

Influence of African Tradition Practices on Christianity Among Ìgbómìnà People of Osun State

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Abstract

This study explores the influence of traditional Ìgbómìnà beliefs on Christian practices, focusing on how the Shema, a core tenet of Christian faith, is interpreted and practiced by Ìgbómìnà Christians in Osun State. The research investigates the influence of ancestral veneration, traditional rituals, and symbols on Christian worship, and how this syncretic blend impacts religious identity and community cohesion. Using a mixed-method approach, the study combines quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to comprehensively understand the complex relationship between faith and culture. Findings reveal that traditional Ìgbómìnà beliefs significantly shape the interpretation of the Shema, with Christian leaders' responses playing a key role in reconciling doctrinal integrity with indigenous practices. This study contributes to the broader discourse on religious syncretism and the role of cultural identity in shaping Christian practices in African contexts.

Keywords: African Tradition Practices, Christian worship, Christianity, Ìgbómìnà People, Syncretism, the Shema

Introduction

The Ìgbómìnà people, a part of the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria, possess a rich cultural and religious heritage. Traditionally, their religious practices centre around ancestral veneration, divination, and other rituals deeply rooted in their beliefs about divinity and the spiritual world. With the spread of Christianity, these traditional religious practices have intersected with Christian doctrines, creating a unique religious landscape that blends indigenous customs with Christian practices. This study examines how Ìgbómìnà traditional religious practices, particularly those related to divinity and ancestral spirits, influence the interpretation and practice of the *Shema*—a central element of Christian worship – a Hebrew term signify the oneness of God. It is a Jewish daily prayer found in Deuteronomy 6:4. Specifically, the study investigates whether traditional rituals and symbols have been integrated into Christian worship and how this integration affects religious identity and community cohesion among Ìgbómìnà Christians.

Several studies have examined the phenomenon of religious syncretism in Africa, particularly in the context of Christianity. The blending of indigenous African religious beliefs with Christian doctrines has been widely studied, with scholars noting the flexibility and adaptability

of African Christians in negotiating their traditional beliefs with the Christian faith. However, less attention has been paid to specific practices such as the Shema, and how traditional African practices might reshape or re-contextualize such foundational Christian doctrines.

In the case of the Ìgbómìnà people, studies have focused on the role of ancestral spirits, rituals, and symbols in their daily lives, but the intersection of these practices with Christianity remains underexplored. This gap in the literature forms the basis for this study, which aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between faith, culture, and identity in a post-colonial African Christian context.

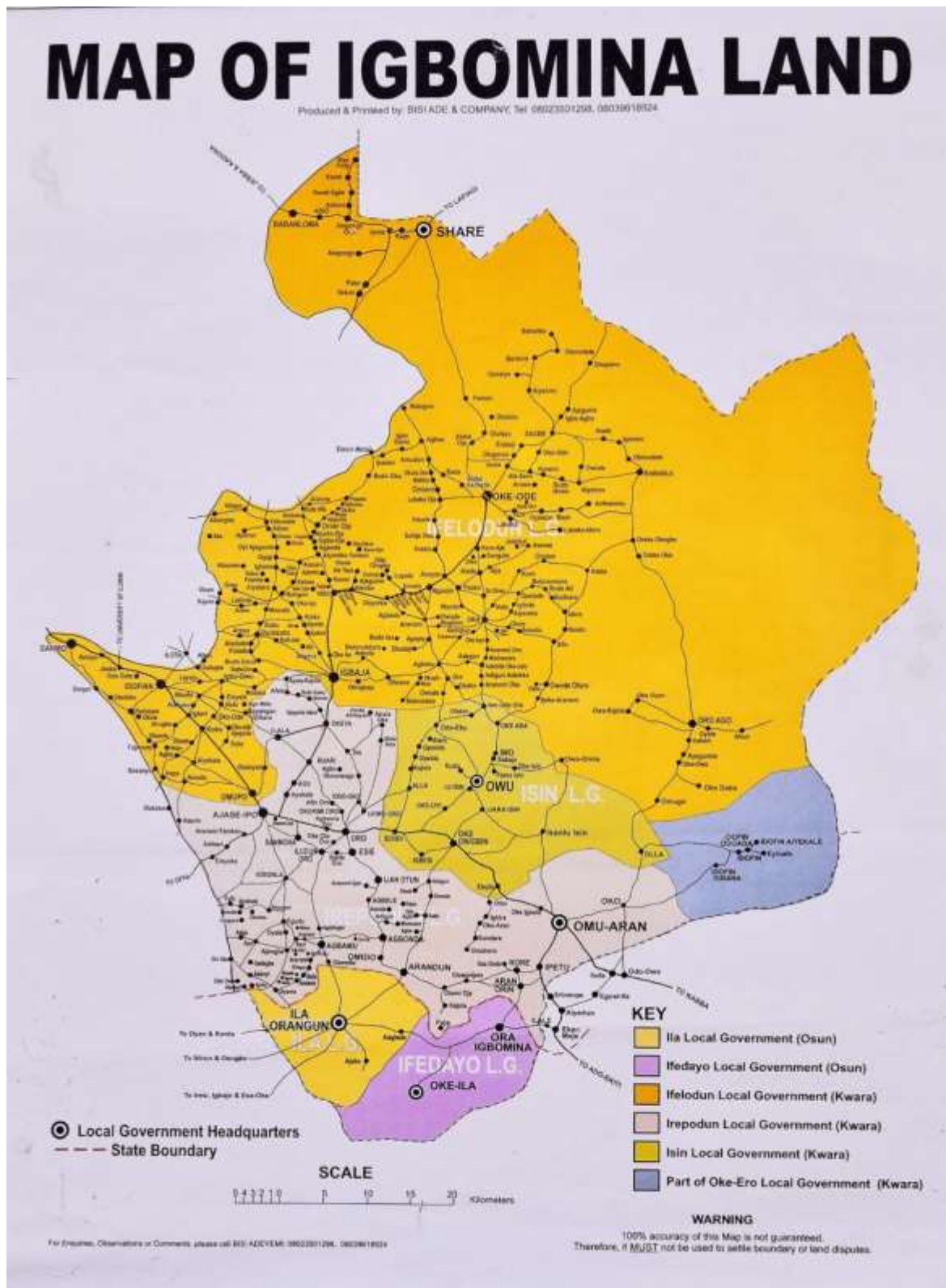


Figure 1: Map of Igbomina Land (Source: The Internet)

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to thoroughly investigate the relationship between traditional Ìgbómìnà beliefs and Christian practices. For the quantitative aspect, surveys were distributed to 120 Ìgbómìnà Christians to collect statistical data on variables such as age, gender, educational background, and religious practices, as well as to assess participants' engagement with traditional beliefs and their interpretation of the *Shema*. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews with 30 Ìgbómìnà Christians, including church leaders, to gain deeper insights into how traditional African beliefs influence their Christian worship. These interviews focused on participants' personal beliefs, experiences with syncretic practices, and their perspectives on the role of ancestral veneration in their Christian faith, providing a richer understanding of the dynamic between Christianity and African traditions within the Ìgbómìnà context.

By integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, the research offers a comprehensive view of the intersection between Ìgbómìnà cultural traditions and Christian beliefs. The qualitative component of the study involves semi-structured interviews with community members and church leaders, providing in-depth, contextual insights. At the same time, the quantitative aspect uses structured questionnaires to gather demographic information and assess the extent of integration between Ìgbómìnà customs and Christian worship. The population comprises Ìgbómìnà Christians who actively engage in both Christian worship and Ìgbómìnà traditions, with a focus on two key groups: church leaders, offering theological perspectives on the integration of indigenous practices into Christian beliefs, and community members, representing the daily negotiation of these beliefs within the community. A stratified random sampling method ensures diverse representation based on demographic factors such as age, gender, and education, while purposive sampling targets church leaders for their expertise. Data collection occurs in phases, beginning with recruitment, followed by survey distribution and interviews. The research instruments include a structured questionnaire to gather data on participants' demographics, religious identity, and the integration of Ìgbómìnà rituals into Christian worship, and semi-structured interviews to explore theological views, experiences of syncretism, and its impact on religious identity and community cohesion. Both instruments were validated through expert reviews and pilot testing. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency and test-retest procedures to ensure stability. Data analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods, using statistical techniques to identify patterns in the questionnaire data and thematic analysis to uncover key themes in the interviews. Triangulation of these data sources enhances the validity of the findings, providing a well-rounded understanding of the research topic. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' emotional and psychological well-being, were upheld throughout the study.

Findings

The study looked at how indigenous beliefs interact with and shape Christian teachings as it examined the impact of traditional Ìgbómìnà religious rituals on the *Shema* within Christianity. It was discovered that customary practices and cultural components have a big influence on how people interpret and apply the *Shema*, creating a special syncretic style of worship. The combination of indigenous and Christian elements enhances the spiritual experience but also poses difficulties for doctrinal integrity. The study sheds light on the complex processes

involved in fusing religious convictions with cultural heritage and provides insightful information on how religious practices have changed over time among the Ìgbómìnà people.

1. **Theological Integration:** The *Shema* is interpreted differently according to traditional Ìgbómìnà beliefs about divinity and ancestor spirits. The participants stated that their interpretation of the *Shema* becomes more complicated as a result of traditional ideas influencing their understanding of monotheistic principles, such as spiritual hierarchy and ancestral devotion. The doctrinal interpretation of the *Shema* is altered as a result of this integration, which blends traditional and Christian perspectives.
2. **Syncretism in Worship:** Traditional rites and symbols are heavily incorporated into Christian worship. A syncretic type of worship is produced when responders blend Christian sessions with customary rituals. The expression of the *Shema* is impacted by this integration, with traditional components either supporting or contradicting Christian practices based on personal and social viewpoints.
3. **Effect on religious identity and community cohesion:** There are two ways in which the merging of traditional and Christian beliefs affects these two areas. Some participants report feeling more connected to their group and aware of their culture, while others face difficulties and conflicts in preserving their distinct religious identity. The multifaceted impacts of syncretism on communal cohesion are shown by this variability.
4. **Ecclesiastical Responses:** In order to handle the integration of traditional customs, church leaders take a variety of tacks. While some leaders strictly adhere to their theological limitations or completely disregard ancient customs, others deliberately include traditional features. While there are differences in the efficacy of these answers, on general, discussion and adaptation work better to balance customs with Christian beliefs.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a significant connection between traditional Ìgbómìnà beliefs and the interpretation of the *Shema*, as well as the integration of ancestral practices into Christian worship. These results underscore the complex relationship between cultural traditions and religious practices in the Ìgbómìnà community.

1. **Influence of Traditional Ìgbómìnà Beliefs:** The study found a strong correlation between belief in ancestral spirits and variations in the interpretation of the *Shema*. This suggests that ancestral beliefs play a key role in shaping how religious texts are understood. As belief in ancestral spirits increases, individuals tend to have a more nuanced or complex understanding of the *Shema*, illustrating how traditional spiritual views influence religious practice and interpretation.
2. **Integration of Traditional Rituals into Worship:** The research also highlights the blending of traditional rituals, such as ancestor veneration, with Christian worship. This integration is not incidental but a central feature of Ìgbómìnà religious life. The data shows that traditional rituals are commonly practiced alongside Christian elements, resulting in a syncretic worship style. This fusion creates a distinctive form of religious expression that honors both Christian doctrine and ancestral heritage.
3. **Impact on Religious Identity and Community Cohesion:** The integration of traditional beliefs into Christian worship positively impacts religious identity and community cohesion. Congregants report a stronger sense of belonging, both to their

cultural heritage and to the Christian faith. This fusion helps individuals and the community feel more connected to their religious practices, reinforcing both personal faith and collective unity.

- 4. Role of Church Leadership in Syncretism:** Church leaders have employed strategies such as educational programs and ritual assimilation to manage the integration of traditional practices with Christian worship. These strategies allow church leaders to maintain doctrinal integrity while respecting cultural traditions, fostering an inclusive spiritual environment that accommodates both belief systems. This approach has contributed to a deeper and more meaningful worship experience for the Ìgbómìnà people.

Conclusion

The main conclusions show how the Ìgbómìnà people's traditional customs and Christian beliefs interact in a nuanced way. This study concludes that the interpretation and application of the *Shema* in Christianity among the Ìgbómìnà are deeply influenced by traditional Ìgbómìnà religious practices, resulting in a syncretic worship that blends Christian teachings with indigenous beliefs. This blending creates a unique spiritual experience that honors both theological innovation and cultural heritage, strengthening community bonds. However, this syncretism also presents challenges, particularly in maintaining doctrinal purity and a clear religious identity. The study emphasizes the need for a nuanced understanding of how cultural traditions shape and transform religious practices. The intersection of Christian doctrine and Ìgbómìnà customs demonstrates how culture can both facilitate and complicate religious expression. Addressing this requires sensitivity to both doctrinal integrity and cultural context. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of adaptive leadership in managing the balance between cultural integration and theological coherence. Church leaders must engage in dialogue with congregants, ensuring both the preservation of theological principles and openness to evolving expressions of faith. The research advocates for educational initiatives that increase awareness of both indigenous traditions and Christian doctrines, empowering congregants to navigate syncretism in ways that enhance their faith while respecting their cultural heritage.

Recommendations

- 1. Encourage Dialogue Between Traditional and Church Leaders:** To foster mutual understanding and respect, it is essential to encourage ongoing conversations between traditional leaders and church officials. Creating forums for open discussion can help resolve disputes, exchange ideas, and work toward a peaceful synthesis of both traditions. This collaborative approach promotes community cohesion and ensures that the integration of diverse practices is respectful and meaningful.
- 2. Integrate Rituals That Respect Both Traditions:** Worship practices should blend traditional symbols and ceremonies with doctrinal integrity. By carefully incorporating indigenous traditions, worship can remain theologically sound while resonating with cultural heritage. This approach ensures that worship practices are meaningful, enhancing the spiritual experience without compromising essential Christian teachings.
- 3. Create Inclusive Worship Practices:** Developing inclusive worship rituals that balance doctrinal purity with cultural adaptation is key. Worship can be both

theologically valid and culturally relevant by integrating indigenous traditions in a way that strengthens Christian beliefs. This strategy ensures that worship remains true to Christian teachings while honouring cultural history.

4. **Hold Community Workshops:** To address the challenges of blending traditional and Christian practices, community workshops should be held. These workshops provide a platform for open discussions, where people can explore how to integrate their cultural traditions with Christian teachings while maintaining a strong religious identity. Facilitated discussions can foster understanding and unity within the community.

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