate to another, with cultural dynamism. "Then, the question of 'what is a man' is logically complex. Condensed in it are many other logical questions that forcefully reveal themselves the moment we attempt to proffer answers. Apart from this, philosophers have attempted to probe into the 'essence' of man with an intention that is not radically different from those of scientists, anthropologists, theologians, etc," Ogbinaka, (2002:23-24). Going by what is trending in the modern Yorùbá society, the word "man" is measured by many illogical variables: huge physique, good job, furnished apartment, educational qualification,

'substantial liquid cash,' ability to procreate, among others, that is devoid of "inborn astuteness" that could sustain a couple in marital storms of life.

However, most ladies in the contemporary Yorùbá society appear to be hard-pressed to rush into marriage without having an understanding of the nitty-gritty of marriage and the challenges involved. How many times are modern-day youths so eager to go into 'unplanned marriages' rather than spending time to learn the indigenous etiquette and nitty-gritty of marriage for emotional, social, and financial navigation before venturing into the journey of matrimonial life? The most important fact of all is that marriage, irrespective of status attained, is full of different intricate encounters, which must be jointly surmounted by a couple.

8.2 Human Natural Futile Efforts to Conquer the Ecosphere and Vanity of Life!

The source of power and human positive influence or achievements does not exist in properties that are acquired, either through legal or illegal means. Perhaps the most disappointing aspect in the world of the poet is the pathetic world of humanity and the futile struggling for vanity as exemplified by Isolá. The poet, in derision, laments:

Bá a sáre, sare, tá kole mole

Tá a fiyàmoyà bá a rale mole

Bó wule, ile a wó, bó wòjò a sàìro.

Sáre sejì, sáre seta, bó bá yá ikú a de.

Ile aye, nítorí kín ni?

Isolá (1978:15)

If we hustle and hustle, and build houses upon houses

And we also endured and bought acres of land

Sometimes, the house could collapse, and rain may refuse to fall.

Quickly do this, quickly do others, and afterwards death will occur.

This world, of what essence?

The poet captures human passion and persistence with a strong focus on progress in life through individual efforts. In the poet's words, man is figuratively portrayed as having socio-economic and political vision, life ambitions, and goals for achievement and security in the first four lines of the excerpt. By mentioning some admirable projects like houses and land, the poet explains that people make untold sacrifices through a moral approach to financial gain for a seemingly lifetime achievement. He clarifies his point in the excerpt for a better understanding of the challenges of ethical demands that man faces in achieving life goals. Shelter, land purchases, and other investments are viewed by the poet as a kind of disillusioned wealth, which is part of illusion and self-promotion.

Virtually every individual or family is usually passionate about making progress in climbing the ladder of success or career development, as expressed by the poet. To the poet, the fundamental idea in achieving these goals should be "slow and steady wins the race," or "no hurry in life." Throughout history, mythology, real-life situations, and personal experience, the poet demonstrates that nothing is worth dying for or truly permanent in life. The ethical message about life achievements is that they are best accomplished with the principle of "one day at a time!" However, more often than not, most people in the world are overambitious, overly anxious, and consumed by greed. Thus, the poet warns:

Ọmọ ẹni ò níí kogbon, bá a kú tán, a gbale,

A terí gbogún terí gbàyà, terí gbàjàngbon.

A bere àròye, a kó sí wàhálà,

Bónìí ti rí, làná rí, bee nìjẹta, bee lọjo gbogbo

Isolá (1978:15)

One's child would not learn; he would inherit the house after one's demise

He would inherit properties, inherit suffering, and inherit troubles,

He would start lamenting and enter into trouble,

As today is, so it was yesterday, so was three days ago, so is every day

After recounting his personal experience about the necessity of the futility of life and its rooted disheartening ends, he then focuses directly on engaging his children in pragmatic counsel to be able to acquire knowledge in taking life as it is, rather than delusive influence, and immoral possessions. Sometimes, children might have an erroneous impression that their father's ideology, philosophy, fundamental issues, or problematic world has no fundamental bearing on their own lives. But within the domain of every human heart lies the urge to get-rich-quickly, either morally right or through dubious means.

Hence, the poet admonishes his children to learn from seemingly old-fashioned ideas to avoid making costly and unredeemable mistakes. Isolá again persuasively lays claim to be a mentor to his children, who might not have enough knowledge or understanding to learn from him in the first line of the excerpt. The moral lesson or inherent acumen that could be acquired from parental guidance on the mysteries and ephemera of life is very germane in the poet's point of view. This profound perspective, a food for thought, is very germane in the home-training of every child to learn from parents, the principles of life, especially in a world that is filled with many delusive and attractive enticements.

The poet's doxology raises two important moral questions: should the children in question not aspire to achieve material things or marital status like their father? While the poet is highly interested in making it in life, possibly like his contemporaries, he makes it clearer that human beings should not be deeply engrossed in an unending, earthbound future for the robust expectation of the uncertain future, which may be guaranteed today and be heart-disheartening tomorrow by unforeseen calamities. Much as working through pragmatic efforts, making ends meet, and having

great accomplishments are integral parts of human desires, the poet warns on the ethical principle of striking a balance as opposed to willfully doing something unethical. He observes:

Aìsùn, àìwo, nítorí kín ni?

Ẹ yọjú wò gboro, ẹ wòsì, ẹ wàre,

Básínwín ti n sínwín, laro n wo.

Onígege n fọrùn jáleke, atiro n fẹse gobẹ.

Adete n fi kùkùrákù tọrọ owó

Mo wò kan títí, àtàyà, àteyìn – gbandukan.

Gbogbo wọn ni ò fe kú, won waye máyà.

Won kó 'tìjú tà, won dẹni tí n tọrọ kó tó jẹun.

Ikú yá jesín, lòwe àgbà, àbí mo sìfo?

Isolá (1978:15)

Not sleeping, not resting, for what reason?

Peep into the town, look at poverty, look afar off,

As a madman is displaying lunacy, so a lame person is crawling.

Goiter is breaking beads with the neck; a limping person is getting hurt with a knife

The leper is using short hands to beg for alms

I observed one for a while, the chest and back, laden, protruding

All of them do not want to die; they cling to worldly things

They discarded shame, and they became beggars before they could eat

Death is better than shame, is the proverb of the elderly. Did I speak wrongly?

There is no gainsaying the fact that hard work is an essential prerequisite for humans' ultimate existence, survival, and success in life. However, the poet cherishes and affirms that the obligation and warmth of moderation cannot be overemphasized. A Yorùbá adage, bí a ò kú ìse ò tán, (there is hope for the living), underscores that, with optimism, virtually everybody has the potential of making it in life. Hence, a natural tendency to morally justify the essence of making extra efforts with the hope that natural human capacity, coupled with providence's assistance, will eventually yield fruitful results.

Isọlá discloses and also condemns the dangers of departing from the ethical habit of overworking without adequate rest, which is peculiar to human nature. The poet satirically describes how people with diverse physical and health challenges are bravely finding strength and holding on to life in the "survival-of-the-fittest" despite the socio-economic challenges in a keenly competitive communal system. The physically challenged people mentioned by the poet, preferably, depend on soliciting for alms rather than turning to the buoyant magnanimity of societal assistance for moral support for survival. Despite the fun-loving tone with which the poet illustrates the health condition of each 'character' in the excerpt, he emphasizes the optimism they hold onto as applicable to Yorùbá ideology about the essence of existence in a peaceful cohabitation. For self-belonging, the Yorùbá moral law for assisting one another, "àsà-ìranra-ẹni-lowo," is not a mere external set of ethos, but naturally permeates an individual's sense of empathy. This ideally motivates beyond verbal expression of care or love, and translates into action of benevolent giving to the needy as part of one big family in every Yorùbá community.

The ethical message is that whatever an individual's current state, within the time or space of his or her existence, he or she remains an active participant in ameliorating individual or societal problems, in the best way possible in the cosmic environment. "Cosmos ordinarily means ordered universe, or just "ordered" as opposed to 'chaos," Ògúndowole (2002:38). More often, human beings rebel against the reality of death through ways of life that contradict health principles as dictated by nature. Consequently, man usually makes a pragmatic attempt to run away from death despite the self-induced potential of dying untimely.

8.3 Fighting for Longevity with Natural and Unnatural Means against Death

Isolá considers the world "aye" as a human manual on how best to interpret, living longer morally and peaceably. Nevertheless, the poet opines that only a few people who have an understanding of the "world" adhere to the guide, whereas, substantial number of people disregard the longevity principles. He enumerates:

Ẹlese kan ò gopẹ, bee ni kò jagun ọba.

Bá á kú, eekan là á kú,

Ọmọ ẹni, wọn a gbe ni sin.

Kín ní n be láye tá n fúnwo mo!

Igbádùn wo ló po tó bee tí a n so gbekúde morùn.

Igbesí-aye ò nítumo, bee ni kò se pàtàkì

Kò se pàtàkì, òfo, ọjo kejì ọjà àdájọná.

Ẹni táye bá ye ló yẹ kó máa gbe 'le-aye.

Bí kò bá ye ọ, gbìyànjú o ní sùúrù,

Bí be.e ko, se bí ọkùnrin.

Isolá (1978:15)

A one-legged man could not climb a palm tree

Man dies, but only once

One's child would bury one.

What is on earth that is worth tight-fitting!

What type of enjoyment in the world is worthy of holding onto

What great enjoyment is there that makes us tie death's preventive charm around one's neck

Life is neither meaningless nor is it important

It is not important, as empty as a day after a communal market day.

Whosoever understands the world should be the one living in the world

If it is not clear to you, try to exercise patience

Otherwise commit suicide

The world is very mysterious, complex, and complicated for human full comprehension, as the poet affirms. The poet opines that the seemingly obscurity of the world makes it extremely difficult for some people who lack understanding to make right or wrong ethical decisions in problematic situations confronting them. Though making a right or wrong decision is logically somewhat a relative term, however, the moral justification of every human decision is usually subjected to or weighed vis-à-vis the Yorùbá norms and values or community lore before the advent of Islam and Christianity or the constitution. In a critical situation, a human being is subject to making wrong decisions due to illogical thinking, wrong counselling, or hasty decisions. Hence, the poet urges people to internalize wise counsel, "using the metaphor of having a deeper knowledge and understanding of the world to the fullest.

In view of Isolá's steadfast stance on his principle on his reasonable understanding of the emptiness of the world amidst the inclination of the "rat race," about materialism reveals that his realistic assessment of human aspiration as totality vanity. His assertion might be informed by what was apparently obtainable in the ancient Yorùbá society and the prevailing modern phenomenon whereby people are passing on without much to show for it, regarding memories of their achievements or contributions to humanity as a legacy for posterity. It was customary in Yorùbá antiquity for people to be relatively modest in dispositions, and even in their words. This includes some wealthy people, who had a better understanding of the principle of give and take, as the pillar of interpersonal relationships in every clime and epoch.

Traditionally, family members, strangers, or society at large, culturally, stand to benefit from the material possessions of an individual, Aderìnkòmí (1978:165), using "Ogbe Alárá" to illustrate the necessity of helping others, especially the common men, less privileged or strangers, the outcasts, as the essence of living and reciprocating good deeds. Consequently, the Yorùbá society was peaceful with minimal vices, and people then lived longer than what obtains now because of a lack of avarice.

8.4 Ìolá's Antidote for Life Crucible and Self-Control in Celebrated Moments

The poet further expounds on life problems, which he asserts to be an integral part of human life. He affirms:

Báye bá díjú, tó fọjú, tó n dá gbáúgbáú,

Ibáà ro somù, de gbede, yotomí àtàtà

Kò se nnkan kan, kò se pàtàkì, kò nítumo.

N ò je sáre owó, kí n bá wọn sesó

N ò sì je sùn, sùn, kí n gbàgbe ise. òwúro.

Báye bá gún rege, bíi kí n máa jó ko.

Báye bá sì dìyà, dòsì, d'ìjàngbon ràbàtà.

Kì í se bíi kí n gbe májele mì;

Isolá (1978:15)

If the world becomes so difficult, chaotic, and breaks into pieces

If the world becomes so pleasant, pleasurable, and rosy, or easy as pie,

It does nothing, it is insignificant, it is meaningless.

I cannot run after money, and get involved in money rituals

I cannot oversleep and forget my early morning work

If the world is perfect, it is not for me to be dancing

If the world is in anguish, in impoverishment, in a troublesome form

It is not for me to take poison.

By using several terms with related but distinct meanings, the poet illustrates understanding of what people naturally consider as either the best option for celebrating or expressing emotional feelings in comparatively "good" or "bad, circumstances." Isolá directly links what society deems good or bad to ethical issues, which are daily common occurrences. In human existence, no matter how hilarious or terrible people may view one another's different experiences, they are meaningless and inconsequential to the poet. "Tied to African culture is the cult of personality. The humaneness, moralism, beliefs, and customs are the non-material aspects of culture that the individual African has inculcated and internalized to form his personality. The African personality, therefore, includes those things that essentially make African "selves" distinguishable. The African personality is, however, tied up with philosophy," (Oláọba, 2005:36).

As a food for thought, the poet, with a metaphorical statement, opines that it behooves everyone to perceive the ephemeral world with the simplicity it deserves. Despite the pleasant time that life could sometimes bring, the poet asserts that it does not call for much spectacular celebration or joyous moments. To him, the world is filled with sweet-bitter experiences in human existence. This backdrop debunks people's optimism in holding on to life, as illustrated in the anxious query of the poet as to when the world will treat everyone with fairness and equity. Thus, the incredible societal dysfunction revealed in his poem could not destabilise him, emotionally or otherwise. Isolá professes that he has a working knowledge of what to do in different situations, which would not make him lose his senses, sleep, peace, and mental health for what he considers as side-distractions of life. His coping mechanism makes the world practically the same, year-in-year-out, with no expectation of spectacular changes, is a food for thought.

Historically, the trending situations, over the years, show that the perennial financial and socio-political problems identified and forecasted by the poet are on the increase at an alarming rate rather than abating. The greatest challenge the poet poses to his readers is: what words of lamentation do they engage in due to the turning of events in their lives, especially when things are not going well. The fact remains that “our world is known for its disorder, troubles, wars, and conflicts. All these factors affect our lives at the personal, community, and national levels.3

On the other hand, do they often forget that good or the perceived evil of life are somewhat synonymous, whenever they are overjoyed with life accomplishments? A Yorùbá axiom, ire wà nínú ibi, ibi wà ni’nú ire (good is embedded in evil and vice versa), pulls together the concepts of what could be defined as good or bad, which essentially is a relative term. The poet, is affirms that human existence and his condition, in this world, are as unstable as water, and the only hope or tenacity to transcend personal or societal problems, in every place or era, is what matters. “The best indication of a man’s internal disposition is his feeling of pleasure or pain in the doing of virtuous or vicious acts. Pleasure or pain may indeed be called the subject-matter of moral virtue,” Ross (1968: 193).

“Aside from the incessant wars that ravaged the Yorùbá societies, the Yorùbá tribe could be well described as a relatively stable people in ancient times,” (See Lloyd, 1987:205-223). Besides, the poet clearly shows that life, in this world, amid thought-provoking situations, does not always play out as individuals or society might have imagined, planned, or wanted.

8.5 The Poet’s Declaration on Self-Assertiveness over Life Circumstances

Perhaps the most salient idea in the self-claim assertions of Isolá about his life experiences is his self-proclamation to be above life generally and whatever it could offer! With adequate preparation of mind, the poet succinctly and metaphorically expresses that he is greater than the world from different perspectives. In his words, he affirms:

Aye ye mi yeke, MO JU AYÉ LỌ.

Mo jùyà lọ, mo jayo lọ, kò sóhun tó kàn mí.

Aye se mí níkà, ó sebí n ò mo,

Bó se mí lóoore, n ò je dúpe.

Ibi kò korò, oore ò dùn.

Àìmokan ló n sòsìkà, ẹni a se níkà n fini rerìn-ín

Oore a máa gbe, Ikà náà a máa gbe.

Ẹ se woo,

Ẹ sinmi agbaja!

Isolá (1978:15)

I thoroughly understood the world, I AM MORE THAN THE WORLD

I am more than suffering; I am more than joy; nothing concerns me

The world did evil to me, it thought that I did not know

If it did good to me, I will not show gratitude

Evil is not bitter, a good deed is not sweet

Evil evildoer is in ignorance, the victim of the evil deed is holding one in derision

Good deeds are uncompensated, evil deeds go Scot-free

Take it easy,

Stop vexation

The most deceitful thing in life is the human heart due to the accelerated speed of light at which it processes information, issues, or misconceptions, either morally or otherwise. The poet 'dissects' the human mind in the light of how well familiar human beings are with their ecosystem and the mysteries thereof. However, Isolá philosophically claims that he is greater than the world, despite its vastness, space, and time of its age of existence.

In his words as a poet, he modestly asserts that he fully understands the world far better than being troubled or disillusioned by seemingly joyful things the world offers as enticements or allurements. His expression adds interesting details of the world as two sides of a coin: which is good and bad, professing that either of the two is meaningless to him. By human nature in the world, it always seems to have more material possessions than what could be accounted for. The principle of servant-leadership has gained currency among management and leadership theorists.4

Isolá, in his realistic assertion, demystified the seemingly insurmountable circumstances in the human world and the world with his poetic words. Though some might not understand or appreciate how individuals impact the natural world, the Yorùbá prose narratives and mythologies reveal that humans' positive influence is measured against the backdrop of individuals' contributions to society or community. The word of wisdom, as aptly articulated by the poet, is akin to a roadmap to a desirable destination with respect to a fulfilled life with longevity.

End Note:

1..https://www.google.com/search?q=what+is+the+maslow+hierarchy+of+needs&oq=WHat+is+the+maslow+ (Accessed on 28th October, 2025)

2..https://www.google.com/search?q=What+is+the+meaning+of+Ecosphere+as+a+Philosophical+term&oq=What+is+the+meaning+of+Ecosphere+as+a+Philosophical+term&gs_lcrp. (Accessed on 20th October, 2025).

3. Adult Sabbath School Guide. Denis Fortin (Ed.). Old Columbia Pike Silver, Maryland: U.S.A (2018:264).

4. Adult Sabbath School Guide. Denis Fortin (Ed.). Old Columbia Pike Silver, Maryland: U.S.A (2016:97).

Conclusion

Beyond all reasonable doubt, Isolá is a philosophical Yorùbá poet. He has shown practical ways for saying no to evil without being emotional about perceived "good deeds" from humanity in the course of one's existence. He affirms that both concepts are similar terms that express the same idea in human existence or survival within his ecosystem. He establishes that a self-disciplined life is so crucial in gaining wisdom on human inter-personal relations, especially in a communal setting like Yorùbá society, where symbiotic culture is a norm. To this end, we submit that understanding the consequences of having a down-to-earth poet, like Isolá could help in no small measure to appreciate the philosophical stance of a poet that somewhat deviates from cultural norms and values on ethical values. We deduced from his poem that wisdom is associated with life, philosophy, and a poetic point of view on matters relating to human existence and pragmatic ways of exploring human survival in the ecosystem without much ado. Within the context of the poet's word, Isolá sensitizes the contemporary Yorùbá society that there is a need to reconsider the fundamental role of a philosophical poet as well as meaningless perspectives about life generally. He further reproves, reforms, and expounds on certain societal maladies through his poem. He further clarified how one can best handle or relate to a pleasant situation or difficult life, as individuals with a measure of calmness and maturity, as each situation arises. The poet noted that more imperfect things one could observe in the world could, likely, engender a sorrowful heart. He, however, asserts that these irregularities, upsetting as they may be, do not warrant much ado but to develop a coping mechanism, such that they would not debar anyone from achieving life goals or accomplishments. Isolá charges his readers to recognize, and warmly accept socio-economic problems with resilience as preventive measures against distress, transfer aggression, and depression that are very common in modern times. The illustrations of the poet, comparatively, try to strike a balance and proffer a probable solution to socio-cultural problems, especially in the light of modern-day reality, where everybody is greatly battling with financial constraint or obsessed with materialism. Nigerians, as a larger society, need to understand the deep veracity and logicality that are embedded in the philosophical statements of Isolá, and apply the same ethical principles embedded. Evidently, his stance in the poem reveals the ethical values he imbibes from home-training, which fortified him with "native intelligence" coupled with self-discipline and the dint of hard work, which are the fountains of life in his existence. We may be right to conclude that the poet lives in his poetic world, which is far from the Yorùbá cultural belief.

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Appendix I – The Poem of Study and its Translation

Mo ju aye lọ	I am more than the world
Mo sáre, jí, mo bojú kíá.	I woke up, and I washed my face
Mo we, mo jẹun, mo de wewù.	I bathed, I ate, and put on my clothes
Mo gbápò, mo dì gágá, ó di'bi ise.	I carried my bag, well-dressed, and I headed to my work
Nítorí kín ni?	For what reason?
Mo de 'bi ise, ise tún díjú,	I got to work and work became difficult
Oríc n gbóná, ojú n pon, eegun n r oni.	I was having a headache, reddened eyes, with painful bones.
Mo sàyà genge, ọrùn tìponnà,	I chested out, stiff necked
Mo gbese, mo rìn gíegíe, mo pebi monú,	I walked groggily, sluggishly, I endure hunger
Nítorí kín ni?	For what reason?
Mo tún síwo tán, àtidele didán,	To get home after closing is so difficult
Atòjò, àtòòrùn, ọko ni ò gbàye,	Inadequate space in a vehicle during the rainy or dry season is obvious
Ká bùrìn, bùrìn, ká súre sese	To walk fast, to walk run briskly
Ẹní kose lowo òyìnbó fi 'ra re sọfà	The person who trains with white is a serfdom
Bó o pe, wọn a níse tán,	You get fired if you come late to work
Bí o tete jù, wọn ò sílekùn	If you come early, they will not open on time
Nítorí kín ni?	For what reason?
Bí mo ti tó gende tán, ni mo wówó yá.	I borrowed money when I became an adult
Mo gbàwìn ewù, gba ti sòkòtò,	I bought clothes and trousers on credit
Mo disi delùbo, mo gbágbon, ó d'le àna.	I packed yams and yam flour. I went to my In-Laws
Mo láya tán, mo bímọ tán,	I got married, gave birth to children
Mo tòjàngbon lọ bẹẹrẹ.	I got in more trouble.
Nítorí kín ni?	For what reason?
Ẹ dá mi lóhùn.	Answer me.
Nítorí kín ni?	For what reason?
Bá a sáre sáre, tá a kole mole	If we struggled, and built houses
Tá a fiyàmoyà ba' rale mole,	If we made sacrifices and bought an actress of land
Bó wule, ile a wó, bó wòjò a sàìro.	The house could collapse, and rain might refuse to fall
Sáre sejì, sáre seta, bó bá yá ikú a de.	While trying to do many things, death will eventually comes
Ile-aye, nítorí kín ni?	This world, for what reason?
Ọmọ ẹni ò ní kogbon, bá a kú tán, a gbale.	One's child would learn, they will inherit the house after the demise
A terí gbogún terí gbàyà, terí gbàjàngbon.	He will inherit the properties and inherit the problems.
A bere àròye, kó sí wàhálà.	He will start complaining and get into problems
Bónìí ti rí, bee nìjẹta, bee l'ọjo gbogbo.	Today is similar to three days ago, and so is every day
Aìsùn-àìwo, nítorí kín ni?	Restlessness, for what reason?
Ẹ yọju' wògboro, ẹ wòsì, ẹ wàre,	Pip into the town, look to the left, look to the right,
Básínwín ti n sínwín, larọ n wo.	As a madman goes about lunatically, so is the lame crawling
Onígege n fọrùn jáleke, atiro n fẹse gobẹ.	Someone with goitre tore beads, a limping person injured by a knife,
Adete n fi kùkùrákù tọrọ owó.	A leper issuing a half-cut hand to beg alms
Mo wo kan títí, àtàyà, àteyìn,- gbadíkan.	I look at one critically, both front and back overshoot
Gbogbo wọn ni ò fe ku, wọn waye máyà.	All of them do not want to die.

Wọn kó'tìjú tà, won dẹnití n tọrọ kó tó jẹun. They overlook shame; they were begging for alms
Esín yaá jukú, àbí kín lẹ t iwi? Shame is better than did, or what did you say?
Ikú yá jesín, l'òwe àwọn àgbà, àbí mo sìfo? Death is better than shame, is an elderly proverb, did I say it amidst?
Bó jìyà, bó sesín, kó sá má ti kùú. If it is suffering, it is shame, just not to die
Nítorí kín ni? For what reason?
Níjo tí Lágbájá te, ó wọle, ó w'onú igbá, The day somebody was ashamed, he entered his room and behold the calabash
Níjo tí Tàmedù te, ó tobẹ bofun e; The day somebody was ashamed, he slits his throat
Ó kófun jáde, ó gẹsin rìnlú já, He brought his intestines and rode a horse around the town
Ó dele, ó kú, kàkà kó dobále fún yà! He got back home, he died, instead of postrating for punishment!
Mo gope, mo rebọ, itan rún wómú. I climbed a palm tree, I fell, and my thigh was fractured
Onísegùn yàdá, a fi bó ge mi l'ese sọnù! The medical Doctor brought the surgical blade to amputate my legs
Ẹ dákun, ẹ fàdá pamo, emi kì í se háràhárà Please, keep your surgical blade, I am not an amputee
Bíle bá ti yá, k rojú ká rele. If it is time to die, let us endeavour to go.
Ẹlese kan ò gopẹ, bee ni kò jagun ọba. A one-legged man does not climb a palm tree, nor can he fight King's war
Bá à kùú, eekan là á kú, If we want to die, it is only once,
Ọmọ ẹni, wọn a gbeni sin. One's children will bury one
Kín ní n bẹ láye tá n fúnwo mọ! What is it in the world that is so spectacular about clinging to it
Igbádùn wo ló po tó bee tí à n so gbekúde morùn. What enjoyment is therein that warrants tying death-antidote charms on the neck
Igbe-aye ò nítumo, bee ni kò se pàtàkì. Life is meaningless, it is not important, as well
Kò se pàtàkì, òfo, ọjo kejì ọjà àdájọná. It is not important, it is empty like a second market day
Ẹni táye bá ye ló yẹ kó máa gb'le-aye. It is only those who understand the world that deserve to live in it
Bí kò bá ye ọ, gbìyànjú o ní sùúrù, If you do not understand it, try to be patience,
Bí bee ko, se bí ọkùnrin. Otherwise, try to commit suicide.
Báye bá díjú, tó fojú, tó n dá gbaúgbáú, If the world is breaking, bewildered, breaking into pieces
Ibáà ro somù, de gbede, yotomì àtàtà If it is rosy, easy, enjoyable with groovy vibes
Kò se nnkan kan, kò se pàtàkì, kò nítmo. It does not matter, it is not important, it is meaningless
N ò je bá wọn sáre owó kí n bá wọn sesó I will not engage in get-rich-quick syndrome and do money rituals
N ò je sùn sùn, sùn, kí n gbàgbe ise òwúro. I will not oversleep and forget my morning occupation.
Báye bá gún rege, bíi kí n máa jó ko. If the world is stable, it does not warrants my dancing
Báye bá sì dìyà, dòsì, d'ìjàngbon ràbàtà. If the world is filled with immeasurable troubles.
Kì í se bí i kí n gbe májele mì; It does not warrants poising myself
Aye ye mi yeke, MO JU AYÉ LỌ. I understand this world very well, I AM MORE THAN THE WORLD
Mo jùyà lọ, mo jayo lọ, kò sohuntó kàn mí. I am more than suffering, I am more than joy, I am not bothered about anything
Aye se mí níkà, ó sebí n ò mo, The world did me harm, it thought I did not know
Bó se mi lóore n ò je dúpe. If does me good, I will not appreciate it.
Ibi ò korò, oore ò dùn. Wickedness is not bitter; kindness is not sweet.
Àìmokan ló sòsìkà, ẹni a se níkà n fini rerìn-ín A wicked person is ignorant of his deed, a victim is laughing

Oore a màa gbe, Ikà a máa gbe.	Kindness might not be rewarded; wickedness might not be repaid.
Ẹ se woo,	Take life easy,
Ẹ sinmi agbaja!	Stop fussing about~

INFLUENCE OF RECRUITMENT TEST ON TECHNICAL COMPETENCE OF EMPLOYEES IN SELECTED MINISTRIES, DEPARTMENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE (2013-2024)

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Abstract
This study examined the influence of recruitment test on technical competence of employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. Recruitment test is regarded as a mechanism through which technical competence of applicants is determined. This study therefore sought to determine ways in which recruitment test attracted technically-competent workforce into Anambra state civil service from 2013 to 2024. The study adopted Resource-Based View Theory as the framework of analysis. Survey research design was employed to extract relevant data from primary sources through structured questionnaire instrument. Test of hypotheses was carried out at 0.05 level of significance using Chi-Square (x^2). Among other things, the study found out that not all employees within the period undertook recruitment test and this did not assist in the recruitment of technically-competent workforce. In order to attract competent employees into the service, the study, among other things, recommended the need to declare failure to take part in recruitment test into the civil service a crime against the state punishable with severe sanction of up to 25 years imprisonment.

Keywords: *Recruitment test, technical competence, civil service, recruitment, Anambra state*

1.0 Introduction
Governments set up institutions and structures to enable them carry out policies and programmes. It is as a result of this that the civil service was established as the administrative structure in civil capacity to accomplish government policies and programmes. The civil service, operating through ministries and government departments in the country, is responsible for the implementation and enforcement of policies and programmes of government (Nwobi, Obi & Chukwurah, 2021). The civil service is reputed as a complex institution involved in the process of developing an efficient way of organizing and executing government tasks; it is an institution saddled with the responsibility of designing, formulating and implementing public policy, discharging of government functions, and developing programmes in an effective and efficient way (Salahudeen, 2017). Since the civil service is responsible for policy execution through excellent service delivery, the quality of civil servants is of paramount importance in the pursuit of its core mandates. This explains why it is expedient to give adequate attention to the crop of personnel recruited into the civil service for the performance of those essential functions (Onwe, Abah & Nwokwu, 2016; Ndukwe et al, 2023).

To achieve excellent service delivery, the bureaucratically organized civil service emphasises merit in the recruitment of civil servants. This means that for a civil servant to be useful, he or she needs

to possess certain technical qualifications which are deployed in the pursuit of service goals (Nwakoby et al., 2021). The availability of competent and effective civil servants does not, however, happen by chance but through a well-articulated recruitment process that contributes towards achieving satisfactory service delivery, including the screening of potential employees based on relevant skills, experience and educational qualification where applicants with the most relevant experience and qualifications are chosen (Gberevbie, 2010; Adeyemi et al., 2015; Bature, 2019).

Recruitments into Anambra state civil service appear not to have been undertaken methodically and in a manner that attracts qualified workforce, and this accounts for the perceived poor quality service delivery which has, in turn, become increasingly worrisome (Salawudeen, 2017; Idigo, 2023; Ogu & Chukwurah, 2023). Expectations of an excellent service delivery from the state's civil service appears to have become elusive as most residents complain of limited access to quality service. Although successive governments in the state had made efforts to improve on efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service, the service seems to have remained inefficient as a result of perceived poor recruitment process adopted over time that could not elicit excellent service delivery (Dike & Onyekwelu, 2018; Chukwuemeka, Okeke & Onwuchekwa, 2018; Kings, 2018; Ndukwe et al, 2023). At the heart of this worry are questions on whether applicants were subjected to screening test. Contentions are that the recruitments largely deviated from the merit requirement. Generally, there were allegations of a manipulated recruitment process and jettisoning of laid-down rules with attendant threats to effective implementation of government policies. It is on the basis of these concerns that this study was conceived to examine the influence of recruitment test on technical competence of employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1. Perspectives on Recruitment and its Processes

Recruitment as a concept has become a central theme in administration and has continued to attract scholarly attention, just the same way that employers who are desirous of achieving organizational goals place recruitment as the core of their responsibility. The sustained interest connects to the fact that it is the single activity which determines the survival of organizations. Basically, recruitment entails the efforts aimed at attracting individuals into work on a timely basis, in sufficient numbers and with appropriate qualifications. It has to do with identifying and attracting potential candidates for evaluation for employment in organizations, and also includes a set of activities used to obtain a sufficient number of the right people at the right time from the right places for employment; its purpose is to select and place those who best meet the needs of the work place, and to develop and maintain a qualified and adequate workforce through which an organization can fulfil its human resource plan (Orakwe, 2021).

Principally, recruitment involves the process of identifying and attracting a pool of candidates from which some will eventually be selected to receive employment offers. The principal purpose of recruitment is to attract sufficient and suitable potential employees to apply for vacancies in an organization. If organizations are able to find and employ staff who consistently and effectively fulfil their roles and are capable of taking on increased responsibilities, service delivery is usually appreciably high. The implication is that for any organisation to be successful, it must recruit people with capacity, skills and knowledge so that they can contribute towards achieving its ultimate goals (Oyadiran et al, 2023). It has been contested that performance measurement becomes adversely affected when the required impetus is not given to systematic recruitment in the civil service. Thus, efficiency and effectiveness of the service largely depend on the calibre of the workforce and how the recruitment exercise was conducted since the personnel employed serve as the hub around which other resources revolve and this allows the wheel of the service to turn smoothly and perform more effectively, efficiently and economically (Idigo, 2023).

Various organizations recruit individuals by utilizing relevant recruitment processes some of which include conducting screening tests. Others are sourcing, advertising and interviewing of future

employees which are undertaken in order to increase the likelihood of hiring individuals who possess the right skills and abilities to be successful at their jobs (Oyadiran et al, 2023). Generally speaking, recruitment processes involved are interviews, resume screening, aptitude tests, as well as background/reference checks in order to validate an applicant's claims (Baribor, 2023). The processes of recruiting personnel are often conducted based on series of steps which crucially begin with predicting the need for new employees based on the type of vacancies that exists to know the right calibre of candidates to attract (Oyadiran, Ishaq & Kola, 2023). Since the fundamental reason behind recruitment is to attract duly eligible candidates for an organization and employing the right process to fill up the range of vacant positions, recruitment process is therefore expected to include administering recruitment tests to make sure that the candidates have the ability to perform their new jobs efficiently. It is often the contention that processes such as conducting screening tests are important in recruitments, more so since an improperly planned and poorly executed recruiting process may adversely impact on service delivery.

2.1.1 Recruitment Process and Challenges of Implementation in Nigerian Civil Service

Certain challenges have come to trouble recruitment in the civil service of Nigeria and these include lack of independence of the Civil Service Commission, delegation of recruitment functions, federal character principle, long military era, increasing pressures from applicants, and sources of recruitment. Others are commercialisation of appointments and infusion of sentiments. For instance, Section 158(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for the independence of the Federal Civil Service Commission in the exercise of its constitutional powers and functions from control of any other authority or person. But in practice, it is observed that members of the commission are oftentimes influenced and pressured by the executive arm and other arms of government, friends, family members and others who are regarded to be powerful in the country to the extent that the pressures and influences from the interested parties affect the independence of the commission and dissuade suitable candidates from competing for appointments into the civil service. The pressures and influences also affect the principles of merit and equal opportunities, such that the lack of independence of the commission adversely affects recruitment processes in the Nigerian civil service. This reduced the service to become a matter of self-service, eye-service, somewhat private as against the rule and expectation of public service (Madugu & Okafor, 2015; Okeke, 2020).

Section 170 of the 1999 constitution (as amended) empowers the Civil Service Commission whether at the state or federal level to delegate any of its powers and functions as it deems fit while the commission is expected to play the role of a regulatory authority for the civil service. In line with this, the commissions delegate to ministries and extra-ministerial departments the activities and functions to recruit the lower category of civil servants (i.e. grade level 01-06) in order to eliminate delays and engender quick decision. However, this has been found to constitute a challenge to recruitment process as it lacks proper control and gives room to heads of ministries and ministerial departments to recruit without adherence to systematic recruitment procedures. In like manner, the federal character principle is originally meant to strike a balance in terms of representation in the civil service of the federation to ensure due representation of all states. But the major problem associated with the principle is that it sacrifices merit in favour of quota system; the undue use of quota system goes antithesis to the recruitment process in the Nigeria civil service and breeds mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy (Briggs, cited in Madugu & Okafor, 2015).

2.1.2 Factors Affecting Service Delivery in Nigerian Civil Service

A major cause of poor service delivery in the civil service has been attributed to non-implementation of systematic process of recruitment of staff into the service. It has been contended that recruitment into civil service must be properly or systematically carried out. In essence, there must be rules and procedures which must be followed strictly and closely. There must be policy statement, definition and assignment of authority and responsibility (Nwakoby et al., 2021). As Ajayi (cited in Dominic & Peter, 2021) noted, key factor affecting service delivery in Nigeria civil

service remains poor recruitment procedures, in addition to other factors which include over staffing, poor remuneration of employees, poor assessment of manpower needs, use of wrong criteria to appraise staff performance, inadequate training and ineffective supervision, lack of qualified technical support staff, failure to carry out periodic assessment of manpower needs of the various departments, considerable political interference in the process of personnel administration leading to improper delegation of power, ineffective supervision, corruption, unauthorized and unreasonable absenteeism, lateness, idleness and poor workmanship. Others are politicization of the top hierarchy of the civil service, lack of financial accountability and probity, perpetual breakdown of discipline, institutionalization of corruption at all levels and segments of the service, disregard for rules and regulations, loss of direction and general decline of effectiveness and efficiency.

In order to address these ills, the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, after his inauguration on May 29, 1999, unfolded his vision of an ideal civil service for Nigeria and by extension an ideal public service with the following elements: a competent, professional, development-oriented, public spirited and customer-friendly civil service capable of responding effectively and speedily to the needs of the society; a civil service with the core values of political neutrality, impartiality, integrity, loyalty, transparency, professionalism and accountability; a civil service that is guided by equity where things are done in the right way based on extant rules and regulations which should be exercised in the public interest; creation of suitable environment where civil servants are assured of protection and job security in the faithful discharge of their duties and responsibilities; as well as a competitively, well remunerated and innovative civil service. The Olusegun Obasanjo administration's Service Delivery Reform of 2003 was instituted in recognition of poor service delivery of the public service in Nigeria (Okeke, 2020).

2.1.3 The Anambra State Civil Service

There is a belief that civil service in Anambra state is not immune from the challenges troubling civil service in the rest of the country. Anambra State civil service is, in fact, characterized by low morale in the sense that punctuality and dedication to work is no longer the priding administrative attitude of the service. The situation is such that there are hurdles or challenges in managing the service of the civil servants in the state (Nwobi et al., 2021). As Nwakoby et al (2021) put it, service delivery in Anambra state civil service was very poor in all ramifications such that the performance output of employees was of prime concern to the public.

Over the years, service delivery in Anambra state civil service has slackened such that it indicates poor service delivery, records poor performance, and is largely seen as maintaining the legacy and poor productivity orientation bequeathed by the colonial era (Nwakoby et al., 2021). The inefficiency in service delivery in Anambra state civil service could be attributed to several reasons. For instance, recruitment process is more or less affiliated to networking and political inclinations as against the notion that organizations select people with the quality essential for continued success in the workplace through proper recruitment and selection practices. Unfortunately, the processes of recruitment are often characterised by favouritism and god-fatherism in which case the employees' loyalty will only be to the god-fathers and not to the service and this adversely affects organizational effectiveness (Chukwuemeka et al, 2018).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Resource-Based View Theory as the framework of analysis. The Resource-Based View Theory propounded by Jay Barney in 1991 is a theory of long-term competitive advantage based on the premise that successful organisations rely on unique resource combinations to create greater value. According to the theory, the calibre of people employed and the quality of their work and relationships account for most of the organisation's successes or weaknesses (Barney, 1991). The theory argues that of all the resources that an organisation may acquire, human resource is the most crucial in the form of a ready pool of highly qualified and motivated employees. It contends that resources are essential and must be both valuable and rare/imitable for an organisation to achieve sustained competitive advantage.

These resources include tangible assets and intangible assets, comprising of human capital (Burley, 2022; Cayago, 2023). According to the resource-based view theory, effective recruiting and selection processes lead to better organisational results, and argues that a competitive advantage may be supplied to an organization when it is able to use its resources in a more distinctive and useful manner than its competitors (Burley, 2022). Thus, the theory explains that all organisations that have achieved exceptional competence have done so because of their remarkable and non-substitutable slot of resources (Cayago, 2023)

2.2.1 Theory Application

The Resource-Based View Theory adopted in this study as framework of analysis is very apt. The utility of the theory is better appreciated in the context of the broad objective of this study which is to examine the influence of recruitment test on technical competence of employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. Taking into account the major argument of the theory to the effect that human resources which are well recruited using appropriate methods and procedures are a great asset to an organization, the need for an appropriate recruitment of workforce into the civil service to attract technically-competent for efficient service delivery is underscored. Workers' skill, knowledge and competencies in organizations are identified and attracted through recruitment tests. Through administering the tests, the goal to have technically-competent civil servants in Anambra state civil service can, therefore, be attained.

2.2.2 Empirical Review

Attempts had been made by previous studies to investigate service delivery in Anambra state civil service. For instance, Ogu and Chukwurah (2023) investigated "E-governance and Public Service delivery in Nigeria: A study of Anambra State Civil Service: 2018-2022" using survey research design and 6,955 employees in Anambra State Civil Service, out of which a sample size of 361 staff were drawn using Krejice and Morgan's sample size determination table. Finding is that the application of e-governance has positively affected public service delivery in Anambra State Civil Service. Also, Orakwe (2021) in a study titled "Compensation Packages and Civil Servants' Performance in State Ministries in Anambra State" utilised descriptive research survey, 1423 selected civil servants and 302 civil servants using Krejcie and Morgan sampling formular. Pearson Product Correlation Method analysis was conducted to assess the relative predictive power of the independent variables on the dependent variable and the study found that there is a strong and significant positive relationship between competence-based, merit-based, and job-based compensation on employees' performance. Equally, in their paper titled, "Impact of Effective Employee Performance Management on Organizational Productivity: A Study of Anambra State Civil Service System, Nigeria", Mgbemena, Mbah and Ejike (2015) using a survey design found that transparent performance appraisal process affects employee performance positively and significantly. It also found out that cordial labour-management relations enhance organizational productivity significantly, and that selective disciplinary measures administration in an organization is a drawback on employee's performance. On the other hand, Nwakoby et al (2021) in their study titled, "Enlistment and Organizational Effectiveness in Anambra Civil Service Commission Awka" determined if the recruitment in Anambra State Civil Service Commission, Awka encouraged the appointment of qualified employees in order to enhance its organizational service delivery using survey research with 5,468 employees of Anambra state civil service commission, Awka as well as simple percentages and chi-square statistical technique in analysing the data. The study found that there is a relationship between sound enlistment and organizational effectiveness in Anambra State Civil Service Commission Awka and recommended, amongst others, that issues such as favouritism should be avoided while selecting applicants.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Survey research design was employed in this study. The choice of this design was to extract relevant data from primary sources that are knowledgeable in the subject of investigation. Using the questionnaire instrument, the study reached out to employees in the selected ministries and departments in order to establish the influence of recruitment test on technical competence of employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state and did not need to rely on secondary sources (documents). This informed the choice of survey design for the study.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study is 2,414, comprising all the staff members of the nine ministries and two non-ministerial departments examined in this study. Table 3.1 presents the population distribution.

Table 3.1 Population Distribution

S/NO	MINISTRY/NON-MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENT	POPULATION	PERCENTAGE
1	Civil Service Commission	80	3
2	Office of Head of Service	251	10
3	Ministry of Finance	468	20
4	Ministry of Youth Development	188	8
5	Ministry of Information	73	3
6	Ministry of Health	276	11
7	Ministry of Agriculture	405	17
8	Ministry of Homeland Affairs	65	3
9	Ministry of Works	213	9
10	Ministry of Lands	321	13
11	Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning	74	3
	Total	**2,414**	**100**

Source: Office of Head of Service (2025)

3.3 Sample Size Determination

Taro Yamane (1964) sample size determination formula was adopted in determining the sample size of the study. This is derived mathematically as:

$$S = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where S = Sample size

1 = Constant

N = Population size

E = Margin of error, usually 5% (0.05)

$$S = \frac{2,414}{1+ 2,414\ (0.0025)}$$

$$S = \frac{2,414}{1+6.04}$$

$$2,414$$

$S = 7.04$

$S = 343$

After determining the sample size of the study, Bowley Sample Technique was used to decide the sample size for each stratum as below:

Civil Service Commission

$$\frac{80 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{27{,}440}{2{,}414} = 11.36 = 11$$

Head of Service

$$\frac{251 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{86{,}093}{2{,}414} = 35.66 = 36$$

Ministry of Finance

$$\frac{468 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{160,\ 524}{2{,}414} = 66.49 = 66$$

Ministry of Youth Development

$$\frac{188 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{64{,}484}{2{,}414} = 26.71 = 27$$

Ministry of Information

$$\frac{73 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{25{,}039}{2{,}414} = 10.37 = 10$$

Ministry of Health

$$\frac{276 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{94{,}668}{2{,}414} = 39.21 = 39$$

Ministry of Agriculture

$$\frac{405 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{138{,}915}{2{,}414} = 57.54 = 58$$

Ministry of Homeland Affairs

$$\frac{65 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{22{,}295}{2{,}414} = 9.23 = 9$$

Ministry of Works

$$\frac{213 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{73{,}059}{2{,}414} = 30.26 = 30$$

Ministry of Lands

$$\frac{321 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{110{,}103}{2{,}414} = 45.61 = 46$$

Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

$$\frac{74 \times 343}{2{,}414} = \frac{25{,}382}{2{,}414} = 10.51 = 11$$

Total = 343

Table 3.2: Sample Size Distribution

S/NO	MINISTRY/NON-MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENT	POPULATION	SAMPLE SIZE	PERCENTAGE
1	Civil Service Commission	80	11	3
2	Office of Head of Service	251	36	10
3	Ministry of Finance	468	66	20
4	Ministry of Youth Development	188	27	8
5	Ministry of Information	73	10	3
6	Ministry of Health	276	39	11
7	Ministry of Agriculture	405	58	17
8	Ministry of Homeland Affairs	65	9	3
9	Ministry of Works	213	30	9
10	Ministry of Lands	321	46	13
11	Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning	74	11	3
	Total	**2,414**	**343**	**100**

Source: Research Report, 2025

3.4 Sampling Technique

Random sampling technique was utilised in selecting employees who served as respondents in the ministries and non-ministerial departments studied. The choice of this technique was to eliminate bias in selecting respondents who may, in turn, show bias in answering the questions.

3.5 Instrument of Data Collection

The study adopted the structured questionnaire instrument for data collection from primary sources. The instrument has two sections: A and B where Section A contained the bio-data of the respondents while Section B contained the metric questions consisting of five questions designed to obtain responses from the respondents on the relationship between recruitment process and service delivery in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. The instrument was based on the objective and research question developed for the study. In the instrument, the respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point likert scale by indicating whether they agree with each of the questions contained in the questionnaire or otherwise by simply ticking (√) Strongly Agreed (SA) = 5, Agreed (A) = 4, Don't Know (DK) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1, as appropriate.

3.6 Distribution of Questionnaire

The researcher used a face-to-face method of data collection by visiting the selected ministries and non-ministerial departments to administer the 343 copies of the questionnaire with the help of an assistant. The researcher opted to use an assistant in order to abridge time in the distribution and retrieval of the copies of the questionnaire. However, the assistant was educated on the essence of the study, the objectives, items contained in the questionnaire and how best to relate with the respondents for a fruitful exercise. The distribution took place within three weeks in order to ensure maximum cooperation of the respondents who demanded that the researcher and the assistant returned in few days when they would have time to attend to them. The time frame was also to accommodate some staff who had have taken official permission to be off duty for days. Through that, the researcher got the cooperation of the targeted respondents in filling the questionnaire. The researcher and his assistant extracted an agreement that the questionnaire copies would be collected from each of the respondents in about 30 minutes after the distribution. Below is the table showing the distribution of the questionnaire.

Table 3.3: Distribution of Questionnaire

S/NO	MINISTRY/NON-MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENT	SAMPLE SIZE
€	Civil Service Commission	11
2	Office of Head of Service	36
3	Ministry of Finance	66
4	Ministry of Youth Development	27
5	Ministry of Information	10
6	Ministry of Health	39
7	Ministry of Agriculture	58
8	Ministry of Homeland Affairs	9
9	Ministry of Works	30
10	Ministry of Lands	46
11	Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning	11
Total		**343**
Percentage		**100%**

Source: Research Report 2025

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The administered questionnaires were collated and scored in order to obtain the number of respondents that selected particular options listed on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Know, Strongly Disagree and Disagree). The benchmark for establishing whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with each of the items on the questionnaire is 2.50. Mean and Standard Deviation was employed to answer the research question in line with the Resource-Based View Theory adopted in this study as framework of analysis. Test of hypotheses was carried out at 0.05 level of significance using Chi-Square (x^2).

4.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

4.1 Return of Questionnaire

A total of 343 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. However, three hundred and twenty four (324) copies were returned representing 94% of the total distributed copies of the questionnaire while nineteen were not returned, representing 6% of the total distributed copies. Out of the returned copies, ten (10) copies were rejected as a result of improper completion by the respondents representing 3% of the total distributed and total returned copies. The remaining three hundred and fourteen (314) copies representing 91% of the total distributed and total return copies respectively formed the basis for the analysis. The return rate of the distributed questionnaire is presented on table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Return Rate of Distributed Questionnaire

Ministry/Non-Ministerial Department	No. Distributed	No. Returned	No. Not Returned	No. Condemned	No. Used
Civil Service Commission	11	11	0	0	11
Office of Head of Service	36	34	2	0	34
Ministry of Finance	66	61	5	0	61
Ministry of Youth	27	23	4	1	22

Development					
Ministry of Information	10	10	0	1	9
Ministry of Health	39	37	2	0	37
Ministry of Agriculture	58	56	2	4	52
Ministry of Homeland Affairs	9	9	0	0	9
Ministry of Works	30	28	2	2	26
Ministry of Lands	46	45	1	2	43
Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning	11	10	1	0	10
Grand Total	**343**	**324**	**19**	**10**	**314**
Percentage %	**100 %**	**94 %**	**6%**	**3%**	**91%**

Source: Research Report, 2025

Research Question

In what ways has recruitment test attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024?

The essence of this research question was to ascertain ways in which recruitment test has attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. Table 4.3 contains the summary of the respondents' responses on the questions.

Table 4.2: Recruitment Test and Technical Competence of Employees in Selected Ministries and departments in Anambra State, 2013 -2024

Responses	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Technical competence of workforce was a priority in Anambra state civil service recruitment	179 57%	65 21%	13 4%	34 11%	23 7%	314 100%
Screening test was conducted in 2013 recruitment	157 50%	55 18%	28 9%	40 13%	34 11%	314 100%
Screening test was not conducted in all recruitments carried out 2013-2024	144 46%	50 16%	32 10%	52 17%	36 11%	314 100%
Not all applicants took part in screening test from 2013-2024	224 71%	47 15%	12 4%	21 7%	10 3%	314 100%
Screening test attracted technically-competent employees	46 15%	219 70%	21 7%	17 5%	10 3%	314 100%

Source: Research Report 2025.

Table 4.2 shows the responses of the respondents on ways in which screening test attracted technically-competent employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. As regard technical competence of workforce was a priority in Anambra state civil service recruitment, 179 or 57% respondents indicated strongly agree, 65 or 21% respondents agree, 13 or 4% respondents indicated don't know, 34 or 11% respondents indicated disagree, while 23 or 7% respondents indicated strongly disagree. Similarly, 157 or 50% of the respondents indicated strongly agree on screening test was conducted in 2013 recruitment, 55 or 18% respondents indicated agree, 28 or 9% respondents indicated don't know, 40 or 13% indicated disagree, and 34 or 11% respondents indicated strongly disagree.

As regards screening test was not conducted in all recruitments carried out 2013-2024, 144 or 46% respondent indicated strongly agree, 50 or 16% respondents indicated agree, 32 or 10% respondents indicated don't know, 52 or 17% respondents indicated disagree, while 32 or 11% respondents indicated strongly disagree. On not all applicants took part in screening test from 2013-2024, 224 or 71% of the respondents indicated strongly agree, 47 or 15% respondents indicated agree, 12 or 4% respondents indicated don't know, 21 or 7% respondents indicated disagree, and 10 or 3% respondents indicated strongly disagree. On screening test attracted technically-competent civil servants, 46 or 15% of the respondents indicated strongly agree, 219 or 70% respondents indicated agree, 27 or 7% respondents indicated don't know, 17 or 5% indicated disagree, and 10 or 3% indicated strongly disagree.

The pattern of responses presented and analysed above shows that technical competence of employees was a priority in Anambra state civil service recruitment, as such screening test was conducted in 2013 recruitment although not conducted in all recruitments carried out afterwards up to 2024 when not all employees took part in the screening test. Regardless, the much of the test conducted largely contributed to technical competence of civil servants in the state within the period.

Test of Hypothesis

Objective: The hypothesis seeks to ascertain that recruitment test has not attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024.

Statement of Hypothesis

Recruitment test has not attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024.

Decision Criteria

When the computed value of chi-square (x^2) is greater than (>) the table value of chi-square (X^2), the hypothesis three will be accepted.

Table 4.7: Observed Frequency for Hypothesis Two

Ministry/Non-Ministerial Department	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Civil Service Commission	2	1	2	7	7	19
Office of Head of Service	4	3	10	9	3	29
Ministry of Finance	9	12	18	10	2	51
Ministry of Youth Development	6	5	5	3	2	21

Ministry of Information	6	3	7	2	3	21
Ministry of Health	15	12	2	€	2	32
Ministry of Agriculture	25	18	3	5	3	54
Ministry of Homeland Affairs	2	5	3	2	2	14
Ministry of Works	10	12	2	4	1	29
Ministry of Lands	12	6	6	7	2	33
Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning	4	2	3	€	1	11
Total	**95**	**79**	**61**	**51**	**28**	**314**

Source: Research Report, 2025.

Calculation of Degree of freedom (DF)

DF = (R-1) (C-1)

Where R = Number of Row in the contingency table

C = Number of columns in the contingency table

DF = (3-1) (5-1)

= 2 x 4

= 8

At 0.05 significant level and 8 degree of freedom the table value of chi-square = **15.51**

Computation of chi-square (X^2)

$$X^2 = \sum \frac{(0-e)^2}{}$$

Where O = Observed frequency

e = Expected frequency

Expected frequency (e) is giving by $\frac{RT \times CT}{GT}$

Where RT = Row total

CT = Colum total

GT = Grand total

Table 4.8: Computation of Chi-Square for Hypothesis Two

Observed Frequency (o)	**Expected Frequency (e)**	**(o-e)**	**$(o-e)^2$**	**$\frac{(o-e)^2}{E}$**
32	32.68	-0.68	0.4624	0.01
15	27.17	-12.17	148.1089	5.45
21	20.98	-0.02	0.0004	0.00
27	17.54	9.46	89.4916	5.10
13	9.63	3.37	11.3569	1.18
29	26.93	2.07	4.2849	0.16
20	22.39	-2.39	5.71	0.26
12	17.29	-5.29	27.9841	1.62

17	14.46	2.54	6.4516	0.45
11	7.94	3.06	9.3636	1.18
34	35.40	-1.40	1.9600	0.06
44	29.44	14.56	211.9936	4.82
28	22.73	5.27	27.7729	1.22
7	19.00	-12.00	144.00	7.58
4	10.43	-6.43	41.3449	3.96
				$(X^2) = \sum (o-e)^2 = 32.89$ E

Source: Research Report, 2025

Decision

Since the computed value of chi-square (X^2) of 32.89 is greater than (>) the table value of chi-square of 15.51, hypothesis three is accepted. The study therefore established that recruitment test has not attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024.

4.2. Discussion of Findings

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of recruitment test on technical competence of employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. From the analysis of this research, it was established that recruitment test has not attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. It was discovered that although technical competence of workforce is a priority in Anambra state civil service recruitment and necessitated the conduct of the screening test during the 2013 recruitment exercise, it was not conducted in all recruitments carried out afterwards. In essence, not all employees in Anambra state civil service underwent screening test. In view of the situation, recruitment test therefore did not attract technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state 2013 to 2024.

5.0 Conclusion

The study was carried out to examine the influence of recruitment test on technical competence of employees in selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. Civil service is important as the administrative structure in civil capacity set up by States to accomplish government policies and programmes. Even though their role in crucial, having competent and effective civil servants in a country does not happen by chance. It rather happens through a methodical recruitment exercise if the employees must deliver satisfactory service delivery. This therefore implies that appropriate recruitment process which involves screening tests for the potential employees is carried out based on the fact that even though every State depends on the effective use of its civil service in order to achieve its objectives, the workforce, if they are to be effectively utilized, should be obtained in the right quality.

Expectation was that screening test should be part of recruitment process into Anambra state civil service. However, the study revealed that recruitment test has not attracted technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024. It was discovered that although technical competence of workforce is a priority in Anambra state civil service recruitment and necessitated the conduct of the screening test during the 2013 recruitment

exercise, it was not conducted in all recruitments carried out afterwards. In essence, not all employees in Anambra state civil service undertook screening test. In view of the situation, recruitment test therefore did not attract technically-competent employees into selected ministries and departments in Anambra state from 2013 to 2024.

6.0 Recommendations

Findings by the study necessitated the need for Anambra state government to make recruitment test into the state civil service mandatory and tailored towards attracting technically-competent employees into the service. In view of the finding that the screening test was not conducted for all the employees within the period covered by the study and also taking into account the need to prioritise technical competence of civil servants in the state, there is the need to declare failure to undergo screening test into the civil service a crime against the state punishable with severe sanction of up to 25 years imprisonment. In addition, the state government is strongly advised to urgently organise mandatory competency test for all civil servants in the state with a view to ascertaining their technical competence for sake of satisfactory service delivery.

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"WHO WILL ROLL AWAY THE STONE?" (MARK 16:3): THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL REFLECTIONS ON WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE RESURRECTION AND NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract
This study, "Who Will Roll Away the Stone?" (Mark 16:3) Theological and Socio- Cultural Reflections on Women's role in the resurrection and Nigerian Christianity, explores the symbolic and theological implications of women's witness in the resurrection narratives and their applicability for gender inclusion in Nigerian Christianity. The aim is to reinterpret Mark 16:3 through a contextual and feminist hermeneutic that highlights women as agents of divine emancipation and equality. Using a qualitative interpretive methodology, the study integrates biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and socio-artistic analysis. Primary sources include the resurrection narratives, while secondary data derive from African feminist theologians such as Oduyoye, Njoroge, and Kanyoro. Findings reveal that the rolled- away stone in the Gospel of Mark functions as a metaphor for disassembled patriarchal barriers and affirms the divine priority in women's emancipation. The study further shows that Jesus' post-resurrection commissioning of women reconfigures apostolic authority as embedded in faithfulness rather than gender advantage. It concludes that Nigerian Christianity must embody a resurrection- inspired theology by espousing inclusive ecclesiastical structures, reforming theological education, and promoting women's full participation in ministry. Recommendations prompt churches to roll away institutional "stones" of rejection or exclusion and to affirm resurrection as God's model for justice, equality, and collaborative renewal.

Keywords: *African Christianity, Resurrection, Gender equality, Mark 16:3, Women.*

Introduction
The resurrection of Jesus Christ stands as the foundation of Christian faith, signifying God's ultimate power over death and injustice. Yet, within this redemptive event, women crop not simply as substantiations but as the first outriders of the philosophy (Matthew 28:5 – 8; Mark 16:2 – 8; Luke 24:1 – 8; John 20:1 – 12). Their question, "Who will roll away the stone for us?" (Mark 16:3), continues to echo as a conceit for the enduring barriers that limit women's agency in religious and social life. In the African context, it encapsulates the struggles of women constrained by theological, artistic, and institutional patriarchy (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992; Acha, 2015). From early Christianity to contemporary Nigerian churches, patriarchal interpretations of Scripture have confined women's leadership. Bakoshi (2016) observes that numerous ecclesiastical systems still image Aristotle's view that "a man is by nature fitter for command than a woman." Likewise, Yoruba sayings similar as *oro obinrin ko se tele* "the words of a woman can not be followed" (Ampitan, 2012) support gender disparity.

Although women seem to constitute the majority in Nigerian population, their leadership openings remain minimum (Oloyede, 2023). Theological rejection is sustained by picky readings of Scripture that honour manly authority while ignoring Christ's inclusive illustration. Socio-culturally, precolonial and traditional structures continue to define leadership legality in mannish terms (Asaaju, 2019). The African church, thus, stands at a theological crossroads while the resurrection affirms the rejuvenation of structures still reflect the patriarchal morals of age (Alana, 2011).

Mark 16:3 places the women's question — "Who will roll away the stone?" — at the heart of the resurrection morning. Historically, it reveals physical limitation; theologically, it represents humanity's battle with godly possibility. African feminist practitioners see the "stone" as a conceit for the socio-religious and institutional walls that continue to hamper women's flourishing (Njoroge

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& Dube, 2001). Yet, upon appearance, the women find the gravestone formerly rolled down, signifying godly action that precedes mortal trouble. The rolled-away gravestone therefore symbolizes God's intervention against patriarchal oppression, affirming that emancipation originates in divine, not mortal, action.

This study reinterprets the resurrection narratives through a theological-contextual lens, fastening on women as substantiations and agents of emancipation. Specifically, it (1) exegetes Mark 16:3 to uncover theological counteraccusations for gender equality, (2) examines parallels between biblical and African patriarchies, and (3) proposes a resurrection-inspired theology of inclusion for Nigerian Christianity. Employing a qualitative illuminative system that integrates biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and contextual analysis, the study foregrounds African women's voices such as Oduyoye (1995), Masenya (2004), and Adewale (2012), demonstrating that resurrection theology remains a vital paradigm for gender justice in the contemporary Church.

The Resurrection Narratives: A Biblical Overview

Synoptic and Johannine accounts of the resurrection:

The resurrection narratives enthral a central position within the canon of the New Testament. Each gospel offers a distinct theological perspective, but all affirm the major reality of Christ's triumph over death. In the Synoptic accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and the Johannine narrative, the foremost vouchers of this decisive event are women — specifically Mary Magdalene, Mary the ma of James, Salome, and Joanna (Matthew 28:1 – 10; Mark 16:1 – 8; Luke 24:1 – 10; John 20:1 – 18). Matthew records that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the grave" and encountered an angel publicizing that Jesus had risen (Matthew 28:1 – 7). Mark's gospel situates the women's trip at daylight, pressing their anxiety over the monument sealing the grave (Mark 16:2 – 3). Luke expands the list of women and emphasises the angelic reproach — "Why do you look for the living among the dead" (Luke 24:5). John's account is more intimate, fastening on Mary Magdalene's particular hassle with the risen Christ (John 20:14 – 18).

Despite differences in detail, these narratives meet on one theological reality God entrusted the exposure of the revivification to women. According to Isaak (2006), the Lukan addition of multiple women "restores the quality of the socially marginalised as credible connections of godly exposure" (p. 1275). The diversity among the accounts reflects narrative independence rather than contradiction, emphasizing the authenticity of their substantiation (Keener, 1993, p. 183).

The document, "The appearance of the Women" rightly observes that while each gospel pen portrays the event differently, their convergence on womanish validation demonstrates theological intentionality "Despite the fact that women of Jesus' days were the first vouchers to the revivification and therefore could be regarded as the first missionaries of the church, moment they are still asking that question as they face the multitudinous roadblocks placed in their path." Thus, the biblical validation challenges any attempt to silence women in ministry. It presents a God who dismantles societal prospects by revealing the most transformative verity of history through those supposed least credible in their culture.

Exegetical reflection on Mark 16:3 and the metaphor of the stone:

Mark's gospel preserves a detail of profound theological and representational resonance. As the women approach the grave, they ask, "Who will roll away the monument from the entrance of the grave?" (Mark 16:3, ESV). The "monument" (lithos) is further than a physical barricade; it's a narrative device that represents mortal limitation, anxiety, and finitude when defied with godly possibility. The question expresses the pressure between faith and impossibility — a recreating Markan motif that underscores godly action in the face of mortal helplessness (Moloney, 2020).

Journey, the women arrive to discover that "the monument had been rolled down." This exposure reframes the narrative from fear to faith, from impossibility to godly accomplishment. Theologically, the rolled-away monument signifies God's prevenient action — God moves before mortal dogging, anticipating need and breaking walls. As Ngewa (1997) affirms, "The revivification of the Lord Jesus Christ is a major fact and has been substantiated by multitudinous unfailing

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evidences" (p. 367). Also, Wright (2020) argues that revivification faith "reconfigures mortal limitation within the horizon of godly power." Therefore, the dumping of the monument is not incidental but pregnant it signals godly win over death, despair, and the unsexed scales bedded in culture.

For African women, this text carries profound contextual significance. It spectacles their lived struggle within patriarchal societies and ecclesial systems that constrain their agency. The "monument" symbolizes the enduring weight of cultural taboos, pastoral rejection, and institutional silencing that hinder women's full participation in God's charge. Asaaju (2010) identifies this as a "gender-vulgarized socio-cultural terrain" in which women's creative and spiritual capacities are completely confined (p. 89). Contemporary African theologians have extended this conceit. Oduyoye (2021) describes the rolled-away monument as "the godly disturbance of patriarchal control and the declaration of women as mates in redemption."

Ultimately, Mark 16:3 – 4 reveals that the revivification is not only a nonfictional event but a continuing godly pattern — God acts first to remove walls that hinder life and flourishing. The rolled-away monument stands as both a theological declaration of God's liberating power and a missional imperative for the Church to strike the "monuments" of rejection, icing that every believer — especially women — shares equally in publicizing the risen Christ.

Women as the first witnesses and bearers of the resurrection message:

The elevation of women as the first vouchers to the revivification is one of the most radical and transformative confines of the gospel narratives. Across the Synoptic and Johannine accounts, women enthral the narrative centre of exposure when the virile epigones retreat into fear and confusion. Mary Magdalene's unvarying devotion — remaining at the grave while the others fled — epitomises fidelity awarded by godly exposure (John 20:10 – 11). In her hassle with the risen Christ, she becomes *apostola apostolorum* — the "backer to the apostles" — a title subsequently affirmed by Augustine and reclaimed in modern theological discourse (Ngewa, 1997, p. 365).

Luke 24:9 – 10 records that the women, including Joanna and Mary the ma of James, "told all these goods to the Eleven." Yet, their communication was dismissed as "gibberish" (Luke 24:11). This response reflects the unsexed scepticism of the ancient Mediterranean world, where women's substantiation carried no legal standing. As Alana (2011) observes, analogous redundancy "illustrates how patriarchy structures indeed the event of exposure" (p. 202). Contemporary African churches constantly reproduce this dynamic, where women's voices remain uncredited in theological deliberation and ecclesial leadership (Oduyoye, 1992; Phiri & Nadar, 2022)

Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene decisively overturns this sense of rejection. His commission — "Go to my sisters and tell them" (John 20:17) — authorises her as the first cleric of the revivification, thereby resting Christian proclamation in a woman's substantiation. This act radically subverts patriarchal scales by entrusting salvific proclamation to one whom society supposed unworthy of public speech. Feminist theologian Schaberg (2021) interprets this as "a deliberate inversion of unsexed authority, signalling that godly exposure transcends mortal constructions of power."

As Acha (2015) notes, "Both biblical and African societies are well known for the marginalisation and domination of women," yet Jesus' ministry "accorded them the quality and recognition due to them" (p. 38). The revivification thus becomes an eschatological reversal those silenced by culture come the first forerunners of new creation. Their fastness at the grave inaugurates a new order in which validation is determined not by gender but by grace, affirming that the voices of the marginalised is necessary to the charge of the risen Christ.

Theological Reflections on Women as Witnesses of the Resurrection

Christ's inclusion of women in redemptive revelation:

From the foremost stages of His ministry, Jesus of Nazareth deliberately included women as integral actors in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. In a first-century terrain marked by rigid

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patriarchy, His conducts were both socially subversive and theologically revolutionary. Women analogous as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and Mary of Bethany not only followed Jesus but also handed material and spiritual support for His ministry (Luke 8:1 – 3). This addition stands in stark distinction to rabbinic conventions that barred women from theological instruction and public cult.

Jesus' encounters with women reveal a harmonious pattern of exposure and restoration. His dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7 – 29) converted a socially marginalised figure into a public theologian — the first to proclaim Him as Messiah to her community, also, His defense of the woman caught in infidelity (John 8:1 – 11) exposed the dissimulation of patriarchal judgment while affirming the woman's moral agency. As Kwok (2015) notes, "Jesus' exposure is intersectional; it discloses godly verity through those barred by systems of power.

In the resurrection narratives, this inclusive exposure reaches its climax. By revealing Himself first to Mary Magdalene and commissioning her to announce His victory, Jesus redefined apostolic authority as fastness rather than gender honour. Oduyoye (2021) argues that "the post- resurrection hassle inscribes women's experience within the canonical memory of redemption." Thus, Christ's addition of women is not incidental but essential, it reflects the truly nature of the gospel as a movement of restoration and equality. The revivified Christ entrusts exposure to those previously barred, signalling that godly verity transcends patriarchal boundaries and inaugurates a new humanity rested in collaborative quality and cooperation.

Resurrection as divine affirmation of gender equality:

The rejuvenation of Jesus Christ represents not only the climactic event of deliverance history but also a godly declaration of equality among all humanity. In the revivification narratives, God vindicates those who remained faithful in the face of despair — women who, though marginalised by patriarchal structures, came the first forerunners of the new creation. Theologically, this event redefines mortal worth and authority, demonstrating that godly exposure and charge are not contingent upon gender, status, or societal honour. As Wright (2020) argues, "the resurrection is the introduction of a new social order in which the markers of power and rejection are rendered void."

In distinction to prevailing Greco-Roman and Jewish morals that silenced women's voices in legal and religious discourse, the risen Christ entrusted the foundational communication of faith — "He is risen!" — to women. This reversal is not incidental but pregnant, it symbolises God's disturbance of the unsexed scales that distort mortal connections. According to Schüssler Fiorenza (2021), "The revivification transforms structures of domination into networks of cult where mutuality replaces mastery."

African theologians also interpret the resurrection as a paradigm for liberation and equality. Oduyoye (2019) contends that "the resurrection is God's definitive statement that no life — female or male — lies outside the redemptive horizon of grace." This declaration challenges ecclesial and cultural systems that perpetuate rejection under theological guise.

Therefore, the resurrection event becomes a theological declaration of godly equality — an ontological recalibration in which women's voices, previously muted by culture, are divinely authorised to annunciate life over death. In affirming women as first vouchers, God sanctifies equality not as a sociological aspiration but as a soteriological verity natural to the gospel itself.

Implications for theology, discipleship, and ecclesial witness:

The women's substantiation at the resurrection transforms Christian theology at its core, [illegible] derstanding of followership and ecclesiastical substantiation. Discipleship, [illegible] d through patriarchal fabrics of apostolic authority, is readdressed by the [illegible] dical inclusivity predicated in fastness rather than unsexed scale. In this [illegible] m, all who respond to the risen Lord — anyhow of coitus or status — are [illegible] ubstantiations of the philosophy. As Migliore (2021) affirms, "the rejuvenation [illegible] not as possession of power but as participation in the new humanity of Christ."

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For the Church, this has profound ecclesiological counter accusations. The *missio Dei* — God's mission in the world is deficient without the full inclusion of women as equal liaisons of the philosophy. Ademiluka (2007) observes that in Nigeria, women's involvement in evangelism and leadership is necessary for a holistic Christian witness (pp. 83 – 84). Their benefactions extend beyond supplementary functions to essential theological and missional leadership, embodying what Phiri and Nadar (2022) describe as "transformative followership" that integrates justice, service, and predictive presence.

This recognition demands that ecclesiastical programs move beyond emblematic representation or token movables toward genuine structural addition. As Kanyoro (2020) contends, "a church that proclaims rejuvenation but denies women equal participation contradicts its own philosophy." Similar reform involves not only ordination rights but also the metamorphosis of liturgy, leadership training, and theological classes to reflect the inclusive substantiation of the resurrection.

In substance, the resurrection authorizations a followership that glasses godly equivalency and an ecclesiology that embodies the new creation inaugurated in Christ. The Church's credibility as the community of the risen Lord depends on its amenability to embody this inclusive calling within theology, ministry, and mission.

The Socio-Cultural Dimension of "The Stone" in the Nigerian Context

The stone as metaphor for gender barriers in African societies:

In African biblical hermeneutics, conceit serves as a ground between ancient textbook and lived environment, enabling Book to speak directly to social realities. Within this illuminative frame, the "stone" in Mark 16:3 becomes a symbol of the heavy, multilayered walls that obstruct women's flourishing across sacred and temporal disciplines. The women at the grave brazened a physical handicap that imaged centuries of institutional rejection — an image that resonates deeply with African women who continue to face rooted socio-artistic and ecclesiastical constraints.

These "monuments" take numerous forms, patriarchal morals that limit women's participation in church leadership, profitable marginalisation that restricts access to education, and theological systems that spiritualise inequality. Asaaju (2010) observes that Nigerian social structures "confer artistic conceptions on women that limit their educational, political, and spiritual openings" (p. 89). Smilar realities illustrate what Oduyoye (2019) calls structural sin — a collaborative mortal construction that resists God's liberating will. The conceit of the gravestone, thus, functions not only as an elucidative image but as a theological charge of systemic injustice.

African feminist theologians have constantly argued that dismembering these walls requires re-imagining the philosophy as an instrument of liberation. Phiri and Nadar (2022) describe the continuity of gender rejection within African Christianity as "a contradiction of the rejuvenation faith that claims to set internees free." Likewise, Kanyoro (2020) urges that "the rejuvenation event must be read as godly kick against every socio-religious order that entombs women's eventuality."

The removal of the stone in the Gospel narrative dramatizes God's action in capsizing similar rough systems. It proclaims that emancipation originates not from mortal authorization but from godly intervention. Wright (2020) interprets this act as "the sign that new creation has formerly broken into the old order, collapsing its scales from within."

For Nigerian women moment, the rolled-away gravestone represents stopgap that the structures confining them — within riser, congress, and menage likewise — can be displaced by the same godly power that opened Christ's grave. In this sense, the resurrection is not only literal memory but continuing social vaticination. God acts decisively in history to strike every gravestone of patriarchy,

rch and society to share in that redemptive movement.

constructs and sayings:

unctions as both a depository and a transmitter of testament, shaping how dentity, authority, and gender. In African societies, sayings serve as vehicles of also as instruments for buttressing social scales. The Yoruba adage "*oro obinrin* wise to follow a woman's advice) encapsulates centuries of androcentric study

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that delegitimises women's sapience and rational capacity (Ampitan, 2012, p. 382). Within traditional Yoruba cosmology, similar aphorisms codified manly dominance and institutionalised the rejection of women from decision-making in both domestic and religious surrounds. These verbal morals have endured, subtly shaping ecclesiastical stations toward womanish leadership and theological participation in contemporary Nigeria.

As Phiri and Nadar (2022) observe, "patriarchal language operates not simply as descriptive but as conventional — it constructs theological boundaries that confine women's places within respectable limits." When these unsexed sayings are uncritically absorbed into Christian theology, they distort the philosophy's liberative intent. They produce what Oduyoye (2019) calls a double jeopardy; women are both culturally and religiously silenced, marginalised first by tradition and again by ecclesiastical systems that baptise patriarchy in theological language.

However, the rejuvenation narrative offers a decisive theological notice of similar constructs. By commissioning women as the first outriders of the risen Christ, the philosophy redefines power not as dominance but as service and substantiation. Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1992) argue that the philosophy "transforms social scales into communities of participated responsibility, where power is measured by one's capacity to serve rather than to control" (p. 98). This aligns with Schüssler Fiorenza's (2021) assertion that "the resurrection establishes followership of coordinates, nulling the patriarchal imagination that confines authority to men."

Proverbs similar as "*oro obinrin ko se tele*" (It is not wise to follow a woman's advice) therefore come theological counter-texts — monuments of how artistic language can obscure godly truth. The Church in Nigeria must engage in critical inculturation, discerning which artistic rudiments can be redeemed and which must be crucified in light of the rejuvenation. The risen Christ's protestation of women's substantiation calls for a verbal reformation; a metamorphosis of the proverbial imagination so that the language of faith reflects God's inclusive area rather than humanity's inherited scales.

Comparative insights: Biblical patriarchy and African patriarchal systems:

Both the biblical and African worlds are deeply marked by patriarchal hypotheticals about gender, authority, and leadership. As Acha (2015) observes, "the ancient world was a men's world and the biblical world was no exception" (p. 38). Within the Hebrew environment, patriarchy was institutionalised in family, tabernacle, and law, defining manly authority as divinely sanctioned, also, African societies historically confined women to inferior places in governance, heritage, and deification, frequently interpreting similar rejections as natural or sacred (Phiri & Nadar, 2022).

Yet, the philosophy does not affirm these systems — it transforms them. By revealing the rejuvenation first to women, God reconfigures the sense of authority from domination to service. Oduyoye (2019) insists that "the resurrection is a theological rupture that overturns every scale grounded on gender and class." This godly reversal challenges both biblical and African patriarchies, exposing their mortal origins. Therefore, a relative hermeneutic that boons emancipation over preservation invites African theologians to re-read Scripture through the lens of resurrection hope. In doing so, the Bible becomes not a tool for sustaining patriarchy but a substantiation to God's ongoing dismantling of all rough morals.

Women, Church, and Power in Contemporary Nigerian Christianity

Women's evolving roles in church leadership and ministry:

In the last few decades, Nigerian women have achieved remarkable visibility in ecclesiastical leadership, theological education, and social ministry. Historically confined to supplementary or probative functions, women now enthral different clerical services across appellations — pastoral, demic. The Methodist, Anglican, and several Pentecostal traditions have begun while the Roman Catholic Church has expanded women's participation in ecutive ministries (Oloyede, 2023). These developments gesture a gradational n to recognition, though representation remains uneven across ecclesiastical

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Alana (2011) correctly observes that "the marginalised — women, children, and the poor — constituted the bottom pealed of society" (p. 202). This social position, deeply bedded in Nigeria's artistic memory, continues to echo within church scales. Numerous women still encounter structural resistance when aspiring to leadership positions, not because of theological incapacity but because of settled gender bias. As Phiri and Nadar (2022) argue, "patriarchal ecclesiastical societies remain the single topmost manacle to the flourishing of women's gifts within African Christianity."

Nevertheless, womanish theologians and ministers have come catalysts of renewal. Through education and activism, Nigerian women similar as Dorcas O. Akintunde, Esther A. Ibanga, and Mercy Amba Oduyoye have shaped contextual theologies that challenge gender conceptions and advocate for transformative followership. Oduyoye (2019) interprets this emergence as an incarnation of rejuvenation faith — "a movement from the sepultures of silence into the public proclamation of life."

These advancements demonstrate that the question is no longer one of women's capability but of institutional amenability. Migliore (2021) underscores that "authentic followership requires communities that image the inclusive patterns of godly grace rather than replicate social scales." When churches affirm women's leadership, they not only actualise the philosophy's egalitarian impulse but also enrich theological imagination and pastoral effectiveness.

Thus, Nigerian Christianity stands at a vital moment to either consolidate the earnings of addition or retreat into patriarchal nostalgia. The evolving participation of women in ministry is not a sociological accident but a theological necessity — a personification of the rejuvenation's liberating power, calling the Church to image the inclusive area inaugurated by the risen Christ.

Institutional and theological obstacles to inclusion:

Institutionally, numerous Nigerian churches remain constrained by patriarchal ecclesiology that interprets Book through androcentric lenses, buttressing manly-centered leadership models. Theological resistance to gender equivalency frequently stems from the misperception that feminist theology represents a temporal trouble rather than a biblical imperative. Bakoshi (2016) refutes this view, asserting that "gender inclusiveness is a biblical tradition" enhancing collaborative flourishing (p. 1). In the same way, Kanyoro (2020) argues that when churches deny women full participation, they "immure the philosophy within the walls of patriarchy." The problem is thus hermeneutical, not doctrinal — arising from inherited interpretations rather than scriptural intent. Nigerian theological institutions must borrow contextual and feminist hermeneutics that centre women's lived gests, enabling unborn church and scholars to interpret Book through the lens of justice and mutuality rather than domination. Only similar reformation can align doctrine with the inclusive vision of the resurrection.

Emerging examples of women's transformation and leadership:

Despite enduring systemic and theological barriers, numerous Nigerian women have come transformative leaders in theology, mission, and education — embodying the courage of the women at the tomb. Scholars like Dorcas O. Akintunde have advanced gender-sensitive biblical interpretation, while ecclesial figures such as Rev. Esther Ajayi and Bishop Funke Felix- Adejumo exemplify inclusive spiritual leadership that islands faith and social reform (Adewale, 2012). Their ministries affirm what Oduyoye (2019) calls "the resurrection praxis of African women" — faith restated into visible action for justice and renewal. In the same way, Phiri and Nadar (2022) describe similar leadership as evidence that African Christianity's future will be shaped by women's voices. These exemplifications reflect a gradational but unrecoverable metamorphosis the "stone" of rejection is being rolled away, revealing a church decreasingly aligned with the inclusive spirit of the resurrection.

Toward a Resurrection- Inspired Theology of Gender Inclusion

The rolled-away stone as symbol of divine liberation:

The removal of the stone in Mark 16:4 serves as the hermeneutical key to a theology of emancipation embedded in the resurrection. It signifies not only Christ's triumph over death but also God's decisive intervention in dismembering mortal systems of oppression. As Wright (2020)

explains, the empty grave "signals the intrusion of godly power into the world's structures of impossibility." Theologically, the rolled-away gravestone announces that no spiritual, artistic, or institutional hedge can repel godly agency. For African women, this symbol affirms that emancipation originates in God's redemptive action, not in mortal concession. Oduyoye (2019) interprets it as "the breaking open of all sepulchres — particular, artistic, and ecclesiastical — that confine women's eventuality." Therefore, the resurrection event becomes a continuing disclosure of godly emancipation, summoning African Christianity to share in God's transformative movement of equality and renewal.

Resurrection theology as a paradigm for gender justice:

Resurrection theology proclaims not only the renewal of life but also the reordering of social realities in light of godly justice. To declare "Christ is risen" while immortalizing gender rejection is to undermine the ethical imperatives of rejuvenation faith. Njoroge and Dube (2001) correctly assert that rejuvenation belief must "restate into structures that affirm the full humanity of women and men likewise" (p. 77). This theological vision demands ecclesiastical metamorphosis — restructuring ministries, leadership, and doctrine around equivalency rather than scale. Schüssler Fiorenza (2021) argues that "the resurrection community is a followership of coordinates, not a reconstruction of patriarchal religion." For Nigerian Christianity, this means embodying rejuvenation as praxis defying systemic patriarchy, reforming ecclesiastical policy, and nurturing inclusive theological education. Gender justice, thus, is not an external docket but a rejuvenation accreditation — a visible sign that the Church lives within the power of the risen Christ who makes all effects new.

The call for hermeneutical and ecclesial renewal in African Christianity:

A resurrection-inspired hermeneutic compels the African Church to re-read Scripture from the perimeters, where God's liberating power is most easily revealed. This renewal entails (a) integrating feminist-biblical education into theological education, (b) constituting policy reforms that insure women's full participation in ordained and lay ministries, and (c) incorporating women's substantiation into liturgical festivity. As Oduyoye (1995) reminds us, "The resurrection must be seen not only as God's act in history but as God's pattern for mortal community" (p. 126). Similar hermeneutical and ecclesiastical renewal reclaims rejuvenation faith as a living paradigm for justice and collective mortal flourishing.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of theological, biblical, and cultural insights:

This study has shown that the question "Who will roll the stone away?" encapsulates both the faith and the frustration of women in history and in Nigeria today. The resurrection narratives affirm women as primary witnesses of divine revelation, subverting patriarchal orders that continue to marginalise them.

Implications for Nigerian churches and theological education:

For Nigerian churches, resurrection theology demands a renewed ecclesiology rooted in inclusion. Theological institutions must integrate gender-conscious curricula and encourage contextual hermeneutics that read the Bible through African women's experiences.

Recommendations for gender-equitable ecclesial praxis:

1. Ordination and Leadership: Churches should establish inclusive policies that enable women to serve in all ministerial offices.
2. Theological Education: Seminaries should mainstream feminist and contextual theology.
3. Liturgical Reform: Incorporate resurrection stories of women into worship narratives.
4. Advocacy: Christian organisations should champion gender justice as a gospel imperative.
5. Partnership: Encourage collaboration between men and women as co-labourers in the *missio Dei*.

Ultimately, the stone that hinders women's flourishing must be recognised not merely as a social construct but as a spiritual challenge. In rolling it away, God calls the Church to embody resurrection power—liberating, inclusive, and transformative.

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INTERPRETING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF WAILARI COLLEGE, KANO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Interpreting is a communicative event which occurs during cross-cultural communication when two interlocutors do not share a language. In the process of rapid information exchange from various languages and cultures, competent interpreters are mandatory. The major goal of interpreting is that a message makes the same impact on the target audience as was intended by the speaker in the source language (Angelelli, 2000). In their professional activities, interpreters encounter a wide variety of problems. Given that interpreting is a major communication skill, this research aims at investigating the challenges faced by interpreters using descriptive method. The study collected its data by recording two student participants who interpreted all deliberations in the course of the Parents-Teachers Association meeting of Wailari College, Kano from English to Hausa, as most parents present at the meeting did not understand English language considered to be the official language in Nigeria. The research revealed that the difficulties faced by interpreters when interpreting included cultural background, time constraint, interlocutors speaking speed and word memorisation among others. Furthermore, it had found some strategies to solve the difficulties in interpreting activities such as working as a team, preparation, using Dictionary and communication strategies.

Keywords: *Interpreting, Interlocutor, Communication challenges*

1. Introduction

The goal of interpretation is that a message makes the same impact on the target audience that a speaker intends for an audience of the same language. Interpretation like all other forms of communication is a multi-faceted activity; it involves a sender, a channel and a recipient. It is a form of communication between people with different linguistic and cultural background (Qian, 1994).

More often than not, the task of the interpreter is portrayed as one of "transcoding" - a simple changing of one code to another (Angelelli, 2000). This is not enough to meet the goal of interpretation since there is much more to communication than words or signs. According to Angelelli (2000) communication involves interaction, context, form, gist, gesture, tone and relations of power. The basic principle outlined in interpreting is the importance of language proficiency because interpreting is more than simply transferring words from one language to another. It involves understanding the meaning, the sense of what is being said before redelivering it into the targeted language. This means that to concentrate on the message, the interpreter has to be well acquainted with the topic at hand and integrate it in the communicative setting, to exploit not only the verbal information but also all other information implicit in the event. Hymes (1964) highlights that, most interpreters lack the necessary background with respect to language proficiency and world knowledge. Since it's a means of communication interpreting involves the transfer of meaning from one language (the source) to another (the target) language.

The transfer of meaning is identified as one of the basic problems in interpreting. The transfer of meaning involves relaying on lexical meaning, grammatical meaning and rhetorical meaning, including implied or inferable meaning (Hatim & Mason, 1990). The question that arises is: how

does the interpreter cope with this basic problem of transferring meaning from one language to another?

The source text sender transmits a message through the source language to the interpreter who in turn resends it through the target language to the target audience. Thus the interpreter is seen as a transitional point of contact between two languages. This task puts him in direct contact with the senders and receivers of the message. The interpreter has to assess the intention of the speaker and transform what is being spoken at all levels of communication, including intentions and implicature. Thus an interpreter holds a key position, in the field of communication (Herbert, 1978).

2. Literature Review

Interpreting may not be common in some monolingual societies but International events often involve interpreters to assist international participants in getting the best experiences. Being interpreters may appear easy, but without a doubt, they face challenges when performing their jobs.

2.1 Interpreting vs. Translating

In order for communication to succeed, language uses voiced symbols to pass a message from speaker to a listener and from the writer to the reader. However, in the event that one specific audience fails to understand a certain language, then there is need to get the message and to communicate with the speaker. In such context, for the message and communication thus so needed to be realized it will be necessary to employ an interpreter, in order to complete the communication process.

The interpreter then comes in handy as a communication bridge between the speaker of the source language and the audience who understands the second language. The translator therefore communicates the message from one language of the original speaker, to the audience using the language they understand. By so doing, the translator breaks the communication barrier which may be caused by a character in the communication process not understanding one of the languages used. The interpreter does not only take the role of bridging different people for communication purposes. He/she also has other roles in the community they serve. For example, the interpreter will also be passing cultural (traditional) messages from one community to another. Interpretation is also used as a skill and a way of teaching a second language or a foreign language. In this context, the second language thus used is then interpreted into the first language in order to make the learner understand the whole process faster (Newmark, 1988b; Appel & Muysken, 1987). Therefore, the interpreter is seen having an important role in communication; that the interpreter acts as a bridge over which communication and understanding crosses from the speaker, to reach his audience, suggesting that successful communication highly depends on the interpreter.

2.1.1 Challenges of interpreting

Although interpreters usually possess a high level of linguistic competence, they often find themselves grasping for the right vocabulary to explain the intended topic. This situation is in line with Gile (2009), stating that interpreters should master a high vocabulary level from different languages. Pratiwi (2016) maintains that lack of linguistic competence, i.e., vocabulary shortage, would hinder interpreters from delivering the interlocutors. It is because they fail to comprehend the message entirely. Nurfauziyah (2017) asserts that failing to convey the message from the interlocutors is likely caused by unfamiliar vocabulary. Accents also become one of the challenges faced by interpreters. As many scholars assert (Mahmoodzadeh, 2006; Ling, Chang, & Kuo, 2013; Baranyai, 2011), good interpreters should have the linguistic competence in terms of understanding a large variety of accents that may come up from dialects. Due to the interpreters' unfamiliarity with a specific accent, interpreting may not be achieved. Chang and Wu (2014) reveal that accents are perceived as the main difficulties when interpreting and that several accents are more challenging than the others.

2.1.2. Cultural Background

Interpreters' cultural backgrounds may hinder the process. Gile (2009) mentions that cultural background is closely related to the audience language. Thus, when the interpreter has a different cultural background from or unfamiliar with the audience's culture in which he has to perform his job, it can cause a problem. Pujiati & Zualiani (2014) also claim that cultural background influences international communication. For example, what is expected in one culture may be a taboo in the other culture. Thus, interpreters should be familiar with the language and the culture in which the language is mostly spoken to minimize misinterpretation.

2.1.3. Time Constraint

Interpreters have minimal time to convey the messages received from one speaker to another in a different language, especially in simultaneous interpreting. In contrast, Fugen, Waibel, and Kolss (2007) mention that interpreters will need time to adapt to the target language and area to get the best results, which is supported by Nurfauziyah (2017), stating that many interpreters could not convey the message nicely due to lack of time. Unfortunately, interpreters may not have the luxury of time. According to Pratiwi (2016), an interpreter's limited time should convey the message correctly, or the meaning will be likely missed.

2.1.4. Interlocutors' Speaking Speed

One of the most common challenges faced by the interpreters is the interlocutors' speaking speed. Since an interpreter deals with linguistic aspects and works with various factors (Amini, 2011), speaking speed does matter. Hasanshahi & Shahrokhi (2016) state that an interpreter ideally handles 120 – 150 words per minute; thus, when the interlocutors speak at average speed, the interpreter would have a full comprehension of the topic discussed (Yu, 2017; Nurfauziyah, 2017).

2.1.5. Issues with Word Memorisation

In general, people's memory is divided into two aspects: short-term and long -term memory. Phelan (2001) mentions that short-term memory is used to recall what is listed, and the other one is used to contextualize what is listened to. In terms of interpreting, memory is one of the most significant aspects that may cause challenges. Pratiwi (2016) & Nurfauziyah (2017) state that issues with memorization could cause interpreters to be not able to perform their job well. Interpreters must use short and long term memory simultaneously while working on translating from one language to another.

2.2. Strategies to Overcome Interpreting Challenges

This section discusses the general strategies commonly applied by interpreters when facing challenges.

2.2.1. Working as a Team

Working as a team can be one of the most effective solutions when facing challenges while interpreting, especially for memorization problems. Zagoto (2016) asserts that working in a team can better comprehend the target language to help each other. Similar to Zagoto (2016), Alghail & Mahfoodh (2016) also state that getting assistance from teammates will make it easier for interpreters to understand the topics when interpreting. Ma (2013) suggests a specific way for interpreters to work in a team. Ma (2013) proposes two interpreters – active and passive interpreters. The active interpreter is responsible for listening to the interlocutors and understand what is said, while the passive interpreter is the one who has sufficient time to supply the active interpreter with documents or extra information.

2.2.2. Preparation

The preparation can be done by familiarizing themselves with accents they might encounter when interpreting. In general, the interpreters have been informed about what they might encounter or who their audience are. The information can be used to feel comfortable with the accents, which, in the end, it will lead to more straightforward communication (Hough, 2010). Pradana (2018) also asserts that being familiar with an accent can help the interpreters to comprehend the language better.

2.2.3. Using Dictionary

Using a dictionary is a common strategy to face the challenge that relates to linguistic competence. Problems with lexicon, syntax, or semantics of a language can be solved with a dictionary. Mohamed et al. (2017) mention that a dictionary is a tool to solve problems with lexicon or vocabulary, find the meaning of unfamiliar words, and confirm the meaning of partially known words. Nowadays, interpreters do not use a printed dictionary anymore. Instead, they use their smartphone for a dictionary or an application to help them with the language (Wang, Teng, & Chen, 2015). In line with this situation, Xueping (2014) states that a dictionary is used to solve many linguistics problems when interpreting.

2.2.4. Using Communication Strategies

Interpreting is about applying communication strategies. Communication strategies are quite helpful for multilingual people to convey messages. Interpreting's ultimate goal is to maintain communication among the interlocutors. A communication strategy, such as finding the word's synonym, is probably the most common strategies to be applied. Li (2015) mentions that an interpreter will likely provide a similar term or synonym in the target language when he encounters linguistic problems in the source language.

The other communication strategy that is commonly used when interpreting and communicating, in general, is miming. Interpreters use body language or miming to make the meaning clearer. Moreover, Wang (2017) states that using body language is a useful tool for communicating with others and expressing their ideas. Besides, body language can give extra information that allows communication to take place effectively. The next communication strategy used by interpreters is to use language functions in social interaction, such as asking for repetition and asking permission to use the second language. Russel (2010) maintains that these strategies are used to confirm and clarify if interpreters need complete and suitable information because interpreters cannot make any assumption from the information received; thus, clarifications are needed.

3. The Study

This research is descriptive in its design and aims at exploring the experiences, personal opinion and perception of the interpreters about the challenges faced in the course of interpreting. Detailed information to gain a better understanding of the issues being researched needs to be obtained.

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted at a private secondary school (Wailari College) in Kano state, Nigeria. The participants were student interpreters who were made to partake in the Parents-Teachers Association of the college as at the time of one of the association's meeting. The two participants were selected because they were considered articulate and their availability for participating. Thus, rich data were obtained. The participants were Ibrahim Madaci Ayya, a science male student in the senior secondary class three who was 18 years old when the data was collected and Khajia Abubakar who is a female and was in class three of the Arts students in the senior secondary of the college and was aged 17 years. Both Ibrahim and Khadija are Hausa speakers by origin even though Ibrahim can speak Hausa, Fulani and English languages, Khadija could only speak Hausa and English as Hausa language is the mother tongue to both of the subjects.

Although all participants showed a high level of English competence, none of them used the English language in their daily life because, in Kano state, English is only used inside the classroom for these particular students.

All names used to address the participants were pseudonyms to protect the participants' confidentiality. Consent was obtained verbally before the event. Also, participants acknowledged their rights before the data were eventually collected.

3.2. Data Collection Method and Analysis

In-depth interviews were used to collect the data of participants' experiences. Mc Namara (1999) states that interviews are useful to obtain more in-depth information needed to answer the research questions. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in English to avoid misunderstanding. Member checking was conducted for trustworthiness purposes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) by sending the transcriptions to the participants to see if they would like to alter any information provided during the interviews to ensure the data's truthfulness. No alteration was made to the transcription. The data were then coded and themed based on the similar themes appearing in the data. The excerpts presented in the findings section were the translated version of the original data.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings and discussion are interwoven through its presentation to answer the research questions. The first part of the section is to serve the first aim of the paper.

4.1. The challenges faced by student interpreters when interpreting

4.1.1 Lack of Understanding of Source Language

As the community in which they lived was Hausa, they naturally used the Hausa language to communicate. Ibrahim and Khadija shared their experiences when interpreting and stated that they found it challenging to interpret the meaning due to lack of linguistic competence of the English language. During the interpreting process, the students often mixed the Hausa and English languages, which became the student interpreters' most significant challenge.

The data showed that Ibrahim and Khadija found it difficult to interpret the proceedings due to lack of understanding of source language. In this context, the source language was English. English language alone has several politeness levels, with which many English younger people are not familiar – let alone non-English speaking people. It is common for people to use Hausa language when talking to strangers as it is also expected that many people in Kano do not use English language which is termed as one of the major languages in Nigeria. In the meantime, Ibrahim and Khadija are not familiar with some of the high level of English language used at the meeting. Besides, they are not initially from the area in which the English language is used extensively. As a result, they were not able to interpret exactly some of the words and sentences to audience correctly. The following are some of the words and sentences that posed challenges to the interpreters in the course of interpreting interpersonal communication during the Parents/Teachers association meeting of Wailari College, Kano, Nigeria on which this study was undertaken: *Abandon, Bullying, Circumvent, Graciously, Henceforth, Hustling, Proprietors, Peer group, Open day, Ridiculous.*
The above mentioned words appeared in the following sentences, thus:

i. Some Teachers *abandoned* their work, failing to report for duty without any tangible reason. Interpreted to mean: Decided
ii. Some Senior Students are in the habit of *bullying* the junior ones especially on their way home after school.
Interpreted to mean: Playing

iii. Any Parent/Guardian that fails to be in *consonance* with the school rules should be sanctioned.
Interpreted to mean: Break

iv. As Parents, we *graciously* appeal to the school authority to live up to expectation by contacting us immediately on any matter that requires our attention.
Interpreted to mean: Sadly

v. Any student that is habitual in coming to school late should *hence forth* be made to go back home.
Interpreted to mean: in the future

vi. Our children are said to always *hustle* for break time instead of paying attention to the lesson.
Interpreted to mean: waiting

vii. There are *Proprietors* of private schools that have not even attended primary school in their lives.
Interpreted to mean: Property owners

viii We should not be weary to find out who our children associate with because *peer group* influence can land one's child/children into trouble.

Interpreted to mean: Bad friends

xi. I wish to call on the school authority to consider organising an *open day*, where both Parents and Teachers can interact face to face, discuss issues of common interest and even inspect the school environment with a view to rendering some assistance.
Interpreted to mean: Opening

x. It is quite *ridiculous* for a teacher to demand financial assistance from his/her student rather, they should seek for any type of help from the school authority.
Interpreted to mean: Wonderful.

In this case, the interpreters' source language's linguistic competence, the English language competence, was relatively low, which hindered the student interpreters from performing their job well. The finding was in line with Ribas (2012), who claims that lack of understanding of the source language can be a problem in interpreting. Ribas (2012) adds that the interpreter cannot build the communication well because of a lack of understanding of source language.

4.1.2 Lack of Vocabulary

Another challenge faced by the interpreters was the lack of vocabulary. Ibrahim stated that he could not mention some of the vocabulary for daily life objects. For example, he did not know the Hausa word for courtesy. The same situation happened to Khadija, who explained that she suddenly realized she either forgot or did not know the Hausa words for some terms such as plead, circumstance, and prerogative. As a result, student interpreters could not perform speech because of a lack of vocabulary in English. The finding was similar to Pratiwi (2016), who asserts that when interpreters do not have many vocabularies, they will find it hard to deliver the speaker's message because they cannot get the meaning properly. Also, Nurfauziyah (2017) claims that the interpreter encounters problems interpreting the speaker's message when finding unfamiliar vocabulary.

4.1.3. Difficulty with Accents

Nigerian interpreters like their parents' counterparts had unique accents that sometimes made student interpreters got difficulties comprehending the language. Nigeria is a multicultural country with diverse cultures, races, and languages, such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Kanuri, Nufe, Tiv, Ijaw

etc., which likely influenced their accents based on the students' mother and or first language. The unique accents made student interpreters challenged to catch the points of conversation. The accents may entail unfamiliar pronunciation to student interpreters. They were more familiar with Hausa and Kanuri accents from among the speeches of parents who contributed at the meeting. The findings are in line with Asgari (2015) explaining that pronunciation is an essential aspect of interpreters' success.

4.2. The Strategies used by Interpreters to overcome difficulties in Interpreting.

The followings are to serve the second aim of the study.

4.2.1. Asking to use the second Language

This strategy was used to solve the lack of vocabulary in the source language. In this context, the first language used was Hausa, and the second language was the English language. The Interpreters asked the organisers to use the Hausa language because most of the parents had a low English language competency level. Ibrahim stated that he asked the organisers to speak in the Hausa language since he did not well understand English. It helped him interpret the language well. The same statement was mentioned by Khadija, explaining that she told the executives that she did not understand English, and they used a more significant portion of the Hausa language. It is similar to Russel (2010), arguing that the interpreters need to maximize the source language to interpret the speech without fewer challenges.

4.2.2. Increasing Focus on Source Language

The strategy overcame the difficulty in understanding speakers' pronunciation. One of the participants at the meeting, Halima, revealed that her strategy to cope with difficulty in understanding certain speakers' pronunciation was done by increasing focus to the source language. In this context, the source language was English, and the speakers were Hausa students. She listened to the points of conversation carefully. Also, she had to pay attention to the speaker whose accent was unfamiliar as he/she was a non-Hausa speaker. She believed this strategy was quite useful to assist conversation going on during interpreting. It can be said that the student interpreters employed the strategy by increasing focus to deal with main items in all speeches. The result is supported by Meliadiny (2017), asserting that the interpreter should focus on what the speaker said to understand the content of the speech. An interpreter must focus and concentrate during interpreting and catching up on discussions on many topics (Nolan, 2005).

4.2.3. Using Body Language

This strategy was used to face the challenge due to a lack of vocabulary. The data revealed that one student interpreter used body language to overcome the difficulties in interpreting activity. Ibrahim argued that he used body language with the intention that the participants could get the point he was trying to explain. Additionally, Ibrahim said he used body language because he did not know the vocabulary. Thus, he tried to use body language to deal with a particular problem. This result is in line with Wang (2017), explaining that a body language is an excellent tool for communicating with others and expressing oneself. Besides that, body language can be a supplement or information and allow effective communication with language.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Since most student interpreters were not professionals, their competence cannot be equalised with professional interpreters. The challenges when performing their job can contribute to their experiences when they graduate and work with the community. The challenge of being unfamiliar with less popular accents can raise awareness of the different cultures. Also, understanding the local culture, including its language, as one of the challenges, can encourage student interpreters to be more mindful of the local language. Strategies employed by the student interpreters can encourage reflection on their learning. For example, when student interpreters used body language to explain

or describe some vocabulary. It is a communication strategy commonly employed by language learners to convey the message effectively.

The research implies that interpreters need to receive exposure to transferring from one language to another, especially foreign languages. Being interpreters can be an effective way to allow students to practice their language competence, but at the same time, they receive exposure to the local cultures. Nigeria, rich with diverse dialects and indigenous cultures, is a great place to provide interpreters exposure.

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