

AN INQUIRY INTO THE RESURGENCE OF UKA-EKE, UKA-ORIE, UKA-AFOR, AND UKA-NKWO CELEBRATIONS AMONG CONTEMPORARY IGBO YOUTHS: A PARADIGM SHIFT OR A DECLINE IN CULTURAL TRADITION

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Abstract

The resurgence of interest among contemporary Igbo youths in the celebration of Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka-Afor, and Uka-Nkwo has sparked scholarly debate about their cultural significance, motivations, continuity, and authenticity. Historically, the four-day market cycle has structured religious observance, economic activity, and social organization within Igbo cosmology. However, in many communities in southeastern Nigeria, particularly in Anambra State, these celebrations are increasingly promoted by youths through organized cultural displays and Sunday gatherings held in the evening after Christian worship. This study examines whether this development signals a paradigm shift toward cultural renaissance and identity reconstruction, transformation of traditional religious substance into symbolic performance, or a decline of Igbo traditional religious culture. Using a qualitative approach grounded in cultural sociology and religious studies, the research draws on interviews, and participant observation to analyze youth motivations, forms of expression, and communal responses. Findings suggest that this trend does not represent a decline in cultural tradition but rather a revival that reflects strong identity consciousness and a desire for heritage preservation. It also reveals a reconfiguration of indigenous religious meanings into a largely cultural Igbo social expression. The study concludes that the contemporary celebration of the four market days constitutes a revival rather than an outright decline, although its long-term continuity remains uncertain. This development represents a negotiated adaptation shaped by modernity, Christianity, and youth agency. The study contributes to broader discussions on cultural continuity, religious transformation, and indigenous time consciousness practices in contemporary Igbo society.

Keywords: Igbo youths, Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka-Afor, Uka-Nkwo, Cultural Revival, Religious Transformation, Indigenous Calendar.

Introduction

The spontaneous celebration of the four-day market on a Sunday basis by the youths in the Igboland has been a source of mixed feelings among the elderly people, who are viewing it from different perspectives. Mixed feelings by different kinds of people and Christian denominations who, for some, view it as neopaganism, and some are in a state of watching what it will lead to, while some are indifferent about it, and a great number see it as a rival of Igbo traditional religious practices. But the practice of celebration of market day that falls on Sunday has come to stay among some youths in different communities, and it keeps transforming into different forms. This depicts the false alarm raised by many African and Igbo scholars who lamented on the extinction, routs, and bad effects of globalization on the Igbo traditional cultures. Sequel to that, most of the scholars concluded that African/Igbo gods are on retreat because of the onslaught of modern civilization on religious practices. Mbiti (1969) predicts this ugly situation and describes it in this way:

Africans are being caught up in a world of revolution that is so dynamic that it has almost got out of human control.... The man of Africa must get up and dance, for better or for worse, in the arena of world drama. His image of himself and of the universe is disrupted, and he must make room for the changing universe and not simply become a tribal man. (p. 216).

While Nwadinigwe (1999) describes the above bad effects of globalization or civilization as follows:

The advent of civilization has divested the Africans and the Igbo in particular. Many scholars of African religion and tradition have pointed to this fact in their various works and publications.... The white man has put a knife and cut the string that holds the Igbos together, and since then, the center can no longer hold.... Though the white man brought and introduced to us some good morals, he deceitfully lured Africans, especially the Igbos, into discarding their rich cultural heritage. Consequently, upon this, many vices have rocked the foundation that holds the Igbos together. Crime of all sorts has become the order of the day. Many of our rich artifacts have been stolen and sold to the same man who condemned them as devilish. (p. 2).

The market week regulates communal rhythms of life, for time in Igbo cosmology was cyclical rather than linear. Uchendu (1965) and Mbiti (1969), among other scholars, have this opinion that the Igbo four-day market cycle, Eke, Orié, Afor, and Nkwo, constitutes a foundational element of indigenous Igbo cosmology and social organization. In the olden times, the cyclical time system naturally structured the economic transactions, ritual observances, cultural assemblies, and communal interactions across Igbo communities in southeastern Nigeria. Each of the four days functioned not merely as a market designation but as a sacred temporal marker embedded within Igbo religious thought and cosmology. Arinze (1970) and Isichei (1976) equally note that the four-day cycle was closely connected to ritual practices, divination systems, and the veneration of deities and ancestral forces because most markets in Igbo land were instituted around shrines or sacred spaces by different communities, reinforcing the interconnection between trading and spirituality. Again Kanu (20) agrees that market days can be understood in terms of the spiritual, associable with spiritual beings, which means that it is the spirit beings that control the physical universe, and that the physical realm of reality is the arena where spiritual forces display their power. Thus, the Igbo calendar system reflected an integrated worldview in which religion, economy, and politics were inseparable.

With the above situation, one will certainly ask the following questions: Does the Sunday-based celebration of Uka-Eke, Uka-Orié, Uka-Afor, and Uka-Nkwo constitute contemporary revival, represent a paradigm shift in cultural consciousness, or a transformation of indigenous tradition into symbolic cultural expression? How does this revival contribute to identity formation, solidarity, and social cohesion among people in the present Igbo society? And to what extent do the current celebrations retain or reinterpret the religious and social dimensions of the market traditional system? The happiness or joyous atmosphere that pervades the celebration among the youths describes and answers the above questions, and even alludes to the more significant role it plays in the contemporary Igbo society. Onwubiko (1991) describes festive village atmosphere as one turned into a home of merry making once the festival period sets in. This is because in African festivals or feast celebrations, there is the connection of sacred symbols of culture, rituals being put into practical expression, and cultural life's real context. The Sunday celebration of Uka-Nkwo, Uka-Eke, Uka-Orié, and Uka-Afor by most communities whose market day falls on Sunday is pervaded by this joyous festival atmosphere, with many people from different communities gathering on the market square of the town concerned.

It is true that Christian missionary activities and other factors significantly altered the indigenous time and four-day markets known to the Igbo people, through the introduction of the seven-day Western week and the institutionalization of Sunday worship, which displaced the ritual centrality of the four-day system. However, the sacred meanings of Eke, Orié, Afor, and Nkwo did not diminish in public life as most people alleged, for it is surviving largely in rural and Urban settings, and most people still retain the naming system in the different families of Igbo communities. The resurgence of the Sunday market day celebration has not only revived the religious practices, but it has also challenged the dominant Christian religion.

The contemporary Igbo youths have increasingly promoted the celebration of Uka-Eke, Uka-Orié, Uka-Afor, and Uka-Nkwo through cultural displays, social media displays, and organized community events. This development raises critical uneasiness among the Christian communities who raised the cries that youths are going back to paganism, while non-Christian religious sects see it as a revival and commendable bold steps. The wave of this revival is greater than the religious change that took place during the time of the Christian missionaries. The youths are involved here willingly, with the help of technology, which disseminates the religious revivals in many parts of the world, but in previous religious change, the outcast were gathered by the missionary to move from traditional religion to Christian religion.

So this study focuses specifically on the how and why the celebration of Uka-Eke, Uka-Orié, Uka-Afor, and Uka-Nkwo among contemporary Igbo youths in some selected communities in Anambra State. The research concentrates on youth-led initiatives, including organized gatherings, and symbolic cultural expressions. The study does not aim to provide a comprehensive ethnography of some Igbo communities, nor does it examine in detail precolonial ritual practices beyond their relevance to the contemporary revival.

The Origin of the Four-Week Day Market System in Igbo Land

Historically, the origin of the four-week day market in Igbo land cannot be tangibly established because it is as old as man itself. However, many scholars have posited many historical perspectives. Uchendu (1965) is of the view that the origin of the Igbo four-day market system, Eke, Orié, Afor, and Nkwo, is deeply rooted in indigenous cosmology, socio-economic organization, and religious worldview. But Uchendu did not narrate how it came to be established among the Igbo People. Although no written precolonial records precisely date its emergence, many scholars believe that anthropological and historical events indicate that the system evolved organically within

early Igbo communities as part of their broader cosmological understanding of time and social order. Many scholars viewed many factors with regard to the origin of the four markets without tracing their direct origin. While some attributed the origin of four-day markets to having been instituted by *Chukwu*, who also established agriculture and other activities. This is why Ifesieh (1989) calls marketplaces sacred places in the Igbo traditional religion because they are also meeting points for the living, the dead, and the spirits, apart from being created by *Chukwu*.

Cosmologically, scholars like Mbiti (1969) and Arinze (1970) argue that the market cycle likely originated from ritual time reckoning before it became a structured economic calendar. As is already known, the Igbo worldview did not separate religion from daily life. Sacred days regulated sacrifices, divination, and communal rituals. Thus, the emergence of the four-day week can be linked to early religious practices that required periodic communal gatherings. Over time, these ritual gatherings evolved into organized market exchanges, blending spirituality with commerce.

From mythological and symbolic perspectives, some oral traditions associate the four market days with primordial cosmological elements or deities, although interpretations vary among communities. While there is no uniform myth explaining the creation of markets in various communities, the symbolic association of the four days with cosmic balance suggests that the system was perceived as divinely ordered rather than socially invented. This reinforces the idea that the market cycle originated within a sacred cosmological framework before becoming a standardized economic institution. Scholars like Afigbo (1981) illustrate the origin of markets from an Igbo legendary story, though there are many versions of the story, as follows:

The days of the week had no names, for there was no way of counting the days because the sun was always shining and no one slept. Then four strangers arrived at Aguleri with four baskets. Ndri asked Chukwu where they came from. Chukwu refused to say, but said he would send a person who would divulge their names and tell where they came from. A wise person (Okpeta) was sent to Ndri. Okpeta brought a rat (oke) with him. At night, he tied a string around the rat and told the rat to end the first basket: the rat did so and made a noise therein. One of the unknown visitors shook the owner of the basket and said, "Eke, Eke," and told him that something was making a noise in his basket. When Eke was about to get up to find out the cause of the noise, Okpeta pulled the rat away/so when Eke looked in he saw nothing to cause the noise. Eke went to sleep, Okpeta noted the name, Eke, and sent the rat into another basket to make a noise therein, and the next man woke up and called to the owner of the basket saying, "Oye, Oye, something is in your basket." Okpeta did as before and so on for the other two baskets and secured the names Afo and Nkwo.... These four men founded four markets, and that is how the Igbo got their four-day-week. These four strangers were sent by Chukwu, and their baskets contained fish.... (pp. 130-131).

Since then, according to Kanu (2022) these market days have been used in Igbo-land to count *Izu-* days, *Onwa-* months, and *Aro-* year. And these names are given to male children: Okeke, Nweke, Okoye, Nwoye, Okafor, Okonkwo, and Nwankwo. To the female children: Mgbeke, Mgboye, Mgbafor, Mgbankwor are given and are still being answered till today. Kanu (2022) further compares English and Igbo calendar as follows:

The English calendar which has 7 days in a week, 30 days in a month, 4 weeks in a month, 52 weeks in a year, 12 months in a year and 365 days in a year, the Igbo calendar has 4 days in a week, 7 weeks in a month, 28 days in a month, 13 months in a year, 91 weeks in a year, and 364 days in a year. These four days represent the four cardinal points.

Eke-----East
Orie-----West
Afor-----North
Nkwo-----South. (p. 46).

Another version on the origin of the Igbo market days came from Onyesoh (2021) as follows:

The present-day commercial and ritual activity of the four market days- Eke, Oye, Afo, and Nkwo, Chukwu revealed the deities to Eze Nri and Eze Nri agents (Nri priests), who consecrated the markets in most parts of Igbo land by establishing the shrines in such chosen locations. In Nri, the center of daily socio-political activities is the Eke Market square, and right at the center of this square is the Eke shrine, as seen in the relevant place. (p.25). From the above citations, it is understood that Igboland regards the origin of the market as ancient as when men held discussions directly with *Chukwu*. Precolonial Igbo society consisted of decentralized village groups rather than centralized kingdoms. To facilitate trade and avoid scheduling conflicts, communities developed a rotational market system aligned with the four-day cycle (Isichei, 1976). Each community designated one of the four days as its principal market day, with its deity being instituted at the same time.

This allowed traders and communities to move sequentially from one market to another within the same cycle. The arrangement promoted inter-village exchange, reduced competition, and maximized economic participation. Over time, the four-day rhythm became institutionalized as the standard structure across Igbo land, and the four-day-week provided a framework upon which economic and religious activities are carried out from generation to generation. Although the precise origin point within Igbo land is unclear, scholars generally suggest that as inter-community trade expanded, the four-day cycle became standardized across different Igbo subgroups (Isichei, 1976). Its widespread adoption indicates that it effectively met religious, economic, and administrative needs. By the time of early European contact in the nineteenth century, the four-day market week was already deeply entrenched throughout Igbo society.

Igbo Youths and The Sunday Celebration of Uka-Nkwo, Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka Afo

The whole issue of Sunday market-day celebration was never premeditated by any of the youths from any of the communities. It is believed that it spontaneously sprang and spread across the Igbo communities, upon the heavy presence of Christianity in Igbo land. This, in a way, signifies that the gods of Igbo land, which went on retreat with the coming of Christianity, are coming back in full force. Despite the growing visibility of this Sunday market celebration by the contemporary Igbo youths, the character and sequence of its development remain clearly unknown by most researchers, and the promoters of Sunday market-day celebration. The youths themselves have different opinions concerning its origin and the motives behind the celebration. What seemed to be the same in the celebration is its social aspects, where and how the feast is being carried out in the market square.

The problem, therefore, lies in determining whether the promotion or celebration of Uka-Eke, Orie, Afor, and Nkwo among contemporary Igbo youths constitutes a paradigm shift toward cultural revitalization or signals a reconfiguration and possible decline of indigenous religious tradition. Hence, there is a need for systematic investigation into this phenomenon, so that its bearing and motives can be known and understood for proper guidance among the youths or reconfirmation of Igbo traditional religion to its proper place. This reconfirmation is important, since most of the observers and scholars argue that the contemporary religious practices lack the ritual depth and cultural substance that once defined the traditional system, thereby reflecting a surface-level transformation or even dilution of cultural heritage.

However, what seemed like an origin of Sunday-based celebration of market-day by youths, as explained by A. N. Okeke (personal communication, January 12, 2026), states that:

It all started with elders in most communities who travelled to far places to bring *alusi* or deity, to their various homes for one purpose or another. Upon bringing them back, there would be a kind of festival or feast for the institution of the deity or *alusi* concerned. A small house is built for it, where the votary will offer prayers and sacrifices to it, depending on what the deity requires from the votary for sacrifice. During the institution and festival of the deity, the votary invites many people to come and celebrate with him. He cooks different kinds of dishes with drinks, which he would use to entertain people. It is from here that many people, especially youths, started gathering for feasts in the people's houses.

This kind of celebration attracted people, both Christians and traditional worshippers, at least for recreation and eating aspects of the celebration, though the majority of Christians cast aspersions on it, maintaining that it is not proper to eat in the shrine or in the institution of the deity. Even when the person who instituted the *alusi* or deity is not home based, he designates one person who will be doing the offering or sacrifices to it. According to J. F. Nwankwo (personal communication, December 22, 2025), sometimes the person designated to do the sacrifice is being paid heavily or compensated well. This lures many youths into the traditional religious activities of being a priest or priestess. As many votaries engage in feasts or festivals of their deities, the population of people attending the feasts kept increasing greatly from house to house. At some point, some of the votaries argued that they are feeding their *chi* or ancestors. This, of course, involves a lot of celebration.

This celebration graduated into another stage where most rich people sponsor the celebration of feasts or festivals of community deities in their respective shrines. In this case, a date is booked and invitation giving to different neighboring communities for the upcoming feast or celebration. During this celebration, there are a lot of ceremonies where the gods of the land are requested to protect and give wealth to the youths in the community. The great masquerades invited from other communities display their dancing steps, magical powers, and are rewarded with some items at the end of the day. Many priests of different shrines, priestesses (*Ndi Ezenwanyi*), and *dibia* are all invited to the celebration. Equally little empowerment and cash gifts are given to most youths to reinforce and energize them in being committed to the course of sacrificing to the deity in the community shrine. Again, many rich Igbo men and women from time-to-time request that different sacrifices should be performed

for them in order to continue to succeed in their various business endeavors, which is done with huge cash deposits to the priests in charge of some deities.

Another critical stage in the formation or spontaneous origin of Sunday market-day celebration is the belief that the deity rewards the adherents with much wealth as they were preached by some rich young youths or men, that it was through the power of deity that their great wealth came to grow, hence they always pay homage to it with the monthly or annual festivals or feast as the case may be. This narrative gradually and spontaneously motivated and pushed most youths into bringing *alusi* in their compound and sacrificing to idols or deities for wealth and for transactional purposes. This accounts recently for the great transactional trend found in Igbo traditional religion by many priests and priestesses. Hence, Nnoruga (2025) remarks that:

The religion, which has been regarded as the custodian of the land in the moral, religious, and social order, is increasingly seen as an avenue for business ventures by the chief priests and priestesses. Hence, the demand for quick-fix solutions, ranging from financial success without any hard work, to political power to protection against enemies, has fueled a market-driven approach to religious practices. Many spiritual leaders now offer charms, rituals, divination, and swearing services (taking oaths) before deities or godfathers for allegiance at fixed prices, leading to the erosion of traditional religious ethics.... The transactional nature of contemporary Igbo religious practices by young people fosters the desire for materialism, get-rich syndrome by any means without any hard work, kidnapping, and ritual killings... this weakened the structure of ITR, and automatically brought about a decline in communal bonds, values, social cohesion and security, for young people in the Igbo society prioritized personal gains over collective well-being and genuine worship of traditional gods. (p. 13).

Here, most youths went into different kinds of rituals in order to make a lot of money or *ego mbutu* in a local parlance. This in many ways increased the tempo of sacrificing to the deities for money purposes, youths' intrusion into traditional religion, and worshipping of many idols/*alusi* as a tool for making money. This automatically degrades the Igbo proverb "*aka ajaja na-eweta onu manumanu*" (hard work brings wealth). This is one of the reasons many elders in Igbo traditional religion (ITR) cast doubts or argue that the contemporary religious practices by the youths lack the ritual depth, truth and cultural substance, that once defined the traditional religious system. This also accounts for the proliferation of Igbo youths going into making money through *Yahoo Yahoo* dealings, thinking that the gods will prosper them through wealth without any hard work. The governor of Anambra state Professor Chukwuma Soludo even decried the above situation severally, since his inception as the governor of Anambra state.

With the above situation, many youths stormed the worship of African/Igbo traditional religion, showcasing their wealth, sponsoring festivals or feasts for deities and shrines, paying handsomely to many youths who volunteered to the worship of the community's deities as the chief priest in many communities. J. I. Okolo (personal communication, November 20, 2025) said that "he was promised a new automobile with a fat monthly salary, but he declined the offer due to pressure from the family members". Many youths saw it as an opportunity to enrich themselves by taking these kinds of offers from the rich young people. This created a lot of fake chief priests and fake priestesses in Igboland with self-made deities, used to manipulate clientele in the name of going back to the root or traditional religion. Nnoruga (2025) states that:

The increase in the demand for quick solutions to personal and financial problems has created opportunities for deceitful individuals to pose as traditional religious leaders. Initially, most people from Igbo land abhor being addressed as traditional priests and priestesses, but that is no longer the same as of today in Igbo land, for people do all they can to resist the temptation of being called and addressed as the traditional priests or priestesses. Even to the extent of moving away to another location or calling any Christian group to pray to intervene in the situation. All these have changed tremendously to the extent that shrines are found in most of the families in Igbo land. This gave rise to the fraudulent practices and exploitation of clients in various ways. (p. 15).

This led the Anambra state government of Professor Charles Soludo in 2025, to start arresting all the fake traditional priests and priestesses in the state and directed them to register with the government of Anambra state to validate their religious traditional practices. Recently, the shrine of Mr. Nwangwu Chukwudozie (*Akwa-Okuko tiwara aku*) was demolished by the Anambra state government in 2026, found to be guilty of the above offence. With the influx of many youths into the office of the priesthood in ITR, both on the personal and community levels, the festival for the commemoration of the deities abounds everywhere and all the time. The apex of these celebrations takes place during the harvest times, like new yam celebrations, at the end of the year and the new year seasons. These celebrations metamorphosed into Sunday basis celebration for the deities that are instituted in the marketplaces found in different communities without being sponsored by anyone. Some of these deities,

were originally the gods of the communities that protect the communities daily and where sacrifices are offered, but were literally abandoned at the wake of civilization and globalization. The celebration of Sunday market day was initially sponsored by some individuals in the communities, but with its expansion in many places, it has become a global Igbo activity that is attended by children, youths, and elders. People conveniently move from town to town for this celebration, recreation with masquerades and social cohesion. From the beginning to the end of the celebration, it is all celebration and bonding with people from different communities. The next day, being Monday, in the evening, the *Achukwu* masquerades will come out in the market square to perform some cultural dance, to show that the celebration of the Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka-Afor, or Uka-Nkwo, as the case may be, was successful.

In another account, T. O. Oranusi (personal communication, February 8, 2026) states that the celebration of the Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka-Afor, or Uka-Nkwo started with some old priests in the Christian domination, who used the market days known to traditional people who were newly converted and conversant in counting of *izu* in Igbo week day and month to count and know the Sunday to do their miniature harvest and project Sunday in different local church communities. The idea behind the use of Sunday market-day by the Christian community came from the fact that, after the market-day of the community that falls on Saturday of any month, tomorrow being Sunday, is when the Christian community brings to the church items they got from the market or farms for development and upkeep of the Christian community, popularly known as project Sunday. It is this Christian project Sunday, which happens to be either in Eke, Orie, Afor, or Nkwo that is being taking up by the youths, in different communities. Though it is not popular as other opinions. T. O. Oranusi (personal communication, February 8, 2026) went ahead to explain that the Igbo youths, in the bid to perpetuate the celebration of Igbo traditional religion, keyed in, to this narrative and revived the market deities celebration, through the traditional way. This means that this celebration was there in the past but promoted to Sunday basis celebration.

The Effects of Sunday Market-Day Celebration in Igbo Land

The Sunday market-day celebration has been seen or interpreted from various perspectives, especially from the point of view of whether it constitutes a paradigm shift or a subtle decline in traditional religious practices. But theoretically, this celebration represents an assertion of ethnic consciousness and identity continuity. Within the framework of cultural renaissance theory, the renewed or spontaneous celebration of the Igbo Sunday market-day can be interpreted as a reconstruction of cultural consciousness, whether it is deliberate or forced. So, the contemporary celebrations of Uka-Eke and related days through fashions, dance, greetings, and symbolic public gatherings have produced moments of shared belonging, communal bonds, and *Igwebuike* in celebration of festivals.

The four market-day in Igbo land is cyclical and each market day carries religious meaning, its celebration on Sunday basis, has reintroduced itself into the conscious mind of the youths who were not conversant with the sequence of the cyclical Igbo market-days. For colonial Masters and Christian missionaries introduced the seven-day week and centralized Sunday worship, reducing the ritual authority of the four-day cycle, thereby almost displaced the traditional four-week day (*izu*). With the Sunday market-day celebration, through recreational dancing and other social engagements, the contemporary youths can conveniently count the sequence of the market days. So, the contemporary revival by the youths, often conducted after church services, reflects indigenous religious transformation rather than restoration through cultural symbolism and identity expression. The tension being experienced among Igbo youths from the point of view of Christianity, modernity, and ancestral heritage has now converged on identity formation through the Sunday market-day celebration. This, in effect, produces a hybrid identity where a youth simultaneously becomes a Christian, a modern youth, and a culturally Igbo youth. The revival, therefore, reflects not regression into precolonial religiosity but creative identity. So, the celebration of Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka-Afor, and Uka-Nkwo functions as a declaration of ethnic culture and pride, a reclamation of the indigenous worldview, and a symbolic reconnection with ancestors.

Adversely, since the beginning of the Sunday market-day celebration by the youths, there has been a cry of woes by the Christian religious bodies who view it as a return to paganism. This has generated a lot of tensions, like fear of syncretism, wealth without hard work, suspicion of hidden ritual motives, where most youths become priestesses and priests. In the colonial era and missionary activities, the devotees of African/Igbo traditional religion cried foul that the youths were being lost to the Christian religion. Achebe (1978) captures the situation as thus:

It is already too late' said Obierika sadly. Our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger, they have joined his religion, and they help to uphold his government. If we should try to drive out the white men in Umuofia, we should find it easy. There are only two of them. But what of our own people who are following their

way and have been given power? They would go to Umuru and bring the soldiers, and we would be like Abame'.... 'Does the white man understand our custom about land?' 'How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says our customs are bad, and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came peaceably and quietly with his religion.... Now he has won over our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together, and we have fallen apart. (p.140-141).

Now the Christian religion is crying out woes where they are seeing the youths moving to traditional religion. In the past, the movement started with outcasts, orphans, and the sick ones, but today it is the able-bodied, educated youths who are never forced to do so, but voluntarily opted to do so.

Evaluation and Conclusion

This study examined the sudden resurgence of Uka-Eke, Uka-Orie, Uka-Afor, and Uka-Nkwo celebrations among contemporary Igbo youths, and explores whether this phenomenon represents a paradigm shift toward cultural revival or a transformation that signals decline in traditional religious practices. The findings reveal that the Sunday market-day celebration historically served as a fundamental structure organized for communal interactions and conscious revival within Igbo society. The system reflected a cyclical conception of time embedded in indigenous cosmology, where Sunday market-day possessed symbolic and religious significance. The study finds that this revival is primarily driven by identity consciousness, cultural preservation, and communal solidarity rather than a complete restoration of indigenous religious rituals. The celebrations also contribute to social cohesion by creating spaces for intercommunity interaction and collective cultural expression. Nevertheless, tensions remain between the cultural revival and Christian religious practices, highlighting the complex negotiation between indigenous traditions and modern religious practices. Overall, the study concludes that the contemporary Sunday market-day celebration represents neither a full cultural renaissance nor a complete decline but rather a hybrid adaptation shaped by modernity, youth agency, and evolving identity dynamics.

The revival of the Igbo four-day cycle in Sunday market-day celebration illustrates how cultural memory is being reactivated within modern contexts while undergoing significant transformation. The findings suggest that secularization does not necessarily eliminate religious symbols but often reconfigures them into cultural expressions. In this sense, the Igbo Sunday market-day celebration persists as a symbolic cultural institution even as its traditional ritual authority diminishes. Rather than being passive recipients of new tradition, contemporary youths act as active cultural innovators who reinterpret ancestral heritage to suit modern realities. However, this movement may decline if it remains limited to fashion and social media aesthetics, as it risks superficiality. Its sustainability requires transmission of deeper historical and cosmological knowledge, coupled with support from elders and traditional authorities which will strengthen its legitimacy. Without such support, the revival may fade as a passing trend. At present, the revival appears sustainable in symbolic form; however, whether it evolves into deeper religious restoration or remains a cultural performance depends on how future generations engage in it.

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