IMPLICATIONS OF THE REMOVAL OF THE RITUAL DIMENSION IN OZO TITLE TAKING: FOCUS ON ONICHA-UGBO, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this dissertation is my original research that I have achieved through my commitment to reading and research. It has not been presented to any other University or Institution for consideration of any certification. Information from other sources has been acknowledged. The texts, data, photos, map or tables taken from other sources have been accredited.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the implications of the removal of the ritual dimension from Ozo title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria. Historically, the Ozo institution was deeply embedded in ritualized ceremonies that served as mechanisms for social cohesion, moral regulation, and the preservation of communal heritage. Without meaningful community-based cultural rituals, a group or a community's heritage could go into extinction and in its place people will define and create their own marker events and values. From the late 1980s onward, however, processes of modernization, urban migration, intermarriage, Christianity and the emergence of a multicultural community contributed to the removal of ritual elements from Ozo title taking. Removing ritual from Ozo title taking created a vacuum in people's lives, an emptiness and loss of identity. Anchored in Structural/Functionalist and Structural Anthropological frameworks, and drawing upon Ritual and Modernity theories, the research employed a mixed-method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The research had a target population of 10,000 people and a sample size of 200. The sampling procedures include, simple random probability, purposive non- probability sampling and snow ball sampling methods. The research adopted questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion as data collection instruments. The findings reveal that the removal of ritual practices has engendered significant cultural, moral, and social consequences, including weakened social structures, erosion of cultural values, breakdown of moral and social order, and disorientation in communal value systems. Respondents emphesised further implications such as the monetization of titles, admission of underage candidates, dilution of ethical guidance, and diminished intergenerational transmission of knowledge. The study proposes strategies aimed at reinforcing cultural continuity, ethical behavior, and social cohesion within the Onicha-Ugbo community. Structured engagement of younger adults in the Ozo institution is recommended to facilitate moral education, strengthen communal bonds, and cultivate leadership qualities consistent with the tradition. If these measures are duly put in place, Onicha-Ugbo community will be able to regain its lost values. By situating the Ozo title within broader debates on ritual, modernity, and cultural sustainability, this research contributes to the discourse on the resilience of indigenous institutions in the face of socio-cultural transformation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the study, examining the context of rituals globally, in Africa, and particularly among the Onicha-Ugbo people of Delta State, Nigeria, in relation to *Ozo* title-taking. It presents the statement of the problem, research objectives and questions, purpose, significance, theoretical and conceptual frameworks, scope, and delimitations of the study and operational definition of terms.

1.2 Background of the Study

Global Context: Rites of passage have existed across human societies for thousands of years and are commonly accompanied by rituals that mark transitions from one stage of life or social status to another (Blumenkrantz & Goldstein, 2010). These rites, which may relate to birth, maturity, marriage, reproduction, and death, provide individuals with symbolic and communal support during significant life transitions. Beyond marking change, rituals strengthen social bonds, reinforce identity, and promote a sense of belonging (Rohlen, 2023; Fujitani, 2023).

Across cultures, rituals serve as important mechanisms for transmitting values, responsibilities, and identity. For example, Jewish *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremonies formally recognise the transition of young people into greater religious and social responsibility (Epstein, 2018). Similarly, historical Western practices such as youth initiation ceremonies and debutante balls marked transitions into adulthood and accepted individuals into wider society (Burrow, 2023). Among the Sateré-Mawé of the Brazilian Amazon, the Bullet Ant initiation tests endurance signifies readiness for adult responsibilities (Nuñez & Pfeffer, 2016). In like manner, Debutante Balls for girls aged 16–18 were introduced in America, based on the English custom of debuting young women at a society ball during their first social season in London.

The American debutante ball was a means of debuting young women of marriageable age and adult status into society (Burrow, 2023). It was a public celebration of her entering womanhood with complete dress, heels, and a father-daughter dance. The Militaries during training for instance, engage in rituals and ceremonies in order to be organically real to their members and to society, and also to engender commitment. When the militaries engage in rituals, it provokes admiration, respect and loyalty to members (Logan, and Kridel, (2019). In this case, rituals give occasion to a life or group event. They are signs that something matters to the group, and

the individuals involved. Therefore, to ensure smooth transition from one stage to another, certain rituals, or symbols are required.

African Context: African societies have also traditionally used rites of passage to mark adulthood and integrate individuals into their communities. Among the Hamar of Ethiopia, the bull-jumping ceremony signifies a young man's transition into adulthood and qualifies him for marriage and ownership of cattle (Nuñez & Pfeffer, 2016). In Kenya, Kenyatta (1938) described rites of passage, particularly among the Gikuyu, as important systems of social education and integration. Historically, rites of passage in the Kenyan context served as the primary mechanism for social stratification, political organisation, and legal accountability. Kenyatta (1938) in his analysis of traditional institutions stated that, the completion of initiation rites most notably *irua* (circumcision) instantly elevated an individual's legal status from a dependent youth to a participating citizen. This transition established the *rika* (age-group) system, which is a lifelong group model that cuts across individual kinship lines to forge broader communal cohesion and military defense units. Within this background, rites of passage must be understood not merely as religious or physical modifications, but as vital constitutional pillars that sustained judicial governance, land rights, and elderly councils (*kiama*) in pre-colonial Kenya (Kenyatta, 1938).

Similarly, in Sierra Leone, West Africa, initiation into the Poro and Bundu societies prepares young men and women for adult social responsibilities. In these initiations the process spans a long period and at the end, the initiates come out ready to enter into the world of adults and become men and women respectively. In Nigeria, ritual practices historically served as important means of transmitting cultural values and maintaining social order. Indeed, value is built into the system of members of the society for the good of the society through the various forms of passage rites. This is because culture and value are interrelated and values build human society with common conscience (Adibe, 2009).

Local Context: Onicha-Ugbo: Among the Onicha-Ugbo people of Delta State, *Ozo* title institution represents an important traditional social structure. Although its exact origin is uncertain, the practice has been passed down through generations. Traditionally, *Ozo* title-taking was reserved for mature men of integrity who were considered capable of protecting their families, community, and property. *Ozo* members were expected to promote and preserve the traditions and customs of the community. Otuwurrune (1997), underscores that the

institution also served to honour elders, preserve cultural values, maintain law and order, and uphold ancestral traditions.

The *Ozo* institution therefore played significant social, cultural, political, and spiritual roles in Onicha-Ugbo society. *Ozo* titleholders contributed to community protection, peaceful coexistence, preservation of cultural heritage, and the maintenance of social order. Traditionally, the ritual ceremony was extensive, consisting of four stages involving various forms of purification and sacrifices. These practices demonstrate the central role of ritual in regulating social transitions, preserving cultural identity, and sustaining communal values among the Onicha-Ugbo people.

Ozo Title Taking in Onicha-Ugbo Before the Late 1980's

Ozo title taking was core to Onicha-Ugbo tradition. Before now, there was law and order, value and respect for elders and cultural heritage of the people. Communal living was the norm and there was harmony in the community as everybody worked toward a common goal. *Ozo* title was a ceremony into the nobility of the town and it attracted numerous social economic and political privileges to its holders as well as responsibilities. At the social level, the *Ozo* title enhanced the social recognition accorded to the holder in the society. Consequently, the holder must not be attacked physically (Okwechime, 2012). *Ozo* title holder gained a lot from sharing of monetary and other material proceeds from traditional ceremonies like burial ceremonies. He was usually given prime position over other social groups.

Politically, he was entitled to sit amongst other *Ozo* titleholders, according to his ranking, during village or town's policy or decision-making conventions. If God blessed him with long life, he could become the custodian of the *Nze* (spiritual head) of the *idumu*, (quarter) the *ogbe* (village) and may be counted among the top twelve who sat in the *Obi's* Council (council of chiefs) (the highest decision-making body in the town) (Okwechime, 2012). In fact, Akabike and Anizoba (2021) attest that *Ozo* titled men ere referred to as the spiritual fathers in Igbo (Onicha-Ugbo) cosmology. They were trusted as the custodians of customs and tradition. They also had the responsibility to defend the customs and the traditions of the land because they were seen as the symbol of justice, equity and moral uprightness. *Ozo* titleholders were men of high degree of morality, proficient in the customs and traditions of the land.

An *Ozo* titleholder himself stood for social justice, truth, hospitality and greatness (Akabike and Anizoba, 2021). In the past, a man was not allowed to take the *Ozo* title before his senior

in the nuclear/extended family. Today, a successful younger man can take the title and even take for his underage children even when some members of the extended family have not taken. Traditionally, this would have been resisted because it could cause serious conflict. Unfortunately, some elders have compromised the whole process of *Ozo* title taking. In the past, the candidate made public pronouncements to abide by the norms, the ethos and ideals of the community during the rigorous public outing ceremonies. These rituals bound him to the community as Stephenson (2015, Some`, 1998), said that, to contemplate about ritual, is also a way to reflect on human nature, sociality, and culture. A community cannot exist without ritual. Stephenson argues that:

> particular rituals may be more or less important to certain people or to certain societies or groups; But even if we do not consider ourselves ritual beings or our society ritually based, an encounter with ritual in the course of a lifetime is as sure as the rising and setting of the sun… Ritual, permeates our social and personal life worlds. Ritual is formative of who we are, and we variously experience the rites and ceremonies that cross our paths as uplifting or boring, exploitive or empowering, creative or moribund. Therefore, to think about ritual is to explore its place, power, and potential in our lives and our society. (2015, p. 38).

Ozo Title Taking Rituals

Ozo title rituals, were the necessary tools that ushered men into the very setting of the society. Their importance was core to Onicha-Ugbo tradition. Belonging to *Ozo* institution opened the door to individuals to belong and be accepted in the society. All these reinforce one's role in the community. During this period, men engaged in *Ozo* title through proper ritual ceremonies and only those with financial strength engaged in the rituals straight to the end. The starting point was that the candidate should be an adult mature of mind, who could afford the expenses and who had shown signs of commitment, capable of taking risks and was able to defend his family and community at large. He should be a married man who was ready to undertake the process as well as the willingness to take responsibilities and to fulfill the obligations of being an adult. There were some elements of apprehension in the intending candidates for the ceremony: should they begin and were not able to complete the circle because the process of Ozo title taking itself was rigorous. Okwechime (2012) grouped the ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title taking as follows:

First Stage: Purification Rites

In the first stage, the aspiring *Ozo* informed the *Onishe* who was the oldest *Ozo* in town. The *Onishe* gave the intending *Ozo*, the requirements for the rites. This began with the purification rites made up of different sacrifices made before the extended family and the clan. An *ikenga* (a protective spirit) was consecrated for the potential *Ozo* in a sacrifice made of palm-oil and fish for his good fortune. It is represented by a carved image with two horns for men and one horn to represent women.

On gender basis, it is important to note that traditionally, women are not admitted into *Ozo* institution. The reason is partly that there used to be a ritual ceremony of initiation into womanhood in the past known as *Inwene*. But the ceremony is long dead. No one born in the last fifty years has any memory of it. *Ozo* institution has survived because it is one of the social structures in Onicha-Ugbo and a man must pass through it before he can be recognised in the society. At the end of *Ozo* title taking, the wife joins her husband in jubilation because her husband has become a man. Otherwise he will be treated as a nobody in the society.

Having done the concecration for the protection of the candidate, the ritual then qualified the him to step into the circle of the chiefs, so that he could be a candidate of the obi-in-council (delegate for the council of chiefs). Equally, the candidate performed the *Ichu Ashi*. The *Ichu Ashi* is the karmic reaction that results from actions of past incarnations. It is believed that karma shows up in adulthood, hence there is a saying that "*one's destiny is a potent medicine in one's life"* (Okwechime, 2012). Offerings are therefore made to forestall any manifestation of negative karma.

Second Stage: Binding Rituals at Village Level

The next stage was *ike ofor* and *ife uno* at the village level. *Ofor* is the staff of office of an *Ozo* title holder and a mark of authority. It is used to convey messages and interpret the prayers of the people and mediates between them: the gods and the ancestors as well as acts as intermediary between this plane and other planes. *Ofor* is used in action only when the suppliant is sure of the right and the justice of his course, otherwise it bounces back on the person. This behooves the holder, especially, to strive after truth, honesty and justice. Similarly, *Ife uno* was a cleansing rite to sanctify the compound of any taboo or abominations committed during the past year as well as to appease the ancestral spirits and the gods, to enable the man complete the remaining stages of the ceremony Okwechime, 2012). The *Ike-Ofor* and the *Ife-*

Uno were severally performed for the financial benefit and recognition of the larger society at the village level. The completion of these two preliminaries qualified the prospective *Ozo* for admission into the *Ikpala* (Senior *Elders*) society. This marked the beginning of liminal stage where the man was yet to become a full man.

"Liminality is a reminder of that mixture of joy and anxiety, that strange combination of freedom and homelessness; that pleasant but unsettling sensation of infinity and openness of possibilities which at some moment, sooner or later will start searching for a new frame to settle within" (Thomassen, 2014.p 65). At this stage the passenger is really in a transitional stage. Tuner (1970) describes it as: "They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. Their condition is one of ambiguity and paradox, a confusion of all the customary categories" (P. 97). After this stage, the candidate qualified to go into the proper threshold of *Ozo* title taking at the town level. This is called "*Ikpa alor*" (Okwechime, 2012).

Third Stage: Threshold Rituals at Town Level

Having performed the rites of "*ikpa alor*", the next stage was "*Iko isi (hair shaving) or Ozo* title taking proper. At this state, the new *Ozo* went to the *Omu*, (the queen mother of the town) for seven consecutive days to have his hair shaved in stages with a small patch left on the side of the right ear where he could stick the feather of an eagle as the mark of an *Ozo* title holder. On the last day of *iko isi* (hair shaving) ritual, the most senior *Ozo* in town, the *Onishe*, performed the concluding rites of installing the new *Ozo* by presenting him with his *Ozo* insignia. This is made up of: "the *Osisi* (carved wooden staff), the *Odu* (elephant tusk) and a red cap with an eagle's feather on the right side" (Okwechime, 2012. p.80). Finally, the new "*Ozo*" went into seclusion again for three months amidst series of purifications. After which he reappeared with his body smeared with native chalk called *nzu*, (kaolin) as a sign of completion of *Ozo* title taking. Then, follows, merriment, celebrations and dance with his wife in an outing ceremony.

Today, *Ozo* title rituals have been removed because, as (Adibe, 2009) puts it, people want to maintain comfortable existence and do not care that harmonious co-existence rooted in the culture eludes them. People are not ready to go through the laborious rituals of *Ozo* title taking any more. The title only exists without the corresponding rituals and people go about freely, wearing the 'red cap' as fashion without actually experiencing what it means to wear it. (The '*Red cap'* is one of the marks or symbols of an *Ozo titled man*). It exudes honour and respect to the one who wears it but he must also be a man of integrity.

Ozo title holder does not tell lies or involve himself in immorality. He is also responsible for the upholding of the "*Ofo*" (staff of office) and abhorrence of crime and evil particularly acts of theft and treachery. He does not howl at people but settles dispute and his word is sacrosanct because it is believed to be true (Aniago, 2015). Consequently, the title is conferred on people who have good moral and ethical orientation and conversely, the holder reciprocates the honour given him. Unfortunately, these days some candidates for *Ozo* title who have acquired wealth, pass through the grades in quick succession and are made "titled men" at an early age than less wealthy fathers or elders, and even infants are admitted once their fathers could pay the stipulated amount for them. In fact, it is not clear whether they still keep the *Ofo* these days because the *Ofo* is a symbol of authority and the holder makes effort to be a person of integrity.

Today the '*red cap'* (*mark of a titled man*) has become common place because people can now buy *Ozo* title with money since it has been monetised. Underage teenagers and adolescents also wear the '*red cap'* probably because their fathers have secured *Ozo* title for them by proxy. Christians are now allowed to take *Ozo* title by monetisation, after which, they take their insignia to Church for blessing. The social consequence of this mix-up is that some of these new generation social status holders disrespect their elders at will and commit crimes without remorse. In ideal situation, holders of such social status would tread gently, aware that they could be ripped of their title if found wanting by virtue of the oath taken during the ritual ceremony. But since there is no ritual, they do not feel bound by community ideals or values.

Onicha-Ugbo Social and Political Structures

In the past too, the social structure helped to stabilise the system. Okwechime, (2012) has it orderly arranged into social grades and political structures:

Itokwelegwe

These were boys in their early teens. As soon as they were strong enough, they took part in communal tasks of the community. They did all the community labours such as sweeping the village streets, digging graves, clearing the paths to farms, and the village square and repairing of shrines (Okwechime, 2012).

Ikolo

This grade was made up of adult men who performed the heavier and most skilled community tasks. They were untitled men, usually from the executive arm of political and judicial authority

within the community and potential fighting force (Okwechime, 2012). Members of these groups and the first above can be regarded as a ceremony of "washing of a child's dirty hands before joining the elders to eat" (Okwuchi, 1992). They might be grown-ups but are still seen as children. But having passed these two stages, they were admitted into the stage of *ndi iche*.

Ndi Iche

These were adult males who were elders but who have not taken the *Ozo* title or were unable to complete the final requirements of the *Ozo* title. They were exempted from communal labour and they formed part of the village council for political and judicial purposes (Okwechime, 2012).

Ikpala

These categories of men were the most important in the social groupings of the community. They were adult men who have taken the *Ozo* title. The importance of this social group is manifold: it helped to determine seniority positions in all socio-communal gatherings without holding premium on the date of birth (Okwuchi, 1992). It enhanced discipline, law, order and respect in the community.

Unfortunately, these institutions now only exist in name without the corresponding rituals that used to usher one into such positions. This being the case, the community values: discipline, respect, harmonious living, observance of law and order have gradually been eroded. The obligation that binds people to commit themselves publicly through the rituals of *Ozo* title taking has also phased out.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The *Ozo* institution has historically served as an important mechanism of governance, justice, social cohesion, cultural preservation, and moral accountability in Onicha-Ugbo. Its traditional ritual ceremonies were central to transmitting values such as discipline, integrity, respect for elders, and communal responsibility. However, the gradual removal or modification of these rituals has transformed the basis of *Ozo* membership, with wealth, social status, and proxy arrangements increasingly influencing admission. This has raised concerns about elitism, weakened accountability, declining respect for traditional authority, social cohesion, quality leadership, cultural continuity, intergenerational transmission and the erosion of cultural values.

Although existing scholarship recognizes the broader cultural and social significance of *Ozo* institutions among Onicha-Ugbo community, there is limited empirical research on the specific consequences of removing traditional *Ozo* ritual ceremonies in *Ozo* title taking. In particular, insufficient attention has been given to how the removal of these rituals affect the institution's moral authority, social cohesion, cultural identity, intergenerational transmission of values, and accountability of members. This constitutes the central scholarly gap that the present study seeks to address.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The title was originally: *"Implications of the Expungement of the Ritual Dimension in the Initiation Into Ozo Title: A Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria". However, after defense, the title evolved to now read "Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in Ozo Title Taking: Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria.*This is now the current title and the purpose of this study. In addition, the study sought to investigate the reasons for the removal of these rituals and to highlight the cultural values embodied in *Ozo* title taking. By doing so, the study aimed to enlighten the community on the dangers of losing its cultural roots and values.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

I. Examine the values embedded in the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo
II. Investigate the reasons for the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo.
III. Analyse the implications or the risks of removing the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo.
IV. Propose a way forward to the consequences of the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo society.

1.6 Research Questions

Although *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo still exists, the rituals that historically accompanied the process have largely been removed, replaced either with improvisations or with no rituals at all. Many young men today are unaware of what the ritual ceremony should entail, since in

some cases it was performed by their fathers on their behalf or bypassed entirely through monetary payment. Against this backdrop, this study was guided by the following questions:

I. What are the values embedded in the rituals dimension of *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo?

II. What are the reasons for the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo?

III. What are the implications or risks of the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo?

IV. What possible way forward can address the consequences of the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study serves as a revelation for the Onicha-Ugbo community by drawing attention to the cultural values inherent in *Ozo* title taking ritual ceremonies. It highlights that true progress could only be achieved through the organic development of indigenous culture rather than the indiscriminate adoption of borrowed practices. Every culture possessed a distinct beauty that shaped identity and facilitated meaningful interaction with others.

Furthermore, the study provides valuable insights for scholars interested in cultural and religious practices in Nigeria and beyond, particularly those at risk of disappearing. It enriches the academic field of Religious Studies by documenting the values, transformations, and implications of *Ozo* title taking rituals. Finally, it offers guidance to policymakers as they consider how to safeguard cultural heritage and shape the legacy that will guide the future generations.

1.8 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining the implications of the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria. Although the gradual shift toward improvisation began in the late 1960s and 1970s, the study emphasises developments from the late 1980s to the present. Specifically, it analyses the values embodied in *Ozo* title taking rituals, the causes of their removal, and the risks posed by their absence. It also proposes strategies for reconciling modern civilisation with cultural continuity, since rituals in *Ozo* titla

taking were historically aimed at personal transformation, the promotion of communal values, and the enhancement of social cohesion.

1.9 Delimitation of the Study

This research was conducted in Onicha-Ugbo, a community in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. It engaged men of different age grades from the four villages that constitute the town. This includes both Christians and traditionalists who have taken the *Ozo* title and those who have not. Onicha-Ugbo was chosen because it serves as the head of the Eze Chime Clan, all of whom engage in *Ozo* institution as a noble practice. The findings of this study, therefore, would be relevant not only to Onicha-Ugbo but also to the wider clan and related communities.

1.10 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides the lens through which a research problem is analysed and explained (Mvumbi & Ngumbi, 2015). This study drew upon four theories: Structural Functionalism and Structural Anthropology (Chapter One), as well as Ritual Theory and Modernisation Theory (Chapter Two).

1.10.1 Structural Functionalism Theory

Functionalism, one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology, emerged in the early 20th century and is associated with scholars such as Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spencer, Robert Merton, Bronislaw Malinowski, and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (Crossman, 2020). Rooted in Durkheim's work, functionalism is primarily concerned with how social order is maintained and how societies remain stable over time. It is a macro-level theory that examines broader social structures rather than individual interactions. Functionalist theories explain social events, practices, and institutions by showing how they contribute to social cohesion, order, and continuity (Hassa, 2019; Wahab et al., 2023).

From this perspective, institutions such as family, religion, economy, and education all function to maintain social stability. Rituals, according to Durkheim, are powerful unifying practices that create social solidarity, the shared bonds that hold communities together (Nickerson, 2023; Ranjan, 2019). In the case of Onicha-Ugbo, the removal of rituals in *Ozo* title title taking has disrupted these mechanisms of cohesion and weakened the symbolic and moral glue that once

bound the community, leaving members vulnerable to value disorientation, commodification of titles, and weakened respect for institutions (Wahab et al., 2023).

Functionalism also stresses the importance of social consensus, a shared agreement on values and norms (Ulfath, 2020). Abrupt changes, such as the removal of ritual from *Ozo* title taking, threaten this consensus and could destabilise social order. Ulfath (2020) notes that while change is inevitable, it should be gradual to preserve stability. The sudden disappearance of rituals in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo thus risked weakening institutions and disrupting collective identity.

At the same time, functionalism recognizes that institutions evolve. If a practice loses its function, it may fade away, while new practices emerge to serve similar purposes (Crossman, 2020). The key question, then, is whether *Ozo* title taking rituals have truly lost their relevance, or whether their values can be adapted to modern realities without undermining cultural cohesion. A purely individualistic approach where members create personal symbolic milestones may erode collective values, weakening solidarity.

In summary, functionalism highlights how *Ozo* title taking rituals historically provided cultural stability, respect for authority, and social order in Onicha-Ugbo. Their disappearance has created dysfunction in the social system, manifested in cultural erosion, reduced cohesion, and weakened dispute resolution.

1.10.1.1 Strengths of Functionalist Theory

Functionalism emphasises the importance of order, cohesion, and stability in society. As modern societies evolve and individuals become more independent, maintaining social order becomes increasingly challenging. Functionalist theory highlights the role of social institutions in creating value consensus, whereby shared values provide the foundation for integration and regulation. These mechanisms are critical for the preservation of cultural identity and continuity.

Furthermore, functionalism demonstrates how institutions such as rituals, education, and governance transmit norms and values across generations. By promoting early socialisation and stabilising adult personalities, these institutions shield individuals from the disruptive effects of modern pressures (Ormerod, 2019; Vakkaldevi, 2014). This insight makes functionalism highly relevant to the study of *Ozo* title taking ritual removal, since it shows how

the removal of key cultural institutions could destabilise society and weaken its cultural resilience.

1.10.1.2 Weaknesses of Functionalist Theory

Functionalism assumes that society operates much like the human body, where each institution functions like an organ, interdependent and contributing to the wellbeing of the whole. While this analogy provided clarity, it also oversimplified complex realities. In practice, value consensus might not always work effectively because people hold different value systems. For instance, if all members of society embraced achievement as the ultimate value, disorder could still arise since not everyone could attain equal levels of success.

Another limitation is that functionalism does not encourage individuals to take an active role in shaping their social environment, even when change might be beneficial. Instead, it often views social change as undesirable, assuming that existing structures will self-correct. This becomes problematic in contexts such as Onicha-Ugbo, where there is tension between those yearning to return to the ritual practices of *Ozo* title taking and others who resist such revival. The modern Onicha-Ugbo elite, driven by personal gain, tends to embrace change, while the elders nostalgically lament the erosion of their cultural heritage. Functionalism, in this case, privileges stability over necessary adaptation.

Furthermore, functionalism offers little predictive power regarding the future of social structures in times of disruption. It does not adequately answer the question: *"What holds a disordered society together?"* Given that societies differ widely in the degree and nature of their unity, functionalism's emphasis on cohesion overlooks cultural fractures and conflicts. In Onicha-Ugbo, this gap is evident as the removal of rituals destabilises the cultural framework without a clear mechanism for re-establishing order.

1.10.1.3 Relevance to the Study

In functionalist theory, societies are seen like a body where every part has a function that helps the whole system together. Hence, shared norms, values, beliefs, and rituals create solidarity that binds people together. Functionalism sees cultural heritage as functional for the present not as old thing because it gives people a sense of continuity. When societies stay together because of their common values and moral rules, their ceremonies reinforce this. Again, functionalist view festivals, rites of passage, like *Ozo* title taking, not only as culture, but as mechanisms that remind people that "they are part of the same group".

In the case of a multicultural community like Onicha-Ugbo, is becoming, functionalism, helps to understand that when new cultural elements enter, they can only survive if they serve a function for group cohesion but it they threaten shared values, there will be tension as it is happening now in Onicha-Ugbo. Thus, while functionalism highlights the importance of rituals and institutions for social stability, it does not fully capture how societies negotiate change or respond to competing value systems. To bridge this gap, it became necessary to also apply structural anthropological theory, which emphasises the relationships and underlying rules that shape social functions and cultural expressions.

1.10.1.4 Structural Anthropological Theory

Structuralism is a product of the twentieth century between 1910 and 1930s influenced by the schools of phenomenology and of Gestalt psychology in Germany (Briggs and Meyer, 2018). It came in a bid to seek new ways of understanding human behaviours and culture. Structural Anthropology, rooted in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009), emphasises the underlying structures that shape human thought, culture, and behavior. Lévi-Strauss argued that cultural practices such as myths, kinship, and rituals reflect unconscious mental patterns that organise meaning and order in society (Cassar, 2024). Rituals, therefore, are not arbitrary practices but expressions of deeper symbolic structures that maintain cultural continuity.

Applied to this study, *Ozo* title ritual ceremonies embody symbolic patterns that communicate values of hierarchy, respect, authority, and community belonging. The removal of rituals disrupts these cultural codes, altering the symbolic fabric of Onicha-Ugbo society. Without the rituals, the meanings embedded in insignia, stages of *Ozo* title taking, and kinship responsibilities lose their depth, and the community risks drifting toward cultural disorientation. Structural Anthropology thus helps explain how the removal of rituals affects not only visible practices but also the deep structures of cultural meaning and identity.

Structuralism seeks new ways of understanding human behavior and culture. In it, Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that human behaviour is shaped by unconscious patterns and structures largely beyond individual control. Unlike theories that focus on historical events or personal choices, structuralism emphasises the deep-seated patterns and rules that govern human thought and cultural practices (Briggs & Meyer, 2018).

In the context of Onicha-Ugbo, *Ozo* title taking has evolved in meaning and practice. This transformation is not merely a matter of individual choice but reflects broader shifts in

collective behavior and unconscious cultural structures. Structuralists maintain that such underlying rules and patterns must be uncovered to fully understand how meaning is produced within a society (Rishit, 2023). These structures provide coherence, functioning as the hidden logic that shapes observable practices such as ritual actions. Thus, analysing the evolving structures of *Ozo* title taking could offer deeper insights into how the people of Onicha-Ugbo interpret and reconstitute their world.

Structuralism also prioritises structure over individual action, examining how social institutions such as family, politics, and education interconnect to form broader systems (Ormerod, 2019). This approach is valuable for analysing the *Ozo* institution within the wider social fabric of Onicha-Ugbo, since its decline or transformation could not be separated from shifts in related institutions. Lévi-Strauss emphasised that anthropology should focus on the fundamental patterns of human thought that organise worldviews. He noted that these processes do not determine culture but operate within it, giving rise to particular symbolic systems (Ormerod, 2019).

Ormerod (2019), stated that cultures are distinguished by hidden rules that participants might not articulate but nevertheless follow. For Onicha-Ugbo, identifying these rules could help explain why rituals once central to *Ozo* title taking have weakened and what symbolic meanings might replace them. Douglas similarly argued that cultural systems of meaning are maintained through symbolic and ritual practices across settings (Manghani, 2022). This suggests that beneath the surface of *Ozo* title taking practices, lies a deeper symbolic logic, which, if rediscovered and articulated, could help preserve and adapt the traditions of the people.

1.10.1.5 Strengths of Structural Anthropological Theory

Structuralism emphasises the structuring elements that shape human thought and cultural practices. Instead of analysing individual actions or texts alone, it uncovers the underlying rules, binary oppositions, myths, and symbolic systems that govern culture (Rishit, 2023). This makes it especially useful for examining *Ozo* title taking, as it allowed the researcher to ask: *What deep cultural logics once governed Ozo title taking rituals?* and *How have these logics shifted over time?*

By bringing together existing cultural elements into new forms, structuralism also explains how societies adapt to change while preserving continuity. For Onicha-Ugbo, this means that

although the rituals have been removed, structuralist's analysis revealed how cultural meanings were reconfigured, enabling individuals and the community to renegotiate identity within changing circumstances.

1.10.1.6 Weaknesses of Structural Anthropological Theory

Despite its contributions, structuralism has limitations. First, it often separates "nature" from "culture," overlooking the reality that culture and society are part of nature and shape one another. Second, cultural systems like language are embedded with hidden rules that participants may not be able to consciously articulate. This creates room for misinterpretation, especially when outsiders attempt to decode these rules. In contexts such as Onicha-Ugbo, external interpretations of *Ozo* title taking rituals distorted and undermined their original meanings.

Finally, structuralism overemphasises timeless structures while underplaying human agency and historical change. In rapidly modernising societies, such as Onicha-Ugbo, where traditions are contested and redefined, structuralism risks overlooking the dynamic negotiations individuals engage in as they balance heritage with modern values.

The two theories therefore converge in explaining the central finding of this study: the removal of ritual from *Ozo* title-taking has transformed both the functions and the meanings of the institution. Structural Functionalism explains the consequences for social order, cohesion, moral regulation and cultural continuity, while Structural Anthropology explains the alteration of the symbolic structures through which identity, authority, hierarchy and belonging were historically expressed. Their combined application demonstrates that the contemporary transformation of *Ozo* is neither simply cultural extinction nor straightforward modernisation. Rather, it is a process of institutional and symbolic reconfiguration in which the title has survived while some of the ritual mechanisms that historically gave it social authority, moral legitimacy and cultural meaning have been weakened.

1.10.1.7 Relevance to the Study

Structural anthropological theory focuses on binary oppositions as underlying structure in a culture. It emphasises that visible parts of culture like rituals are just the outer layer but the real situations are the structures underneath. The real causes of the removal of ritual in *Ozo* title taking are not the rituals but the factors that gave rise to the removal: impact of Christianity,

Impact of modernity and urbanisation, multicultural influence and intermarriage. These are the forces that caused the removal of ritual in *Ozo* title taking.

1.10.1.8 Ritual Theory

Ritual Theory, advanced from the works of scholars like Victor Turner and Catherine Bell, focuses on the role of rituals in shaping meaning, identity, and social relations. Rituals are understood as performances that symbolise transitions, reinforce communal bonds, and negotiate power dynamics. They are powerful tools of identity formation and cultural reproduction.

In Onicha-Ugbo, *Ozo* ritual ceremonies traditionally marked a man's transformation into a custodian of communal authority and morality. The removal of rituals therefore undermined this symbolic passage, reducing *Ozo* title taking to mere social or economic status symbols. This theory highlights how the absence of ritual weakens communal solidarity, disrupts generational continuity, and diminishes the sacred aura of authority, leaving governance and social order vulnerable.

1.10.1.9 Modernity/Modernisation Theory

Modernisation Theory explains social change in terms of society's transition from traditional to modern structures, influenced by urbanisation, education, industrialisation, and globalisation (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). It suggests that traditional practices often decline as modern values and institutions emerge.

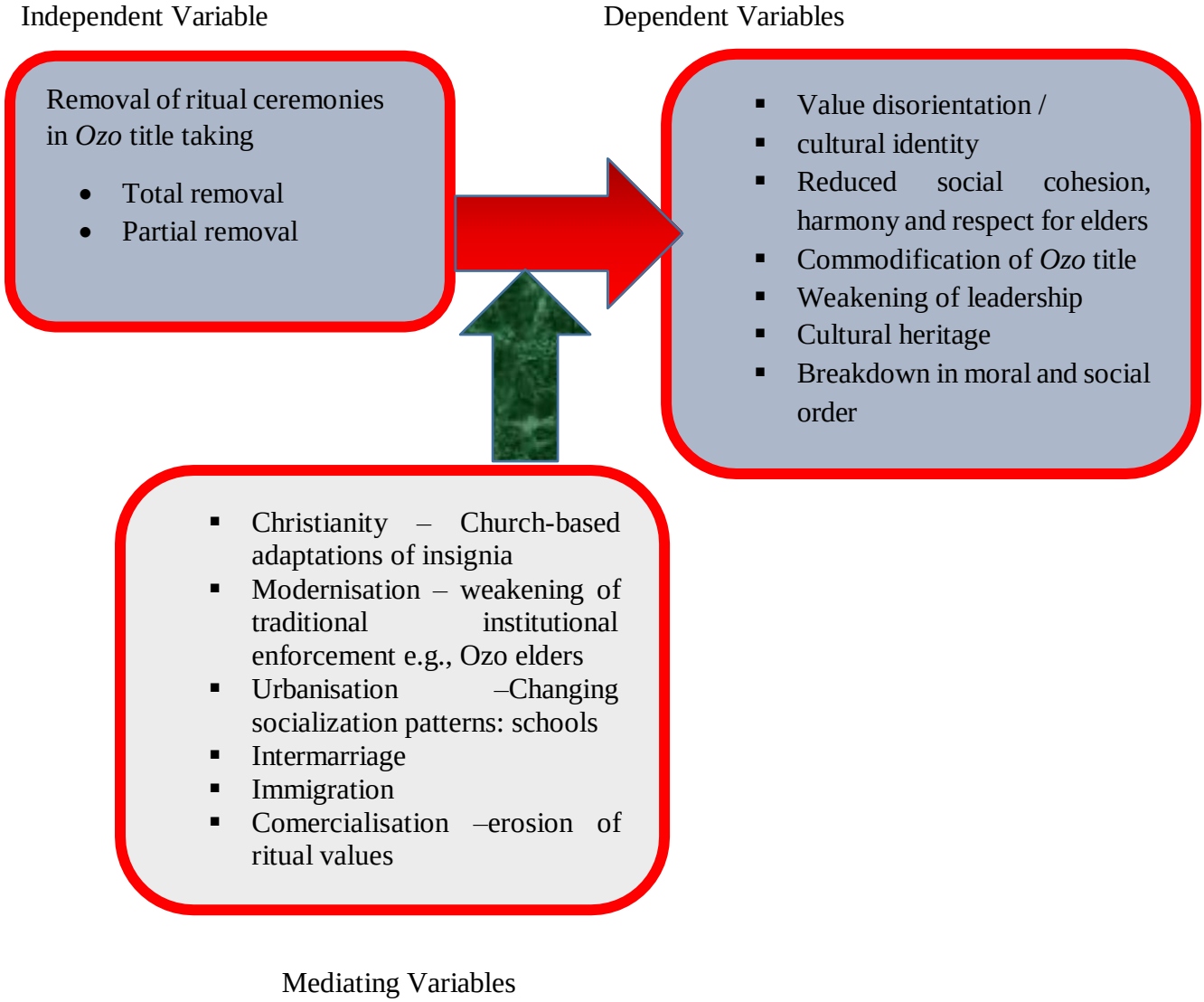
In Onicha-Ugbo, modernisation introduced new forms of education, religion, media, and economic practices that challenged the relevance of *Ozo* title taking rituals. The Church, for instance, has reinterpreted or replaced certain ritual symbols, while urban migration has reduced the younger generation's participation in traditional rites. From this perspective, the disappearance of rituals reflects broader modernisation processes. However, the theory also raises critical concerns: can modernisation fully replace the social functions of traditional practices, or does it leave behind gaps in social cohesion and cultural identity?

In sum, structural functionalism ensures societies works like a body. Institutions like family, religion, economy, each have a function that keeps the whole system stable in an orderly manner to maintain social cohesion. Although, it struggles to explain social change as it sees it as disruption. Structural anthropological theory on the other hand, underscores that culture is

organised by underlying structures and binary opposition. It focuses on meaning and symbolism and not just function. It also looks for universal patterns in how human thinks across cultures.

Ritual theory explains why rituals persist even in modern, secular societies because rituals capture the symbolic and identity-forming role of ritual. It enhances cultural continuity through practice. Although, rituals can be misinterpreted as it focuses on interpretation more than explaining changes. In modernisation theory, societies move from traditional to modern through economic growth, urbanisation and by adoption of foreign life-style. It ignores the role of culture and history. Modernisation theory often predicts rituals and tradition would fade as societies modernise.

1.11. Conceptual Framework



Source, Researcher, 2026

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored on the premise that the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title-taking is an important mechanism through which Onicha-Ugbo society historically transmitted values, identity, morality, leadership ideals, cultural heritage, and social responsibility. The study therefore examines the implications of reducing or removing these ritual elements and the ways in which such changes have affected the social and cultural functions of the *Ozo* institution.

The framework conceptualises the removal or modification of *Ozo* title taking rituals as the independent variable, while cultural identity, moral orientation, leadership, social cohesion,

social order, and cultural heritage constitute the major dependent dimensions. Christianity, modernisation, urbanisation, intermarriage, immigration, and commercialisation are recognised as contextual forces that have contributed to the transformation of *Ozo* title taking.

Importantly, the framework does not assume that cultural change necessarily results in cultural disappearance. Rather, it recognises that rituals are dynamic and may be adapted, reinterpreted, substituted, or transformed in response to changing religious, social, and economic circumstances. Thus, the study investigates whether the removal of traditional ritual elements has produced a loss of their former functions or whether some of those functions have been retained through new forms of cultural and religious expression.

The framework consequently establishes a relationship between ritual transformation and cultural continuity. Where ritual practices are removed without functional alternatives, the study anticipates possible weakening of moral formation, cultural identity, social cohesion, and institutional accountability. Conversely, where traditional meanings are consciously preserved through adapted or alternative practices, cultural continuity may be sustained despite changes in ritual form. The framework therefore provides a basis for examining both the disruptive and adaptive consequences of the transformation of *Ozo* rituals in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo society.

1.12 Operational Definition of Terms

Removal of Rituals- This is the removal, or replacement of traditional rituals in *Ozo* title taking, often replaced with payment of money or simplified ceremonies.

***Ozo* Title-** This is a traditional institution in Onicha-Ugbo that confers prestige, nobility, social status, and political responsibility.

***Ozo* title taking**- This refers to the process, traditionally marked by rituals, through which a man is admitted into Ozo title institution.

Ritual-A ritual is a repeated symbolic act that gives order and meaning to life. It marks key transitions such as birth, initiation, marriage, and death. It is the prescribed ceremonial, symbolic, religious, and ancestral practices associated with *Ozo* title-taking through which values, responsibilities, and membership are formally established. In Onicha-Ugbo, *Ozo* title rituals affirm cultural identity, morality, and community bonds. Their absence makes the ceremony incomplete.

Rite of Passage- A rite of passage is a ritual or ceremony that marks a person's transition from one social status to another, such as the ceremony of *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo.

Social Grades / Political Structures-These refer to the traditional male stratification system in Onicha-Ugbo.

Insignia- Insignia refers to the tools given to a new *Ozo* titled man in Onicha-Ugbo. These include: an elephant tusk, a carved wooden stick and the red cap.

Nze- Nze is a spiritual leader of all *Ozo* title holders: at the quarter, village or town level.

Itokwelegwe: Social group of Boys in their early teens

Ikolo: Untitled men, usually, from the executive arm of political and judicial authority within the community and potential fighting force.

Ndi Iche: Adult males, though elders but are without title, could form part of village council for political and judicial purposes.

Ikpala: Adult titled men (*Ozo*) who enforce discipline, law, order and respect in the community.

Identity: The sense of belonging, status, recognition, values, and responsibilities associated with membership of the *Ozo* institution in Onicha-Ugbo.

Morality: The ethical standards of conduct expected of *Ozo* titleholders, particularly integrity, discipline, honesty, respect for elders, fairness, and communal responsibility.

Leadership: The authority and responsibilities exercised by *Ozo* titleholders in community governance, decision-making, conflict resolution, preservation of tradition, and maintenance of social order.

Cultural: The beliefs, values, customs, traditions, practices, symbols, and knowledge of the Onicha-Ugbo people that are expressed and transmitted through the *Ozo* institution.

Social Cohesion: The unity, solidarity, cooperation, mutual respect, shared values, and sense of collective responsibility fostered within the Onicha-Ugbo community through the Ozo institution.

Cultural heritage: This refers to the inherited practices, knowledge, beliefs, symbols, institutions, values and ritual traditions regarded by the people of Onicha-Ugbo as significant components of their collective past and transmitted to subsequent generations. In this study, *Ozo* title taking rituals constitute part of the community's intangible cultural heritage. The concept is used to assess whether the removal, modification or abandonment of ritual practices has resulted in the loss, weakening, discontinuity or reconstruction of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices

Modernisation: This refers to the social, economic, technological, educational and institutional transformations associated with contemporary ways of life that alter traditional patterns of thought and social organisation. In this study, modernisation includes increased education, urban living, technological development, individualism, changing social values and exposure to alternative worldviews. It is examined as one of the forces contributing to the modification or removal of the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking and to the changing meaning and functions of the institution. Thus, modernisation is not assumed to be entirely negative; rather, the study investigates both its transformative benefits and its implications for traditional cultural continuity.

Christianity: This has to do with Christian religious worldview, teachings, institutions and practices that have influenced the beliefs and cultural practices of members of Onicha-Ugbo. In this study, Christianity is operationalised particularly in terms of its influence on *Ozo* title-taking, especially the rejection, modification or replacement of rituals perceived as incompatible with Christian doctrine. This includes the separation of the *Ozo* title from elements of indigenous religious practice and the introduction of Christian forms of prayer or blessing.

Commodification: This refers to the transformation of something that possesses social, cultural, religious or symbolic value into something that can be treated as a commodity and acquired primarily through exchange or purchasing power. In this study, commodification of the *Ozo* institution occurs when the title and the prestige attached to it are increasingly perceived as something that can be acquired through wealth rather than earned through the traditional processes of moral qualification, ritual ceremony and communal recognition. Thus, commodification concerns the change in the meaning and status of the Ozo title itself.

Monetisation: This refers to the increasing conversion of the processes and requirements associated with *Ozo* title-taking into monetary terms. Operationally, it concerns the extent to which money, financial contributions, fees, expenses and other economic considerations influence access to, participation in or performance of *Ozo* title-taking activities. In this study, monetisation is distinguished from commodification. Monetisation focuses on the increasing role of money in the process, whereas commodification focuses on the transformation of the *Ozo* title into something whose value and acquisition are increasingly treated as a marketable commodity.

In sum, the chapter provides a general overview of the study. It places the discussion on ritual globally, across Africa, within Nigeria and then narrowing it down to Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria, with particular reference to *Ozo* title taking. The chapter articulates the statement of the problem, research objectives and research questions. It presents the significance of the study and the purpose of the study. It further outlines the theoretical and conceptual framworks guiding the study and then clarifies the scope and deliminations. Having given the synopsis of this chapter, the researcher proceeds to the review of literature in chapter two.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The chapter deliberates on the assessment of the theories on that which enhances or mars community structures, social solidarity, bonding and cultural heritage of a people. Then it also examined thematically, the themes as they were generated in the objectives. The chapter begins by examining two theories as already mentioned in chapter one. Thereafter, it discusses some empirical literature related to the themes drawn from the objectives.

2.1.1 Review of Related Theories

As already noted, the theories that are employed for this chapter are Modernity or Modernisation Theory, developed in the mid- 1950s and Ritual Theory of mid-nineteenth century.

2.1.1.1 Modernity/Modernisation Theory

Modernization theory emerged prominently in the 1950s and 1960s to explain the transition of societies from traditional to modern forms of social organization. Its intellectual foundations are associated with Karl Marx, Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, while later scholars such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck extended the analysis of modernity (Kumar, 2023). Bhuyan (2022) describes modernization as a multidisciplinary process through which societies respond to technological, economic, social and cultural changes, while Mba and Ojukwu (2019) emphasize the movement towards characteristics associated with modern societies. Modernization therefore involves more than technological advancement; it also transforms social norms, values, institutions, authority structures and patterns of interaction.

The theory is relevant to this study because the transformation of *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo reflects broader changes associated with modernity. Traditionally, *Ozo* title taking involved a structured ritual process through which an initiate acquired not only a title but also moral obligations, social responsibilities and recognition within the community. With increasing modernization, however, significant ritual elements have been reduced or removed, and title-taking has increasingly assumed a shorter, more social and ceremonial character. This transformation illustrates the movement from traditional forms of authority and communal organization towards contemporary forms of social relations.

In Onicha-Ugbo, this transformation became increasingly evident from the late 1980s as the community moved from a predominantly traditional social order towards a more contemporary, industrialized and religiously pluralistic society. Education, urbanization, technological development, globalization and changing lifestyles have reconfigured traditional institutions and increased the significance of individual achievement. The removal of significant ritual elements from *Ozo* title taking can therefore be understood as part of this wider socio-cultural transformation rather than as an isolated change within the institution.

The relevance of the classical theorists of modernity, particularly Marx, Weber and Durkheim, lies in their concern with the processes and consequences of the transition from pre-modern to modern society. As Royce (2015) observes, classical theories of modernity examine the forces driving social transformation as well as the new problems generated by modern social life. From this perspective, the transformation of *Ozo* raises important questions about the capacity of Onicha-Ugbo society to maintain cultural heritage, moral values and communal responsibilities while adapting to contemporary realities.

Durkheim's concept of collective consciousness is particularly useful to this study. Collective consciousness refers to the shared beliefs, values and sentiments that bind members of a society together. In traditional societies, rituals serve as important mechanisms for affirming and transmitting these shared values across generations (Royce, 2015). Consequently, the decline of ritual practices in *Ozo* title taking may weaken an important institutional channel through which moral expectations, communal responsibilities and shared cultural meanings were historically communicated. The implication is therefore broader than the disappearance of particular ritual acts; it concerns the transformation of an institution that formerly contributed to cultural continuity, moral formation and social solidarity. Where alternative mechanisms for transmitting these values are inadequate, the weakening of ritual may contribute to diminished social cohesion (Pals, 2006).

2.1.1.2 Strengths of Modernization Theory

A major strength of modernization theory is its capacity to explain the positive dimensions of social transformation. Modernization has contributed to technological advancement, education, globalization, greater individual freedom, equality and more rational approaches to social organization. Globalization has also increased interaction among previously separated communities, creating opportunities for the exchange and adaptation of ideas, values and

practices. Onicha-Ugbo's emergence as a more multicultural community reflects these broader processes.

Modernization has also increased the efficiency and accessibility of some social institutions. In *Ozo* title-taking, for example, the contemporary process can be completed within a considerably shorter period than the traditional initiation. Modern education and new organizational structures have further encouraged administrative development and achievement-oriented attitudes. Thus, modernization should not be regarded solely as destructive to Onicha-Ugbo culture; it has created opportunities for education, technological development, wider interaction and institutional adaptation.

2.1.1.3 Weaknesses of Modernization Theory

Despite its explanatory value, modernization theory has limitations when applied uncritically to African traditional societies. Its classical formulation can imply a direct movement from tradition to modernity, thereby privileging Western models of development and portraying traditional institutions as backward or destined to disappear. Such an approach risks overlooking the continuing cultural and social functions of institutions such as *Ozo*. In Onicha-Ugbo, the reduction of ritual should therefore not automatically be interpreted as progress; it may also involve the loss or weakening of mechanisms for cultural transmission, moral formation and social cohesion.

Another limitation is the theory's tendency to emphasize individualism and universalistic values at the expense of communal orientations. Traditional forms of informal education transmitted cultural heritage, moral expectations and collective responsibilities across generations. The challenge for contemporary Onicha-Ugbo is therefore not simply to preserve traditional practices unchanged, but to develop ways of adapting and transmitting their underlying values within changing social conditions. Where social transformation occurs faster than mechanisms for cultural adaptation, a gap may emerge between modernization and cultural continuity.

Overall, modernization theory provides a useful framework for explaining the transformation of *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo. It demonstrates how technological development, education, globalization, urbanization, rationalization and changing social values have contributed to the movement from a predominantly ritualized traditional institution towards a more socially oriented form of Ozo title-taking. However, modernization should not be equated

automatically with cultural progress or cultural loss. Rather, the Onicha-Ugbo experience demonstrates that modernization can produce both development and cultural dislocation, adaptation and continuity, transformation and loss. The analytical significance of the theory to this study therefore lies in explaining the tension between the benefits of contemporary social change and the weakening of ritual mechanisms through which cultural identity, moral values, communal responsibility and social cohesion were historically sustained.

2.1.1.4 Relevance of Modernisation theory to the study

In modernization theory, traditional society moves to becoming a modern one. It sees rituals tied to religion and ancestors, regulating daily life. As people get educated, urbanise and industrialise, rituals lose centrality, become cultural performance not functional necessity, public rituals shrinks to private life. This is what has happened to the rituals ceremonies of Ozo title taking in Onicha-Ugbo.

2.1.2 Ritual Theory

Ritual Theory developed from the works of scholars such as William Robertson Smith, James George Frazer, Bronislaw Malinowski, Clifford Geertz and Émile Durkheim, who established important foundations for understanding the relationship between ritual, religion and society (Kishan, 2023). The theory generally regards ritual as a fundamental mechanism through which religious beliefs, morality, cultural values, social relationships and collective identity are produced and reproduced. Ritual is therefore more than a sequence of religious actions; it is a form of social interaction through which individuals participate in shared symbols, meanings and emotions. It possesses both conserving and transformative capacities, preserving established values while enabling communities to negotiate changing social circumstances (Summers-Effler, 2006).

Ritual Theory is particularly relevant to this study because the central concern is the implications of removing the ritual dimensions from *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo. Traditionally, *Ozo* title taking was not merely the conferment of a prestigious title but a structured process through which the candidate experienced religious, moral and social transformation and became integrated into a recognized community of titled men. The ritual process communicated the obligations, responsibilities and behavioural expectations associated with *Ozo* status. Its decline therefore represents more than a change in ceremonial procedure; it potentially weakens important mechanisms through which cultural heritage,

moral values, communal responsibility, identity and social solidarity are transmitted across generations.

A central contribution of Ritual Theory is its explanation of social integration and collective consciousness. Ritual brings members of a community together through shared symbols and experiences, strengthening social bonds and reinforcing interdependence (Baele & Balzacq, 2021). From a Durkheimian perspective, ritual renews collective consciousness by reminding individuals of their membership in a larger social body and of the obligations attached to that membership. In *Ozo* title taking, participation in the prescribed ritual process publicly marked the candidates transition into a recognized status and affirmed his responsibilities to the community. It consequently contributed to communal identity, social integration and the reproduction of the institution's social structure.

Ritual also performs an important moral and regulatory function. Hobson et al. (2018) demonstrate that rituals can regulate emotions, goals and social relationships, particularly during significant transitions when individuals assume new roles and responsibilities. Applied to *Ozo* title taking, ritual ceremony prepared the candidate psychologically and socially for membership of the institution while communicating the standards expected of a titled person. The public character of the process also created a form of social accountability: the candidate’s new identity was accompanied by expectations of appropriate conduct, responsibility and dignity. Ritual thus linked status to moral obligation rather than allowing title to exist merely as a social insignia.

The regulatory significance of ritual also extends to the maintenance and restoration of social order. Bell's (1997) concept of ritualization emphasizes ritual as a culturally strategic form of action through which people organize, negotiate and transform their social circumstances. In the traditional *Ozo* institution, ritual mechanisms could therefore provide culturally recognized means of responding to violations and restoring moral and social equilibrium. The decline of such mechanisms may consequently weaken traditional forms of accountability and regulation within the institution.

Bell's perspective is also important because it prevents ritual from being treated as a fixed or unchanging survival from the past. Ritualization can provide a means through which communities negotiate social change. This suggests that the relevant question for contemporary Onicha-Ugbo is not whether *Ozo* ritual should be preserved in exactly its historical form, but whether its essential moral, cultural and social functions can be retained and meaningfully

adapted to contemporary circumstances. Such adaptation could enable the institution to remain relevant while maintaining continuity between generations.

Rappaport's emphasis on the performative nature of ritual further strengthens the analysis. Ritual derives part of its authority from actual participation and performance; consequently, symbolic representation without personal participation may not generate the same experiential or transformative effects. This perspective is particularly relevant to proxy ceremony. Where an individual obtains *Ozo* status without personally undergoing the prescribed ritual process, the experiential dimension through which the status was traditionally constituted and legitimized is absent. Proxy ritual ceremony can therefore be understood, from this theoretical perspective, as an incomplete form of ritual ceremony.

Ritual is equally significant for cultural and religious identity. Santiago (2023) argues that religious rituals provide frameworks through which beliefs, shared values, belonging and cultural heritage are expressed and maintained. In this sense, the ritual dimensions of *Ozo* constituted an important marker of Onicha-Ugbo's cultural identity. Their decline therefore raises concerns extending beyond religious practice to the preservation of the community's distinctive cultural heritage.

2.1.2.1 Strengths of Ritual Theory

The major strength of Ritual Theory is its ability to explain the social significance of ritual beyond its outward ceremonial form. It demonstrates how ritual communicates sacred values, creates belonging, regulates behaviour, strengthens collective consciousness and reproduces social order. Ritual also facilitates cultural transmission by connecting generations and enabling younger members to acquire the values, meanings and responsibilities embedded in communal practices. The theory is particularly useful to this study because it explains how *Ozo* ritual ceremony connected status with morality, identity with responsibility, and individual membership with communal obligation. It therefore provides an analytical basis for examining what may be weakened when ritual is removed from the title-taking process.

2.1.2.2 Weaknesses of Ritual Theory

Despite its explanatory value, Ritual Theory has limitations. Some rituals may become ineffective or difficult to sustain when the social conditions, beliefs and institutions that originally supported them change. Modern science, education and rationalized forms of social organization may challenge some supernatural assumptions associated with traditional rituals.

This helps explain the pressure placed on certain dimensions of *Ozo* title ritual in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo.

Ritual symbolism can also be ambiguous because symbols may acquire different meanings in different contexts and may be manipulated, exaggerated or misunderstood. Consequently, cultural preservation should not necessarily involve reproducing every historical ritual practice unchanged. Rather, it requires identifying and retaining those elements that continue to perform meaningful moral, cultural, religious and social functions, while allowing appropriate adaptation to contemporary circumstances.

2.1.2.3 Theoretical Integration and Link to the Study

Ritual Theory and Modernization Theory complement each other in explaining the transformation of *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo. Modernization Theory explains the forces driving the transformation, including urbanization, education, globalization, changing social values and the movement towards more individualistic and contemporary forms of social organization. Ritual Theory explains what the traditional ritual process accomplished: the transmission of cultural values, moral formation, social integration, identity, accountability and communal responsibility and therefore provides a basis for understanding the implications of its removal.

Taken together, the theories suggest that the contemporary transformation of *Ozo* should not be understood simply as the disappearance of tradition. Rather, it represents a shift from a predominantly ritual-based institution towards a more socially, economically and individually oriented form of title-taking. The critical issue is therefore whether modernization can accommodate cultural adaptation without severing the moral and social functions that historically gave *Ozo* its legitimacy. The empirical findings of this study provide the basis for determining how this transformation has actually affected Onicha-Ugbo society. This perspective advances the study beyond a simple opposition between tradition and modernity by recognizing that cultural continuity may depend not on preserving every ritual unchanged, but on consciously adapting meaningful ritual functions to contemporary social realities.

2.1.2.4 Relevance of Ritual Theory to the Study

Ritual Theory provides a direct conceptual framework for understanding *Ozo* ritual ceremony as a rite of social and cultural transformation. Ritual marks transitions, establishes new identities and prepares individuals for new social roles. In the case of *Ozo*, the candidate

traditionally moved through a structured process of becoming a recognized member of the institution. The ritual therefore did not merely mark the acquisition of a title; it helped define what it meant to attain *Ozo* status within the community. The reported recognition of persons admitted without the traditional ritual process as having undergone an incomplete or invalid ceremony demonstrates the continuing importance attached to ritual performance.

The theory is consequently central to explaining the implications of the removal of ritual practices from *Ozo* title-taking. It helps demonstrate that the removal of ritual may weaken more than religious ceremony. It can affect cultural identity, intergenerational transmission, moral formation, social regulation, communal solidarity and the legitimacy of the institution itself. The decline of ritual may also create a gap between the acquisition of the *Ozo* title and the moral preparation traditionally associated with becoming an *Ozo* man.

In sum, the combination of the two theories therefore provides a more comprehensive framework for this study. Modernization Theory prevents the analysis from treating cultural change as an isolated phenomenon, while Ritual Theory prevents modernization from being interpreted simply as progress without considering its social and cultural costs. Together, they lighten the central tension confronting Onicha-Ugbo: how can a community accommodate legitimate processes of modernization while retaining the ritual, moral and cultural mechanisms necessary for sustaining its identity, social cohesion and heritage? This theoretical complementarity is particularly important to the present study because the issue is not merely whether *Ozo* rituals have disappeared, but what their disappearance means for the future of the *Ozo* institution and the cultural continuity of Onicha-Ugbo.

2.2 Review of Empirical Studies

Having reviewed the related theories in this session, the researcher focused on the review of empirical literatures. The reviews are organized according to the themes that were generated from the objectives of the study. Empirical review of the value of rituals is hereby discussed.

2.2.1 Values of the Ritual Dimension in Ozo Title Taking in Onicha-Ugbo

Rituals are universal practices of human culture and so are everyday practice in human life. Ritual cuts across disciplines: anthropology, psychology, sociology and religious studies. For instance, when one is faced by the problem of transition, risk and uncertainty in the human lifespan during *Ozo* title title ceemony for instance, ritual provides the psychological and cultural solutions to it (Lagare and Nielsen, 2020).

In politics, ritual effect is realized in ensuring social cohesion and has integrative function (Bellah, 2003). For example, some rituals involve the representation or glorification of 'heroes' like during incorporation stage in the rites of passage. Hence, rituals do not simply serve a social, bonding function, but also have an 'ethical' function through which the preferred norms and values of the group are preserved and reasserted (Post et al, 2003). Furthermore, Baele and Balzacq (2021) demonstrate that ritual activities occur every day in both domestic and international politics, citing EU summits of heads of States, UN General Assemblies, and conferences, Nobel Peace Prize ceremonies, and other similar interactions as examples of events that contain a ritualistic character in them.

Cultural beliefs and practices find expression through rituals, which existed prior to the influence of the modern world. Rituals are considered the most traditional form of performance, with all aspects of life celebrated and ritualised (Ehimuan 2021). In the African context, rituals connect us to our ancestors and therefore give meaning to our existence. Obeten (2024) states that in African Religion, rituals and ceremonies abound. During passage rites, ritual ceremonies are evident at various stages. Ritual is "a means to negotiate a responsible relationship in the human community, with the ancestors, spirits, divinities, and cosmos" Grillo (2012). "African rituals are spontaneous strategies that seek practical ends: they establish identity, elicit revelation, access divinity to foster empowerment and effect transformation" (Obeten (2024).

All stages of life in Africa are ritually celebrated. Likewise, every stage of *Ozo* title taking was ritually celebrated. They were representations of indigenous knowledge's systems and values, as well as ways of being (Ohaja and Anyim, 2021). Mbiti (1987) shows that Africans celebrate life and therefore they also celebrate their religion in that, they dance it, they sing it and they act it. A lot of the concrete demonstration of African Religion happens in rituals and festivals. This exemplifies what people believe, what they value and what they wish to apply in daily life.

Through rituals people not only act their religion but communicate it to the younger generation. In all these, symbolic ritual action is essential to ensure that all members of the group understand the newly acquired position and will behave accordingly (Kayode, 1984. For instance, among the Ashantis of Ghana, West Africa, is the "Accession Ritual". The king is appointed by the Queen Mother in consultation with the traditional high court officials. In the appointment of a king the use of a *'golden stool ritual'* which has great bearing on the soul of the nation is employed. The golden stool represents symbolically the collective soul of the

Ashanti nation. In the rite of installation, the Chief is taken to the *Stool Room* where he is placed on the stool of his ancestor for a minute and lifted up thrice. This ritual means that the king rules by virtue of his relationship with his ancestors. This accords him with a special sacredness and will henceforth be surrounded by a number of taboos (Kayode, 1984).

Among the Mende's and the Kono's of Sierra Leone, ritual ceremony in initiation is very paramount. They continue to practice Female Genital Circumcision (FGC) despite the World Health Organisation condemnation of it. The women themselves criticized the tendencies of Western observers who view FGC as a reflection of women's oppression by patriarchal societies. On the contrary, the women see the FGC as a way to preserve female sources of power and authority as well as promote characteristics such as strength, tenacity, endurance and fearlessness in young women (Hipple, 2024). The initiates go through the ritual process with pride and commitment.

For the Maasai of East Africa, circumcision represents the beginning of adulthood for both boys and girls. Boys must endure the operation without flinching or crying out, while girls are allowed to show pain but cannot marry or bear legitimate children within Maasai society if they refuse to undergo the procedure. In their book *African Ceremonies,* Carol Beckwith and Angela Fisher (2002), note that the Maasai "believe that the male or female youngster who undergoes the agony of such an ordeal with courage will be able to endure the challenges of life and uphold the proud reputation of the Maasai people" (Hipple, 2024.

In South Eastern Nigeria, Iwa Akwa initiation ceremony is a ceremony into adulthood which takes three years to prepare. The initiates are guided through the customs, and are supervised from the beginning of their initiation through the main market-square display (Okeke, 2022). In Iwa Akwa, the participant's mother must have been married properly to the community and be admitted by women of the community, and the father must have properly passed through the initiation stage in his days. Rituals that mark changes from passive to active membership in the community with the accompanying privileges and obligations are performed. Okeke (2022) wrote that during these rites and rituals, candidates are taught the implications of community life, which includes; living together, obedience to elders, public spiritedness, endurance, and entrusting the secrets of the esoteric traditions and love of the group.

Several sacrifices are done during: at the take-off point of the initiates, and at the market square. These function to connect the village, people, and initiate to the deities for religious unification in the interaction of beings, for a peaceful celebration and for the general good of the land. The

rituals associated with Iwa Akwa project the visible (e.g., the initiates and communities) to the invisible reality (e.g., deities and ancestors). This is a way of inviting the spiritual entities for communion through the desired intention of the followers. This ritual symbolizes communion with unseen powers of the spiritual reality of the people's belief in the desired intention and the objective (Okeke, 2022). Thus, religious ritual moves the gods, ancestors, or spirits as well as the living as an integrating force. This is an equivalent of the series of purification rituals in *Ozo* title taking that are repeated. Other values of ritual in *Ozo* title taking ceremony include the following:

2.2.1.1 Integration with the Community

Religious ritual reestablishes a unified social order, primarily by reaffirming the sentiments on which this social order is based. Turner, (1995) opines that rituals, have the power to integrate and reconstruct a national community around extraordinary events. Rituals, he posits, are essentially important in times of crisis or shock, because they hold the potential to reinstate a possibly fragmented society. This integrative function is mainly achieved through the embeddedness of symbolic elements into the consistent ritual process expressed (Baele1 and Balzacq, 2021). A man becomes a full *Ozo* titled man after performing the necessary rituals and at the end of the seclusion stag he comes out a new person and the older members welcome and jubilate with him.

Additionally, Baele1 and Balzacq, (2021) maintain that rituals enhance the 'reintegration of the group whose morality is shaken and sees to the re-establishment of morale'. Ritual action has the power to keep *Ozo* titled man integrated into the institution especially after he defaults. Gelfand et al., (2020) also posit that one of the well-studied social regulatory functions of rituals lies in their ability to generate the experience of the fusion of the individual with group identity. This sense of fusion with the group can be created through two mechanisms. The first is the perception of behavioural development, which triggers feelings of similarity, trust and self-other overlap behavioural progress, as a cross-culturally universal element of collective rituals.

This happens in the form of prescribed movements, gestures, singing, chanting, dancing during rituaal ceremony, and has been found to have profound effects on later social interactions (Gelfand et al., 2020). The second mechanism is the experience of emotional synchrony. This is the collective experience of intense emotions, which generates a self that is merged with the group and is capable of motivating pro-group behaviours, including self-sacrifice (Whitehouse,

2018). Consequently, ritual sacrificial process like those of *Ozo* title ceremonies, functions to reestablish social equilibrium after it has been upset (Bell, 1997).

Therefore, social functions of ritual contribute to the formation and maintenance of the social order. Ritual is the means for expressing collective representations in form of religious beliefs. It also has the social role in securing and maintaining the unity of the group (Blumenkratz, 2016). Blumenkratz (2016) and Somé (1998) equally stressed the place of ritual in upholding and safeguarding community ideals and communal spirit. Somé does not seem to envisage that a community can survive without meaningful ritual.

However, Blumenkrantz (2016) recognizes the need to rethink ritual in response to changing community circumstances, but the literature does not sufficiently demonstrate how such rethinking can be applied to a specific traditional institution such as Ozo title taking, particularly where traditional ritual practices have been weakened or bypassed. *Ozo* titled men are the visible embodiment of the community force for implementing its social order. Their authority affects the community as a whole. In the same vein, their supportive presence in community is very valuable. But it is only through a valid ritual process incorporated with ritual, that this can be achieved.

Through the *Ozo* title taking rituals the man comes to full realization of his purpose and the responsibility he owes to the building of his community (Okwechime, 2012). Just as he is the responsibility of his village, to help him become a man, so the good and the progress of the community are his secondary duty after his own family. In it he says “yes” to the common good of the community. This is because the ceremony is not only an outward social symbolization of the movement from one stage of social to the next but also a mystical transformation intended to remold the moral, mental and spiritual orientation of the Ozo candidate towards his world and his role in it (Imasogie, 1982).

Blumenkrantz, (2016) opines that rite of transition and in this case, *Ozo* title taking, promotes the psychological sense of community and contributes to the future of society. Through a meaningful ritual ceremony, a man becomes a member of *Ozo* institution because the ritual ceremonies not only guide the cerebration stages but create public events that celebrate the transition and reaffirm these community values, which inform and guide expectations for behaviors essential for the group’s survival. Involvement in cultural and religious practices like *Ozo* title ceremonies, provides opportunities for individuals to strengthen their sense of community and strengthen their social identity (Gomez 2021). This process becomes the basis

for a person to recognize himself in relation to the community, build a sense of pride in the culture he holds, and solidify the values that he considers important in his life. Traditions like *Ozo* title taking rituals help individuals and groups to understand changes in life, give meaning, and reaffirm their identity (Fujitani 2023).

The presence of rituals in these crucial moments shows how profound the role of rituals is in shaping and strengthening identity. Rituals are also a cultural mirror that reflects the values and norms embraced by a society (Elsner 2021). Blumenkrantz (2010) argues in favour of ritual as an important part of the community and cultural health promotion during ritual process. That is why rituals are community-created and community-directed. But where there is a flaw in the process of becoming adults and no meaningful community-based ritual ceremony takes place as it is the case of *Ozo* title taking ceremonies, the question will be, what will be the marker events?

Against this background, McMillan and Chavis (1986) underscore four distinct components in their explanation of a psychological sense of community: membership, influence, integration, and fulfillment of needs and shared emotional experience or connection. Ceremonies and rituals, they stress, are intended to bring balance and harmony to each person, the community, and all of life. Turner (1991) calls this *communitas.* Yes, *Ozo* title taking rituals bring wholeness and fulfillment to the candidate because in the ritual, he feels belong. These are intended for people to come together and focus on the spirit world - to reenter that world, and reconnect with essential knowledge. At the end of the initiation, the man feels complete, ready to plunge into the society.

Equally, Blumenkrantz (2016) remarks that in almost all cases, an individual undergoes ritual ceremony for the purpose of ensuring that the values, skills, and behavior expected of its members, which maintain the group's vibrancy and existence are understood and passed on to the new members. He therefore emphasized that to have a workable rite of passage and ritual for the youth, (*Ozo* title taking rituals), rethinking the connection between youth and community development is necessary (Blumenkrantz, 2009). The purpose is both to help transform the individual to function and be accepted within the group and to ensure the survival of the group. These are essential for the ongoing adaptability and survival of the community as well as the health and wellbeing of its members (Hans, 2023).

Additionally, Nelson-Becker & Sangster (2019) affirm that rituals help quell anxiety, remotivate purpose, forge a collective identity and a sense of belonging. But whereby there is

a disconnect with ritual ceremony one wonders what the people are left with? They are likely to feel abandoned, empty, purposeless, and alone. Nelson-Becker & Sangster, (2019) attest that when people engage in ritual, it provides an integrating function by providing a sense of legitimacy to the candidate. To this, Bone (2016) suggests that the act of ritual is an essential part of human condition and that gathering together for ceremonial rituals connects one to one's history. This is so because ritual ceremony of *Ozo* title taking ideally, unites members and the ancestors. But in the absence of ritual what structure sustains the community? (Baele, and Balzacq, 2021) argue that rituals do not simply serve a social, bonding function, but also have an 'ethical' function through which the preferred norms and values of the group are preserved and reasserted.

Ritual serves to rejuvenate the most essential elements of the collective consciousness. Rituals provide a powerful way in which people's social dependence can be expressed' (Baele, and Balzacq, 2021). Thus, ritual follow social integration, fulfilling an all-embracing social function through which they give a group individuality and identity especially in times of crisis or shock, because they hold the potential to restore a possibly fragmented society as seen in *Ozo* title institution.

This integrative function is mainly achieved through the embeddedness of symbolic elements in the ritual process (Baele, and Balzacq, 2021). However, the gap in the above reviews is that the integrative power of ritual can equally elicit different reactions from those excluded such as resisting, being indifferent, crafting a counter-ritual by, for instance, and cultivating alternative symbols. Conflictual impulses of rituals may arise when the ritually included members are against the non-ritual members. This can happen when there is the likelihood that *Ozo* title taking without ritual could mean incomplete initiation.

The literature reviewed demonstrates a strong convergence among scholars on the proposition that ritual is a major mechanism for integrating individuals into the social order and sustaining communal solidarity. Turner (1995), Bell (1997), Blumenkrantz (2016), Baele and Balzacq (2021), Gelfand et al. (2020), Whitehouse (2018), McMillan and Chavis (1986), Nelson-Becker and Sangster (2019), and Gomez (2021), although working from different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, all assign ritual an important integrative function.

Their arguments differ principally in how this integration occurs. Turner (1995) emphasizes the capacity of ritual to reconstruct social unity, particularly during periods of crisis; Bell (1997) stresses the capacity of ritual action to restore social equilibrium; Gelfand et al. (2020)

explain integration in terms of behavioural synchrony, trust, similarity and emotional fusion; while McMillan and Chavis (1986) conceptualize community integration through membership, influence, fulfilment of needs and emotional connection. Baele and Balzacq (2021), in addition, extend the discussion by emphasizing the ethical dimension of ritual, arguing that ritual does not merely bind people together but also reasserts the norms and values that regulate collective life.

Existing scholarship has established the integrative functions of ritual and the importance of ritual ceremonies in creating belonging, identity, legitimacy and communal responsibility, but it has paid insufficient attention to how the removal or alteration of ritual in contemporary Ozo title taking affects the integration of the candidate into the wider community and the integration of the community itself. The present study agrees with this established scholarship, but its findings provide empirical specificity that is largely absent from the general literature.

The gap is that there is insufficient scholarship on how the erosion or bypassing of Ozo title taking rituals affects both the integration of Ozo title holders and the wider community, particularly the tension between inclusion, exclusion, legitimacy and belonging that arises when some members undergo ritual ceremony while others do not. This study addresses the gap by showing how ritual practices can be adapted or reconstructed to facilitate community integration while preserving the essential cultural and ethical values of the Ozo institution.

The present study extends the existing scholarship by demonstrating that the integrative function of ritual depends significantly on the validity and completeness of the ritual process. Much of the literature assumes that when ritual is performed, it produces integration, solidarity and belonging. The Onicha-Ugbo findings reveal the reverse problem: when the ritual dimension is removed or bypassed, the institutional process of integration becomes weakened.

2.2.1.2 Ritual Actions Promote Community Building

Blumekrantz, (2016), in responding to the purpose of ritual ceremony and the role of ritual, said, that it is illustrated in the relationship between those who go out on the vision quest and those who remain behind. People who remain in the village and those who seek a vision are all connected through common symbols and ritual practices in support of a common purpose if they all engage in ritual action. He maintains that there is transcendence and a sense of mattering that is not only present in the physical plane of the individual but also in the spiritual dimension where all things are related.

In ritual is a whole-village approach to health and unifying their lives in common pursuit of strength, healing, and love. Ritual also serves as the "principal ingredient of the community's operating dynamics" (Somé, 1998). It has been observed that ritual can strengthen individuals managing difficult situations by extending the bonds of community. Likewise, individuals can also help fortify the bonds of community when they grow weak (Nelson-Becker & Sangster, 2019) because it is said that "we are persons through other people" (*Onicha-Ugbo proverb*).

Legare and Nielsen (2020) then opine that there are different means of communicating rituals; within communities (horizontal transmission) and across generations (vertical transmission). Rituals, they uphold, are cumulative. Different cultures continuously elaborate on handed down rituals and building on what was originally designed by their predecessors (Legare and Nielsen, 2020). Here, Blumekrantz (2016) makes a compelling case for rites of passage (*Ozo* title taking) as a way to promote a psychological sense of community and contribute to the future of society. Ritual action in *Ozo* title taking is the strategy that could help build community because in it are values that when inculcated and applied, would keep the community bonded.

Situating it in the context of a modern age, he posits that it is directed toward remembering the roots of a sense of community and replanting them in a new paradigm for youth and community development through rites of passage (*Ozo* title taking). This, he says, is sensitive to the complex and interrelated challenges of modern western society. Consequently, he thinks a new paradigm must emerge that sees all things as related in a global community, which includes all of nature. Although he was not specific, Blumenkrantz (2016) thinks one broad possibility for the regeneration and a sense of community is to explore in depth, the human tradition of ritual in general and those of initiation like *Ozo* title taking.

Ritual is one thing that is done to keep the people and community together. To this, Somé (1998) avers that in ritual ceremony and participation is the spirit that safeguards the community and *Ozo* titled members. Consequently, to do wrong is to insult the spirit realm. He adds that the elder cannot be an elder if there is no community to make him one and for this to happen, he upholds, ritual must be the prime element of its effective dynamics. He insists that ritual in *Ozo* title taking, must be invoked as an opportunity for the weak to become strong and the strong to get stronger (Somé, 1998).

Kišjuhas (2023) maintains that it is necessary for members of any society (*Ozo* institution), to renew their social bonds and solidarities occasionally, and the key mechanism for this renewal is the social ritual. That is, the human emotions, and the "collective effervescence" that rituals

produce. In this way, the "feeling" of belonging to a society (as something "sacred" or "larger than themselves") was being embedded in individuals, even when they are physically dispersed, alone, or in the "profane" mode of existence Kišjuhas (2023.p. 2).

Rappaport surmises that the survival of a ritually organised community and *Ozo* institution, depends on its ability to protect its identity, while at the same time adapting to different material and cultural conditions (Cassell 2014). Thus, a community maintains its identity in relation to a changing societal and social reality through self-reflection, (Pesonen, 2022). This means that to ensure a stable social structure in Onicha-Ugbo in the face of the changing realities, ritual actions of *Ozo* title taking needs to be employed. This is because ritual form communicates something that cannot be communicated in any other way. The form communicates certainty, meaning, specificity and public acceptability regardless of the individual's beliefs (Cassell 2014).

Consequently, the real power of rituals lies in the affective experiences they evoke in participants and that people carry in their everyday lives (Darlington 2012). When ritual action is valued among *Ozo* members, people will no doubt experience its powers but the gap here is that in a context of *Ozo* title taking, where ritual action has been removed, the people have lost the power of ritual and the reality it evokes in people.

The literature demonstrates a substantial consensus that ritual action is fundamental to community building because it creates shared experiences, reinforces collective identity, transmits cultural values and renews social relationships. The central finding emerging from the comparison is that ritual action historically constituted an important infrastructure of community building in *Ozo* title taking. Existing scholarship establishes that ritual promotes solidarity, identity, belonging, value transmission and social continuity. The present study confirms these functions but demonstrates that, in Onicha-Ugbo, they were not abstract outcomes of ritual; they were embedded in a concrete institutional process through which an individual moved from being a prospective title-holder to becoming a socially recognized member of the *Ozo* institution.

The most important contribution of the present study is therefore its analysis of the consequences of ritual absence. Whereas much of the reviewed scholarship asks what ritual does for communities, this study asks what happens when an established ritual system is substantially weakened. The findings indicate that the removal of ritual can weaken communal participation, interrupt intergenerational transmission, diminish embodied cultural learning,

complicate membership legitimacy and reduce opportunities for the collective reaffirmation of shared values. This shifts the scholarly conversation from the functional presence of ritual to the functional consequences of ritual discontinuity.

The findings also demonstrate that the continued existence of the *Ozo* title does not necessarily mean that the traditional institution continues to perform all its former community-building functions. This distinction is important: institutional survival is not synonymous with functional continuity. The *Ozo* institution may survive as a social title while some of the ritual mechanisms through which it historically generated solidarity, legitimacy, identity and responsibility become weakened. This constitutes a significant analytical insight into the transformation of Onicha-Ugbo traditional institutions under conditions of Christianity, modernity and social change.

Accordingly, the study advances scholarship in African Traditional Religion and Religious Studies by demonstrating that ritual should be understood not merely as a religious ceremony but as a social technology of community reproduction. Through ritual, the community recognizes members, transmits values, creates belonging, renews solidarity, establishes legitimacy and connects generations. The *Ozo* case therefore illustrates that the removal of ritual from a traditional institution can have consequences that extend beyond religion into the domains of social organisation, cultural identity, moral formation and community cohesion.

While scholars have extensively demonstrated the role of ritual action in strengthening community bonds, preserving collective identity, transmitting cultural values and renewing social solidarity, existing literature does not sufficiently address how the loss of ritual affects the community-building functions of the *Ozo* institution in Onicha-Ugbo or what forms of ritual renewal or adaptation could restore these functions within the context of contemporary social realities. The present study seeks to address this gap by indicating that adaptation should preserve the core social and cultural functions of ritual rather than merely retain the institutional title after removing its ritual foundation.

2.2.1.3 Ritual Promotes Moral and Social Order in the Community

Somé 1998) remarks that human rituals rejuvenate the moral values of the community. Human societies engage in rituals (Brown,1991) as a way of ordering the world and making meaning out of chaos (Bell 1997). These include performance and sacred symbolism, convey forms of authority or rules, and represent tradition and ancestors (Bell, 1997). Stephenson (2015)

maintains that ritual plays a fundamental role in establishing sacred and social order, with its corresponding group membership, social roles, status systems, and hierarchies. It has been noted that ritual is an intrinsically conservative institution that joins people into a collective and encourages them to look to the past for models and guidance. Ritual action in *Ozo* title taking was an event that guided people's life and kept them morally checked because nobody who underwent the ritual process during the ceremony compromised his position. It would be too risky to do so because the path of an *Ozo* titled man was guided by ritual actions.

Again, certain ritual genres contribute to cultural and religious processes of negotiation, but the negotiating power of ritual and performance become especially important at certain socio-historical moments, referred to as "social dramas" (Kings, 2019). A social drama happens when there is a breach of normative modes of social life that, if not addressed, can bring about crisis capable of splitting the social fabric into two or more contending groups. Therefore, to respond to such a situation as this, redressive action through ritual and other genres of cultural performance become useful instruments (Kings, 2019). This is suggestive that *Ozo* title rituals are not just necessary but also important?

Rituals are often linked with maintaining social order, power relations, and common inequalities. This means that ritual provides comfort, inner peace and moral consolation (Kišjuhas, 2023) and by participating in emotionally charged rituals, *Ozo* members actually contribute to the strengthening and continuous renewal of society itself. This goes to further to suggest that ritual keeps the society together. Hence, Summers-Effer warns that any transgression against these sacred elements is a moral transgression that engenders righteous anger. He says that by coming together for ritual activity, *Ozo* members reaffirm their boundaries, feelings of solidarity associated with the group, and the power of the sacred symbols that help to organize the group's activity outside of formal ritual activity (Summers-Effer, 2007). He however does not entertain the idea of what could happen in a society or *Ozo* institution, without ritual ceremony and what could generate group emotion in place of ritual. This study examines how the ritual dimensions of *Ozo* title-taking rituals mediate the interaction between tradition and modernity, and how these transformations influence the preservation, adaptation, or erosion of core values in Onicha-Ugbo society.

Collins (2004), though different from Durkheim's approach to the relationship between ritual and emotion, both uniformly emphasise the importance of collective emotions or "collective effervescence" for the emergence and reproduction of social solidarity, cohesion, and

ultimately, social order well beyond the actual interaction situation. Collins describes this as 'emotional energy,' which can take the form of collective emotions in face-to-face encounters. Durkheim's analysis of emotions in ritual answers the sociological question: 'what holds the society together?" It is "emotional energy" that is produced by ritualised social interactions (Collins, 2004).

In *Ozo* title taking, collective emotions through ritual is felt by members because it gives them identity and challenges them to live up to their positions in the society. Non-Ozo title holders do not enjoy this privilege and even those addmitted without ritual, are seen as members with incomplete ritual ceremony. In the past, this class of men would not have any moral or social right to illicit collective emotion because they lack the power to do so. Therefore, both Durkheim and Collins speak of the ideal situation where ritual actions are employed, probably they do not envision a society with different value oriented as it is in Onicha-Ugbo presently because collective conscience or emotion can only be practical among people of common background. The situation in Onicha-Ugbo is a picture of traditional and modern society where cultural values and orientation are at variance and this affects the social order.

Furthermore, with the removal of ritual in *Ozo* title taking, a moral vacuum has been created. Cosmides & Tooby (2013), and Hawkes (2014) also affirm that rituals facilitate coordinated and cooperative group action, function in social group behavior and allow for coordinated caretaking of offspring. But where ritual is removed, in what other concrete way can collective emotion or group-based emotions take place? What happens to social group action and behavior of people in Onich-Ugbo for instance, where ritual action in *Ozo* title taking has been removed?

These are questions that the above authors have not given attention to. This is particularly necessary in the situation where many now wear the '*red cap'* (insignia meant for *Ozo* titled men in Onicha-Ugbo) and present themselves as though they are titled men. Ideally, rituals provide signals that individuals share similar beliefs and values and therefore are more likely to be trustworthy reciprocators. They are an indication of one's "behavioral type," facilitating affiliative and cooperative interactions (McElreath, Boyd, & Richerson, 2003). But when the ritual action is removed, the obligation that binds them as members of the same social group cannot also not hold.

Blumenkrantz (2016) asserts that the hallmark of ritual ceremony is the transmission of values that inform and guide expectations for behavior. This behavior has to be in service to the health

and wellbeing of the individual and the community as well as the natural world. Stephenson (2015), understands that ritual, whether secular or sacred, binds groups together, ensuring their harmonious functioning by generating and maintaining order of meaning, purpose, and value. Ritual, he adds, confirms and reinforces social order, plays a fundamental role in establishing that very sacred/social order, with its corresponding group membership. Ritual, it is said, is all about tradition which is an inherently conservative institution that joins people into a collective group and encourages them to look to the past for models and guidance (Stephenson, 2015). For him without ritual there can be no society. *Ozo* title rituals transmit traditional values that help to order the society and therefore, should be upheld.

Durkheim's approach centers on psychological descriptions of effervescence as the key experience at the heart of ritual. He sees religion as a matter of social images and behaviors that mold the dispositions of the individual. Hence, his sociological approach to ritual function remains relevant. Jing (2024), therefore, affirms that religious rituals play a vital role in transmitting moral values and social norms from one generation to another and serve as a key mechanism for socializing individuals like the *Ozo* title taking, into a shared set of moral values and norms within a religious community. It emphasises the communal aspect of religious rituals and their impact on shaping collective morality of *Ozo* titled members.

Cassel, (2014) on his part argues that ritual is not merely one among many meaningful human activities, he maintains that the binding of people around a shared sense of the sacred is best and perhaps only achieved through ritual. His idea is that through a mutually shared and relatively invariant performance, ritual begets a sense of permanence, consistency, reliability, certainty, sanctity, even truth, particularly, among *Ozo* titled members. He opines that a general posture toward and experience of the world cannot be obtained through other means. Although this idea has been criticised that he has problem dealing with the empirical fact of ritual change and that his emphasis on social unity and experiences of sanctity seems to overlook another empirical fact, namely, that much ritual is filled with explicit or tacit conflict and used for purposes of power and control.

That, notwithstanding, *Ozo* titled men without the corresponding rituals are not really recognised as members as such. It is the ritual exercise that ideally, makes one an *Ozo*. Therefore, it is likely that *Ozo* title taking without ritual is half way ceremony or no ceremony at all. Members know this fact and it comes out in their relationships. Hence, ritual offers both a framework and a type of analysis, demonstrating the blending of different aspects of living.

It provides order on chaos, integrates belief and action, subjectivity with objectivity, and what is viewed as real with imagination (Bell, 2009). *Ozo* title taking rituals are therefore, an effective means to integrate a social instinctive tendencies and adjust to prescribed social roles (Bell, 1997).

Against this backdrop, Hans (2023) argues that when groups of people carry a social sense of ritual; older adults socialized by religion may find these formal rituals satisfying, whereas those with no religious belief may seek meaning from alternative rituals that likewise confer peace and contentment. His explanations of ritual attempt to explain this behaviour in relation to the needs and maintenance of a society. The strengths of this approach are dependent upon a claim that it is both logical and empirical even though this is opened to serious criticism. Of course it can also be argued that if the aim is to explain why rituals are present in a society, it will be necessary to clarify such terms as need, maintenance, and a society functioning adequately, and this becomes crucial if they are to be taken as experimental terms. It is, therefore, asserted that a society functions adequately when necessary needs like ritual is present in that society (Hans, 2023).

Ozo institution will thrive adequately, when the necessary process is adhered to. But the unanswered question still remains: How will a society like Onicha-Ugbo function adequately without ritual and rituals are the means for changing and reconstituting groups in an orderly and sanctioned manner that maintains the integrity of the system? Obeten (2024) maintains that the idea of rituals is to promote loyalty, moral obligation, obedience, and ethical code, which are central to humanness. He stresses that: "ritual observance creates a sense of commitment, loyalty, discipline, decorum, responsibility, values of honesty and integrity, transparency, obedience, and civility that helps to restore confidence and hope in the society. It also helps in the elimination of bad values; like corruption, criminality, greed, and double standards which are the very vices *Ozo* rituals aim at preventing. Without rituals cultural values would be difficult to preserved for future generations.

The literature reviewed demonstrates a strong convergence among scholars that ritual is an important mechanism for establishing, maintaining and reproducing moral and social order. The findings of the present study substantially confirm these propositions in the context of *Ozo* title taking. Ritual historically helped define the expectations associated with membership, reinforced the dignity of title-holders and provided a symbolic and experiential framework for moral conduct. The main area of disagreement concerns the assumption that the existence of

ritual can be treated as a stable condition. Some of the literature gives insufficient attention to what happens when ritual itself becomes contested, selectively practiced or removed.

The principal extension of existing scholarship is therefore the introduction of ritual discontinuity as an analytical problem. Existing scholarship largely asks how ritual creates order. The present study additionally asks how social order is affected when ritual is removed from an institution that previously depended upon it for moral formation and social recognition. This makes the Onicha-Ugbo case particularly significant because the *Ozo* institution has not simply disappeared; it continues to exist under altered religious, cultural and social conditions.

The gap is the insufficient scholarly understanding of how the weakening or removal of Ozo title taking rituals affects moral regulation, legitimate membership, collective identity, trust, cooperation and social order in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo, and what mechanisms can sustain these functions when the traditional ritual process is no longer consistently observed. This study therefore addresses the gap by examining how changes in *Ozo* title taking rituals influence moral and social order in Onicha-Ugbo and by considering how the ritual institution may be adapted to contemporary realities without losing its essential moral and social functions.

2.2.1.4 Ritual Preserves Cultural Heritage and Values

Frazer opines that ritual is the original source of most of the expressive forms of cultural life (Bell, 1997). Ritual, he suggests, is an opportunity to reflect on the disjuncture between what is and what ought to be. Although he did not provide an alternative to ritual activities when it is lost and how cultural heritage can be preserved, Smith, (1982) maintained that it is a "focusing lens" through which people can attempt to see, or argue for, what is significant in real life. Ritual, in *Ozo* title taking provides a window through which the younger Onicha-Ugbo people would grasp elements of their culture and tradition.

Chleo (2024) affirms that rituals play a pivotal role in shaping and preserving cultural identity, serving as a bridge between the past and the present. They capture the values, beliefs, and traditions of a community, allowing individuals to connect with their heritage in meaningful ways. Through the repetition of specific actions, symbols, and narratives of *Ozo* title taking, rituals create a sense of continuity that reinforces cultural memory. This continuity Chleo stresses, is essential, as it fosters a shared identity among members of a community, enabling them to navigate the complexities of modern life while remaining anchored in their historical

roots. When people participate in rituals, he continues, they engage in a communal act that reinforces their belonging to a larger group.

This shared experience not only strengthens interpersonal bonds but also instills a sense of pride in one's cultural heritage. By participating in rituals, Chleo suggests that, younger generations learn about their ancestors' struggles, triumphs, and beliefs, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of their cultural identity. This transmission of knowledge is vital for the survival of cultural practices, especially in an increasingly globalised world where homogenisation threatens the uniqueness of local traditions (Chleo, 2024). Chleo's point is very apt here because retaining ritual in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo remains paramount to keeping the community unique and original in the face of modern thought and life style.

Blumenkrantz (2016) affirms that the primary purpose of the ritual in the rites of passage (*Ozo* title) is to ensure the survival of the community and this depends on the righteous and healthy way a community celeberates and employs the ritual process. It must be socially, culturally relevant, community- oriented ceremony that increases the likelihood that they will in turn be of service to others and ensure the survival of their culture and community. It is not one or the other. It is reciprocity. Accordingly, Akabike and Anizoba (2021) uphold that *Ozo* title taking is indeed an occasion to showcase rich cultural heritage of Igbo (Onicha-Ugbo) traditional religion involving extensive religious ceremonies whereby the aspirants undergo some ritual purifications/ceremonies that at the end would make them the voice of the gods, ancestors and the people.

Hence, it is also both a religious and social association into which men are addmitted in various stages with religious ceremonies. However, where the custodians of culture and tradition are themselves ignorant of their tradition because of the compromised system what becomes the fate of the community values? This is because most modern Onicha-Ugbo elite class do not have much knowledge of the traditions of their origin and the value of rituals, otherwise rituals would not be removed. One wonders what legacy they will leave for the younger generation?

(Meade 1993.p. 314) said that: "One purpose of ritual ceremony is to awaken an inner authority in each person and to connect that force to the common ground of the community." "Little wonder then that poorly crafted rituals or nothing at all constructed in the service of one's ego are an insult to the divine". Somé, (1998) criticise that they will not only fall short of their intended purpose, but will more likely have unwanted and unpredictable consequences. These could bring about elders who are so ignorant of who they are in the society and or their identity.

This is because *Ozo* title taking process is one of the most significant "educational experiences" the individual undergoes (Somé, 1998). Consequently, one cannot have a deep sense of community without individuals engaging in ritual and there cannot be meaningful and productive rituals without a sense of community (Blumenkrantz, 2016). In Blumenkrantz's description, "in the absence of rituals we are naked in the cold world without a roof over our head" (p.116). The reason being that rituals are anchored in myth, from which they emerge and convey essential values, attitudes, and beliefs that inform and guide behaviors that serve rituals.

Similarly, Nelson-Becker & Sangster, (2019: p. 155) observed that "ritual is layered with historical cultural understandings that are seen as public texts read systematically for meaning". To them, in ritual, meaning is transmitted to others including different generations. They argue that ritual may be traditional, as it is with *Ozo* title taking, an act committed over time as in Onicha-Ugbo and across cultures and that finally, ritual carries intention. The one who performs it has an awareness of why he or she is participating and ritual is a link that mediates tradition.

Again, Aniago (2015) in his work, although, focused on the dignity, hierarchy and the responsibility of *Ozo* title holder, and the extension of the conferment of *Ozo* title to Christians and to follow the laid down adaptation, posits that *Ozo* title through the rituals, confers on the holder, honour and responsibility in order to preserve tradition of the people. He did not dwell much on the values of ritual or the implications of its absence. But his points are valid. The literature reviewed reveals a broad consensus that ritual is an important mechanism for preserving cultural heritage, transmitting values and maintaining continuity between generations. Although these scholars approach ritual from different perspectives, there is considerable agreement on its cultural-preservative function. Their arguments collectively establish that ritual is not simply a repetition of inherited actions. Rather, it is a cultural medium through which a community remembers, interprets, embodies and transmits what it considers valuable.

This finding is consistent with Nelson-Becker and Sangster's (2019) argument that ritual functions as a kind of public cultural text through which historical meanings are communicated to different generations. The major area of disagreement concerns the relationship between ritual preservation and ritual adaptation. Some approaches emphasise the conservative function of ritual, while others recognize that ritual must respond to changing circumstances. The findings support adaptation but reject the assumption that adaptation is culturally neutral. When

ritual is removed without preserving its essential functions, cultural continuity can be weakened even if the institution itself remains.

The major contribution of the present study, however, is that it moves beyond the proposition that ritual preserves culture to examine the consequences of ritual removal for cultural preservation. The findings suggest that when ritual is removed from *Ozo* title taking, what is endangered is not only the ceremony itself but also the cultural knowledge, moral expectations, symbolic meanings and intergenerational relationships embedded within that ceremony. This makes ritual erosion a problem of cultural transmission rather than merely a problem of religious practice. The present study therefore does not advocate an uncritical return to every traditional practice. Rather, it argues that adaptation should distinguish between ritual forms that can legitimately change and ritual functions that remain necessary for cultural continuity.

The gap is the insufficient scholarly understanding of how the erosion or removal of *Ozo* ritual ceremonies affects the preservation and intergenerational transmission of Onicha-Ugbo cultural heritage, values, identity and traditional knowledge, particularly when the custodians of the tradition themselves have limited knowledge or practice of the rituals. The study addresses the gap by suggesting the need for appropriate ritual renewal in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo.

2.2.1.5 Ritual Actions Ensure Responsible Elders of Integrity

Ritual ceremony underlines the realisation that with the social organization an individual is required to show special loyalty to certain personal or group relations as a way of strengthening the whole community (Magesa, 1998). Some` (1998) remarks that the young boy cannot feel secure if there is no elder whose silent presence gives him hope in life. The adult cannot be who he is unless there is a strong sense of presence of the other people around. He calls this "supportive presence" (p. 47).

This strengthens community because formation he says, has to happen in a nurturing way if it is to work and prove itself to the rest of the world. In other words, it has to prove itself to be different, attractive and nurturing without the ambition of competing with the current dysfunctional communities supported by an army of policemen. Therefore, it is important to be at home with rituals and with the community since through it, formation of leaders (*Ozo* titled men) with integrity happens (Somé, 1998).

Furthermore, admission into the *Ozo* institution requires one to be a person of integrity, responsibility, disciplined and to have high regard for one's elders because he too aspires to be one. It behooves one to be a person of sound judgment. This is necessary because no man holds office in the body politic unless he is of the rank of *Ozo* (Okwechime, 2012). This is important because an aspiring *Ozo* candidate or the already *Ozo* members must not be found wanting, disobedient to the chiefs, or violates the laws of the land especially the ones regarded as abomination. He must not commit adultory and if he does, he is liable to be expelled from active membership of the society. He will be denied of his entitlement to service from his subordinate folk (Okwechime, 2012).

The thought of losing his hard earned position after the ritual ordeal will make the person strive to leave up to his expectation. Such is the power of ritual. *Ozo* title is revered highly that holders are seen as elders who have "*their tongues washed*" (Ikediugwu, 2015). This implies that they are bound always to stand for the truth and nothing but the truth. They must always tell the truth. It is an abomination for an *Ozo* titled man to tell lies. It is therefore important that an *Ozo* candidate must be a man of credible character. He must be transparently honest because holders of *Ozo* title are the custodians of the traditions and leaders of the community (Ikediugwu, 2015).

In line with the above, Kemper & Goffman (2011) articulates some of the values in participating in ritual exercise following Durkheim's collective effervescence:

1) It elevates those eligible to participate above those who do not qualify for this privilege.

2) It demonstrates to those who make judgments about these matters, one's worthiness for elevation into higher levels of spiritual privilege.

3) It brings all participants for a time under a common status rubric, elevating those who in ordinary life, have lower status. By the same token, someone with higher status is brought down by the de-differentiation that takes place. But these are fewer in number and they are not without compensation: by allowing themselves to participate, they bind the others to them in loyalty.

4) It pleases the transcendental entity that demands that the rite be performed, hence improves the likelihood that the entity will reciprocate with benefits (status) to the obedient ones. These factors alone would be sufficient reasons to engage in ritual, even to assume engagement. But there are also relational reasons of power that spur the manifest appearance of ritual

involvement (p. 75). Unfortunately, it is not clear whether this ideal still holds especially as underage and unscreened persons are admitted into *Ozo* institution without ritual actions and this has serious consequences. The study demonstrates that this has serious implications for traditional societal values and highlights that, it calls for guiding behavior, balancing adaptation and deemphasise on commodification of title.

Furthermore, Han (2020) emphasises the role of rituals in embedding traditions and values within a society. He underscores that through repeated enactments, rituals pass down collective wisdom, moral codes, and cultural values from generation to generation, ensuring their continuity and relevance. This interplay between past, present, and future, he continues, fosters a collective memory and identity. It anchors communities in their heritage while enabling a shared vision for the future (Han, 2020). Thus, by articulating a shared reality, rituals help individuals to find their place within the societal group, thereby balancing personal and collective interests (Stephenson, 2015).

Engaging in rituals of *Ozo* title taking makes for responsible elders because the process drills them to be men of integrity, honesty, moral and justice oriented. The gap, here, lies in the limited scholarly attention on how the omission, weakening, or commodification of prescribed *Ozo* ritual actions affects the formation of responsible elders of integrity, particularly where underage or unscreened persons are admitted without undergoing the traditional processes of moral and character formation.

The literature reviewed establishes a strong relationship between ritual process, ritual formation, moral integrity, leadership and the development of individual potential. Magesa (1998) and Somé (1998) emphasise that ritual ceremony is fundamentally relational: the individual is formed within a network of relationships and obligations that connect him to elders, family and the wider community. Somé's notion of “supportive presence” is particularly relevant because it presents community formation as a reciprocal process in which younger members depend on elders for guidance while, in turn, becoming future custodians of the community. The present study confirms this existing scholarship by demonstrating that the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking historically functioned as a mechanism of character formation.

The present study therefore extends the theoretical argument from ritual as status transition to ritual as leadership formation. Existing ritual scholarship also explains how rites of passage move individuals from one social status to another. The findings from Onicha-Ugbo

demonstrate more specifically that the transition into *Ozo* status historically had implications for the quality of leadership available to the community. However, the findings also introduce an important qualification: the legitimacy of elevated status depends upon the integrity of the process through which the status is conferred. This finding advances scholarship in African Traditional Religion, Religious Studies and African indigenous leadership studies by moving beyond the general proposition that ritual forms identity or transmits values. It demonstrates specifically that, within the Onicha-Ugbo *Ozo* institution, ritual historically served as a mechanism of leadership formation and moral authentication.

The research gap, is that, although existing scholarship establishes that *Ozo* rituals ceremonies are intended to form individuals who embody integrity, honesty, discipline, responsibility, respect for elders, and commitment to communal values, insufficient attention has been given to the consequences of bypassing or weakening these ritual processes in contemporary *Ozo* practice. The present study addresses this gap by examining how ritual actions contribute to the formation of responsible *Ozo* elders of integrity. It particularly considers the extent to which ritual ceremonies guide behaviour, reinforce truthfulness and moral accountability, regulate eligibility for leadership, and transmit traditional values across generations.

2.2.1.6 Ritual Actions Promote Development of Potential

Usually, through most initiation ceremonies one undergoes serious ordeal – ordeal of time, of protocol, of demanding rituals and ceremonies and these are aimed at helping the initiates to become aware of who they are and what gifts they can offer to their community. These equip him for future adversity and to live up to his title. Through the rituals of *Ozo* title taking, a man moves from self to a community and to a responsible person. His potentials are developed and strengthened (Okwechime, 2012). *Ozo* title is the highest honour a man confers on a man in Onicha-Ugbo society. This is because *Ozo* title gives the holder a position of authority, respect and honour in his village or community.

The achievement of an *Ozo* title confers high status, leadership, and responsibility in the community (Aniago, 2015). Madukasi, (2021), affirms that ritual authority and political legitimacy are interconnected, even as traditional institutions encounter contemporary change. It is a thing of joy to be able to undergo the ritual ceremonies as the man emerges dignified after the ceremony. Though Durkheim concentrates on ritual's effects on subjective states, he does point out that participants' behavior is affected as well (Marshall, 2002). This impact on

behavior is important on how ritual produces belonging and belief. For instance, the ritual situation allows the participant to do things he otherwise could not do.

The situation gives him the stamina, strength, and skill to accomplish things ordinarily outside his capacity. The confidence produced by the ritual situation inspires the participant to do amazing things that look even more dangerous than they actually are and once they safely and successfully perform them, these actions serve as mighty proof of the powers at work (Marshall, 2002). Thus, ritual practices like performing unusual acts are an outcome of proof of confidence, and a means of creating confidence (Marshall, 2002). It forms the structure and the hierarchy and helps define one's place in the society (Hans, 2016).

In ritual process, especially in the rites of *Ozo* title taking, there is usually, a sense of before and after, that life has been touched by the experience and given deeper meaning. The more intense the experience, the greater the bond created among members which is why sharing traumatic initiation rites is believed to strengthen community ties and the individual as well (Bone, 2016). Ritual actions in *Ozo* title taking equip the man to become brave and consequently, saddled with the responsibility of defending and protecting his family and community.

Ritual then functions to "strengthen the bonds attaching the individual to the society of which he is a member"; it is the medium through which shared social life is experienced, expressed, and legitimated. (Bell, 1997. p. 25). According to Blumenkrants (2010. p. 44). The hallmark of a community-based rite of passage (*Ozo title taking rituals*) strategy through ritual ceremony is the creation of intentional, inclusive community dialogues to address what are the values and expectations that youth (*men*) must carry forward to insure the future success of the community.

There must be deliberate structures that allow these community discussions to occur so that some consensus about essential expectations for behavior and values emerge. This process must precede the creation of experiences that foster youths' (*men's*) understanding, appreciation and commitment to these expectations. Unfortunately, these ideals seem to be fast fading away with the removal of ritual in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo.

The reviewed literature revealed a concensus that Ritual can produce confidence, stamina and a sense of capability, enabling participants to perform actions that they might otherwise regard as beyond their capacity. The ritual experience therefore has consequences beyond the ceremony itself because the participant carries the psychological effects of the experience into

ordinary social life. The present study confirms this argument in the context of *Ozo* title taking. The ritual process historically represented a transition from ordinary social membership to a higher level of communal responsibility. The argument is further supported by Aniago (2015), who links *Ozo* title holding with honour, authority and responsibility, and by Madukasi (2021), who connects ritual authority with political legitimacy in the context of changing traditional institutions. These scholars demonstrate that ritual authority and social or political authority are interconnected. The present study confirms this relationship but goes further by showing that the ritual process itself constituted part of the legitimating pathway through which authority was developed and recognised.

The major area of theoretical tension concerns whether the continued existence of the *Ozo* institution necessarily guarantees the continuation of the moral formation associated with it. The present study shows that it does not. An institution can survive formally while the mechanisms that historically produced responsible membership become weakened. This finding challenges any assumption that institutional continuity automatically guarantees functional continuity. Existing scholarship establishes that ritual ceremony can produce responsible members and leaders. The present study demonstrates that removing or weakening the ritual process can potentially disrupt the relationship between title, character and authority.

The gap lies in the limited empirical understanding of how specific *Ozo* ritual actions develop and strengthen the potentials of men for leadership, resilience, courage, and communal responsibility, particularly in the face of the contemporary weakening or removal of these formative rituals in Onicha-Ugbo. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining how ritual actions in *Ozo* title-taking promote the development of individual potential and prepare men for leadership, responsibility, and service to the community.

2.3 Reasons for the Removal of the Rituals Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

Rituals, historically foster unity and communal identity, but contemporary society has witnessed a decline in commitment to shared symbols and rituals, leading to increased isolation and egotism. Byung-Chul Han (2020) observed that under neoliberal capitalism, people are driven to self-produce, isolating them while promoting superficial connections. The emphasis on performance fosters a self-centered engagement with the self, leading to burnout and depression, contrasting with the communal bonds and grounding provided by rituals. He further posits that the decline of ritualistic practices in contemporary society weakens communal ties and fosters a disconnection among individuals. This perspective invites study, as it suggests

that the impact of modern life and economic structures diminishes the richness of human relationships and the sense of belonging.

This is why rites of passage, incorporating ritual ceremonies, and symbolic transitions, were once the vessels in which young men underwent transformative experiences. These rites played a central role in imparting a sense of purpose, identity, and responsibility, fostering the growth of well-rounded individuals within their communities. However, with modernity and other factors, traditional rites of passage have gradually eroded, giving way to a more disjointed and individualistic society (Dandia, 2023).

For instance, the historical background of Kenyan rites of passage is deeply intertwined with cultural resistance against colonial and missionary erasure. Throughout the early-to-mid 20th century, Eurocentric administrative lenses frequently viewed African transition rituals as primitive or morally retrogressive. In defense of African cultural integrity, Kenyatta (1938) argued that the aggressive targeted suppression of these rites by colonial actors threatened to dismantle the entire indigenous social fabric. Because individual morality and civic obligations were tethered directly to initiation cohorts, the erosion of these rites inevitably disrupted traditional governance. Contextualizing this friction in the background of the study is essential for understanding how contemporary Kenyan communities navigate the tensions between cultural preservation, Christianisation, and modernisation. Politically, the lack of shared rituals can contribute to social fragmentation, making it harder to foster a sense of national or communal unity.

Weakening influence of traditional institutions partly contributed to the eroding of ritual actions. As societies move towards secularism and globalisation, the importance of communal rituals diminishes. The breakdown of extended families and local communities further aggravates the erosion of these rites, leaving individuals floating in a sea of disconnection. Moreover, the invading of technological advancements has also created virtual spaces that often replace physical gatherings, which further hinders the transmission of cultural wisdom and values (Dandia, 2023).

Nelson-becker and Sangster (2019) posit that traditional venues for ritual that used to be found in religion are changing. Han (2020) describes this societal shift as “Modernity and Erosion of Rituals”. Nelson-Becker and Sangster (2019) blame this on the fact that ritual experienced through religion is becoming less accessible as numbers of adherents fall. They fear that ritual is in danger of losing ground and its capacity for healing is under recognised. Research also

shows that, the percentage of those professing to be atheist or agnostic is growing with about 19.6% of the population in the UK and about 13.5% in the United States (Association of Religious Data Archives, (ARDA, 2018). This has serious impact on ritual usage.

Apart from the religious stance, the erosion of rituals also has economic and political ramifications. Han (2024), highlights that economically, rituals can be seen as a form of social capital that is eroded over time. In a world where everything is commodified, even time-honored traditions and rituals can be monetised, leading to a loss of their inherent value. In times of crisis, societies without strong communal rituals may find it harder to mobilise collective action and solidarity (Han, 2024). The situation in Oncha-Ugbo is not far from this scenario because *Ozo* title taking has been monitised and commodified. Hence, Han upholds that the disappearance of rituals has far-reaching consequences that goes beyond the personal to affect the social fabric and broader societal systems. Again, psychologically, it increases anxiety and isolation; socially, it causes weakening of community bonds and social cohesion; the erosion of social capital and the potential for societal fragmentation (Han, 2024).

Han further describes this erosion of ritual as a communication without a community which can be fast-tracked because it is additive. He laments that symbolic perception, as recognition, should be a perception of the permanent and that data and information technology do not possess symbolic force and so do not allow for recognition and therefore, the world is "symbol-poor". "Those images and metaphors which found meaning and community, and stabilise life, are lost in symbolic emptiness. The experience of duration diminishes, and contingency dramatically proliferates" (Han, 2024.p. 2). Han reasons that "rituals are *symbolic techniques of making oneself at home in the world*. They transform being-in-the world into a *being-at-home*. They turn the world into a reliable place. They are to time what a home is to space: they render time *habitable*. They even make it *accessible*, like a house. They structure time, furnish it" (Han, 2020.p. 2).

Unfortunately, rituals of *Ozo* title taking are today, seen as routine and so are rejected as such. In the world of today, between individualism and group affinity is a big gap. Han further underlines that in a society that increasingly focuses on the individual, collective rituals like *Ozo* title taking rituals, which require participation and a sense of belonging, often lose their significance and appeal. In like manner, where consumerism, has reshaped human interactions and social frameworks and as such, promotes instant gratification and material wealth and so, often, intangible values that rituals offer, such as community, continuity, and meaning become

overshadowed. The commodification of life experiences means that rituals, traditionally performed as acts of community bonding, are now repackaged as products to be consumed (Han, 2020).

The above sentences capture the situation in Onicha-Ugbo presently. *Ozo* title has become a commodity that only the highest bidder could buy. The financially broke persons, though, ideally should merit it, cannot afford it but the financially buoyant sometimes, with moral and questionable character acquire it. They acquire it without ritual but through monitisation and they forget that in a society governed by ritual, there is no depression because in such a society, the soul is fully absorbed by ritual forms and it is emptied out. Han (2020) reasons that rituals contain aspects of the world, and they in turn produce in us a strong relationship to the world. Depression, by contrast, he says, is based on an excessive relation to self. But rituals, in contrast, "disburden the ego of the self, de-psychologising and de-internalising the ego" (p. 27.). Han advances further that rituals give form to the essential transitions of life. He describes them as forms of closure and that without them, "*we slip through"*. 'Thus, we age without growing *old*, or we remain infantile consumers who never become adults' (p. 28.)

Han (2020), articulates that passing a certain threshold means concluding a phase of life and entering into a new one. He sees thresholds as transitions that give a rhythm to, articulate, and even narrate space and time. Threshold rituals at *Ozo* title taking make possible a deep experience of order. But today, they are being erased and replaced by a fast-tracked and seamless communication and production and temporally intense transitions are disintegrating into speedy passages. This is dangerously making people poorer in space and time and in their attempt to *produce* more space and time, they lose them.

But where ritual actions are employed as they should, *Ozo* title taking rituals give structure to life in the same way seasons do. In over four hundred ethnic groups in Nigeria, ritual ceremonies are upheld for different events especially in passage rites. Likewise, in the Delta areas of Delta State, ritual initiations abound. Equally in other Anioma Clans around Onicha-Ugbo, *Ozo* title taking was done ritually at different stages, requiring some sacrifices, and purifications because these are necessary for society structures. Although, in some communities, ritual ceremonies have also been compromised, bringing about a change in the social structure as it is in Onicha-Ugbo. Perhaps the following reasons could account for this shift.

2.3.1 Impact of Modern Civilisation

Before the late 1980's Onicha-Ugbo could well be described as a traditional society. Traditional religion was the bedrock of the people's communal life. As such, ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title taking were celebrated publicly with the corresponding rituals. But the modern pluralistic community orientation with divergent religions and social worldview have devalued Onicha-Ugbo communal life (Adibe, 2009). Modern life, Ritzer (2000) asserts, is a double-edge sword, providing positive and negative development and both the agents of modernity and recipients of modernity, are caught in turmoil of risks. Thus, he suggests, that post modernity period needs re-moralisation. Akabike and Anizoba (2021) put it neatly that the forces of social change have destabilised traditional beliefs and practices. The traditional religious outlook which gives solidity and meaning to Onicha-Ugbo community existence is now missing. Removing the ritual dimension and ceremonies from *Ozo* title taking has contributed to the disregard of the fundamental aspect of Onicha-Ugbo tradition.

Christopher Okigbo, a Negritude poet laments that indeed, a break with traditions is one of the fundamental constants of the modernist stance where people believed the previous generations' way of doing things was to say the least, "a cultural dead end." By this, the world events were escalating into unknown territory. He went further to state that modernist era reflected the uprooted experience of life in which tradition, community, collective identity and faith were eroding (Oden, 2019). Hence Chinua Achebe (1995, p. 161) aptly sums it up that "the white man is very clever… He has put a knife on the things that hold us together and we have fallen apart".

Incidentally, the elders of Onicha-Ugbo have also compromised their position and integrity in exchange for money against *Ozo* title taking rituals. In like manner, Durkheim surmises that the modern world suffers from a condition of deep turbulence, with an alarming moral destitution, bringing about a wave of sadness, state of mental confusion, discouragement and moral mediocrity (Royce, 2015). His assessment of the malaise of modern era (removal of Ozo title rituals), sets him on the motion to call for the restoration of the old times and a "complete remolding of the social order."

Royce (2015) explains that as the pre-modern era gives way to the modern civilisation, the moral rules governing people's conduct undergo a corresponding change. Onicha-Ugbo is gradually beginning to experience a corresponding change in the moral rules governing its people's conduct. In traditional society, the moral duty of the person is to "resemble everyone

else," to conform to the "collective type" because they live communally. But in modern society, the moral duty of the person is to specialise, to equip oneself "*to fulfill usefully a specific function*" (Royce, 2015.p. 139). This has also affected the *Ozo* title taking rituals. Durkheim however argues that the rules of conduct that people follow to some extent, serve social needs and foster social cohesion in both cases. He insists that the emancipation of the individual does not imply a weakening but a transformation of the social bonds. He supports that the individual does not tear himself away from society but is joined to it in a new manner (Durkheim, 1984).

Although Durkheim reasons that the state of crisis is not due to any intrinsic characteristics of modernity, nor is it an inevitable outgrowth of the system of private ownership. It is, instead, he maintains, an aberrant product of a tumultuous passage from the pre-modern period to the modern period. Equally, Onicha-Ugbo community is progressing and transiting from a local community to a modern one and this comes with such challenges like removing the ritual process of *Ozo* title taking. Transition is an ongoing source of instability. It is at once profound, rapid, uneven, incomplete, and contradictory. Durkheim further explains this thus:

> *Profound* insofar as it altered the fundamental structure of people's lives, giving rise to an entirely new social type, a "mainly industrial" society. *Rapid* insofar as the passage from the old world to the new world occurred at an extraordinary velocity, too quickly to be anything other than disruptive. *Uneven* insofar as the speed of economic change outpaced the development of corresponding cultural adaptations, leaving the new economic system without an appropriate moral framework. *Incomplete* insofar as archaic sentiments and practices from the past, including the institution of inheritance, continue to linger on into the present, hindering modern society's maturation. *Contradictory* insofar as the new industrial economy in its currently unregulated state excites egoistic motives and extravagant aspirations, freeing desires and appetites from all authoritative restraints (Durkheim, 1992.p. 11).

In the above situation one could say that the modern Onicha-Ugbo is in a state of crisis because the new life that all of a sudden has arisen has not been able to organise itself thoroughly (Durkheim, 1995). Nevertheless, one could only hope the disorder of the modern era is a transitional problem and that the old world of *Ozo* title taking ritual is not yet altogether dead, and the new world is fully yet unborn. Otherwise, Onicha-Ugbo society could become antiquated and this could result in a state of upheaval as constituting a crisis of integration and solidarity; a *moral* crisis. Here, Okigbo interjects that passage rites (*Ozo* title taking) is like a labyrinth and this means the road to reaching the spirit world which he called the 'heavensgate'. He assured that though the modernist era has altered the ways of the past (*Ozo* title taking

rituals), the gods can still receive one back to its fold as long as one performed the cleansing rites (Oden, 2019).

Durkheim exonerates, that the moral crisis does not stem from any failings of modern industry, but is due instead to the absence of a moral order sufficient to regulate the emerging economic order (Durkheim, 1995). Suffice it to say therefore, that Modern approach focuses on the social life of the people but does not have interest neither in the moral order nor in the religious aspect. Equally, it does not believe in the existence or efficacy of ritual for its existence or to strengthen and preserve societal values. In the same way, the modern Onicha-Ugbo people play down on the traditions of their society. The culture and traditions of their forebears are labeled obsolete culture of the past (Oden, 2019) but without a replacement of such. They are incline to break through from what holds the society identity and maintains the equilibrium but without a corresponding new ritual in place.

Additionally, the impact of modern civilisation on Onicha-Ugbo traditional values like ritual action, stems from the people themselves when they could not regulate the influence of modern life on their value system. The new social order has been allowed to adjust what was original and cultural to them. Development is good and societies can grow and develop as there will always be the need to improve life conditions but where it touches on interfering with the people's cultural ties and heritage in the process, then it is worrisome because it could lead to loss of one's root. Modern life brought with it both good and bad, unfortunately, it did not offer a way forward on what to make up for the moral lapse and the cultural disorientation. The social changes that occur in modern Onicha-Ugbo society also create a gap in understanding the relevance of rituals and religion in daily life (Bokenkamp 2023). Many individuals living in large cities or modern societies often do not have a strong attachment to their cultural traditions (Gomez 2021). How this disconnect impacts on the formation of their identities remains unsettled.

Durkheim illustrates this further when he aptly diagnosed the discontent of modern condition of his time under three key problems: egoism, anomie, and injustice as the chief nature of modern society. Focusing on egoism, he terms this "*The Absence of Group Life"* (Royce, 2015*)*. He explains:

> The rise of modern society, by opening up new economic positions, liberates the individual from the sometimes stifling influence of family ties, ascribed groups, and communal associations. Although this transformation overcomes one abnormal state, where the individual is excessively absorbed into the collective, it causes another: egoism. "In this egoistic state, people are isolated in their own personal worlds, unfettered by social ties, and detached from the influence of collective forces" (Royce, 2015, p.141).

Here, people are caught up entirely in their own individual lives, they pursue personal inclinations rather than societal goals, and are guided by self-interest rather than collective codes of conduct, and their own egoistic calculations take precedence over higher social (Royce, 2015).

Durkheim calls this "excessive individuation," and this he observes, is a common problem in the modern era where the ethos of individual freedom is exceptionally strong and a stable group life appropriate to an industrial society has yet to form (Durkheim, 1951). Again, this is trending among modern Onich-Ugbo people as they are caught up with modern way of life which favours individualistic attitude and where collective ideals like *Ozo* title taking rituals no longer appeal to such people. Although Pickering (2009) remarks, that modern western society does not actually depend on religious ritual to strengthen it regularly and reiterate its values. This is because the individuals lack collective conscience or if they have it is very minimal. Onicha-Ugbo is still a traditional society even though it is developing into a modern society. As a result, ritual actions could still be needed for the purpose of preserving the culture and traditions of the people.

Under anomie, Durkheim describes it as "*The Absence of Moral Regulation".* This development causes among other things, social disorder. Durkheim (1984) emphasises, that the problem of anomie is a particularly serious threat, because of the preeminence of economic activity in the lives of modern individuals. He reasons that Pre-modern people pass the bulk of their time in the close embrace of families, Churches, and communities. But the advent of modernity, causes a shift in society's center of gravity. Economic realm becomes the principal locus of social existence, because people spend their lives almost entirely in an industrial and commercial environment. This becomes a "source of moral deterioration" in the sense that they have lost their foundation to the anomic state of the modern world, where economic pursuits predominate, the "greater part" of people's lives, and therefore, a "divorced from any moral influence" (Royce, 2015, p. 142). The modern life assures economic power, influence and fame

and so, the modern Onicha-Ugbo man feels he does not need *Ozo* title taking rituals to wield influence in the society.

Nelson-Becker & Sangster (2019) argue that the power of ritual remains largely unexplored, unrealised, and unavailable to individuals, families, and communities in a postmodern age where the pace of society allows scant space for ritual inclusion. They decry that the traditional transition from adulthood to older adulthood has taken a new stance than for previous groups of aging adults. Although their research was on recapturing the value of meaningful rituals that can aid transition for older adults and navigating the changes in life, their study also evoked the importance inherent in the value of the ancient tradition of ritual for modern times. They also posit that standard and historical rituals that support life transitions and aid in crises might be void of meaning if they have not evolved with changing older adulthood. This for them stems from the fact that ritual has been overlooked or dismissed as having narrow or no purpose in modern times.

Here, there is substantial agreement among scholars. Durkheim and Royce recognise that modernity transforms traditional social bonds and moral rules. The present study confirms that Onicha-Ugbo is experiencing this transformation, particularly in the changing place of *Ozo* rituals. The disagreement is based on difference concerning replacement. Some modernity-oriented perspectives suggest that traditional social forms can be transformed without necessarily producing social breakdown because new forms of social organisation emerge. The present study, however, demonstrates that when the ritual component is removed, the consequences are not confined to the loss of religious ceremony. The effects extend to moral regulation, cultural identity, leadership legitimacy, intergenerational transmission, communal cohesion and the meaning of social status.

While existing scholarship establishes the positive functions of ritual, the present study demonstrates that when those ritual functions are removed without adequate functional alternatives, the *Ozo* institution may experience a disjunction between its continued formal existence and the weakening of the cultural, moral and social functions that historically sustained its legitimacy. This finding advances scholarship in African Traditional Religion by demonstrating the consequences of ritual discontinuity for an indigenous religious institution; in Religious Studies by extending ritual theory from the study of ritual performance to the study of ritual absence and functional replacement;

The scholarly gap is that existing studies, including the works of Durkheim, Royce, Pickering, and Nelson-Becker and Sangster, explain the relationship between modernity, moral regulation, social cohesion, and the decline of ritual, but they do not specifically establish how the removal of *Ozo* title taking rituals affects the moral, cultural, and social life of Onicha-Ugbo, nor what alternative mechanisms could perform the integrative functions of the traditional rituals. This study therefore seeks to examine the consequences of ritual-less *Ozo* title taking ceremony within the specific socio-cultural context of Onicha-Ugbo.

2.3.2 Impact of Christianity

Missionary activities affected the entire social fabric of life in Onicha-Ugbo. Okwechime, (2012), Akabike and Anizoba, (2021) and Madukasi, (2018) surmise that the nobility was traumatised and its sacred traditions degraded. Okwechime (2012) remarks that, because Ozo title taking ceremonies were associated with traditional religious practices, any *Ozo*, on conversion, was made to renounce the title and burn his *osisi* (insignia of his *Ozo* title). But he compared that Christians who took *Ozo* title in the past brought their insignia to the Church for blessing in a public ritual and commitment. Why would people abandon their tradition and religion just to accommodate another, he wondered? In fact, some Christian *Ozo* titled men in some instances have ignorantly maintained that these "religious ceremonies are not essential to the title-taking" (Madukasi, 2018), (*referring to the ritual ceremonies*). They do not subscribe to the idea that ritual is important for sustaining a society.

Aniago (2015) decries the fact that many traditional beliefs and activities were jettisoned and replaced with what many considered "*more sanitised form*". A picture of the scenario painted by the abandonment of the cherished cultural values of the people is rightly captured in the words of the Kikuyu poet, Joe Muthiga (1962), even though he was not actually referring to Onicha-Ugbo people. This is what he says:

> Our customs are dug up.
> And put aside like the grass
> On which the dancer trod.
> And foreign crops implanted;
> And we pass by, eyes on the ground.
> Submitting to the foreign as ours.

Although Christians are now allowed by the concesion of 1980s by Bishop Gbuji, the then bishop of Issele-Uku diocese, to take *Ozo* title, but with the significant rituals associated with it set aside. This was to accommodate Christians. Even at that, there is always tension between

the adherents of Traditional Religion and Christians. Whenever a Christian dies the traditional burial rites ensue immediately after the Christian rites. This leaves one to question the reason for such duplication. Christians desire to be given their rightful burial ceremonies and no one should interfere with it because, according to diocesan norm:

> Certainly, native customs and rites are intimately bound up with religious beliefs and ceremonies. These ceremonies, often bound up with non-Christian practices … The Rites of Christian funeral admonishes that family traditions, local customs, groups established to take care of funerals, or anything that is good may be used freely, but anything alien to the Gospel should be changed so that funeral rites for Christians may proclaim the paschal faith and the spirit of God (The Rites, 1976).

This is often the point of conflict between the Church and native customs, culture and beliefs (Gbuji, 1984). The reason for the interference is partly because as they claim: "Tradition comes first" and that the deceased belonged to the community." Hence, the traditional burial rites ought to be given as well especially when the deceased was an *Ozo* title holder.

This is where Christians are caught in the web: to forgo the time-honoured custom of *Ozo* title-taking which is regarded as being very advantageous in raising one's social status, encouraging industry and serving as pension to the aged (Madukasi, 2018, Akabike and Anizoba, 2021) and or be treated like a no-body among elders because, probably one did not take *Ozo* title? It is at this stage that some Christians, while they are still alive, choose to risk the consequence and take the title, though without the corresponding rituals. It is worth noting that some devout Christians have remained firm in their resolve never to yield and so are not interested in the title. In fairness, no one is forced to take the title. One is free choose whether or not to take. Whichever side of the divide one chooses, is a choice and whatever the consequences that results from it, one should also face it.

Others took the title to avoid confusion for their children when they die. It was to resolve this problem of interference of tradition with Christian practice and to enable Christians participate in *Ozo* title taking, that the Catholic Diocese of Issele-Uku to which Onicha-Ugbo belongs, approved conditions for title taking for Catholics as marks of social status in their respective localities (Gbuji, 1984). These conditions include public presentation and blessing of insignia which is ritual in disguise because in it the man commits himself publicly as he pledges to make sure he keeps to his responsibilities as a Christian who has taken *Ozo* title.

Apart from social status, these Catholic Christians with titles are meant to represent the Church and defend her members when and where the need arises. Unfortunately, some of them even cause more harm than good to the Church. They either betray the Church or imbibe syncretism secretly. Sometimes they even subject their fellow Christians to torture before non-Christians or humiliate them. Needless to say that today Christians too, have equally abandoned this public commitment and presentation of insignia. It is no longer clear who has taken the *Ozo* title and who has not.

Naturally, people look up to Christians as models and custodians of moral, justice, love, peace and honour just as an *Ozo* title holder is a custodian of justice, moral, faithfulness and peace as they apply with traditional religion. The moral codes of conduct, were anchored on religious observance as institutionalised rituals which guided interpersonal relationships, and aided the maintenance of order and control in the social life of the people (Okwechime, 2012). Unfortunately, these have been diluted by the traditionalist in a bid to accommodate Christians but even the Christians too are no longer engaging in public rituals. For their sake *Ozo* title taking was modified and was integrated into the blessing of the insignia in the Church but they too have failed to adhere to the conditions laid down for them, it has also contributed to weakening the social structure.

Akabike and Anizoba (2021) also underscore that Christians themselves are not keeping the norms and taboos of *Ozo* title taking. They are only after the social status and perhaps the economic gain accruing from the *Ozo* institution. From all indications, they want the title but not the public commitment that goes with the title which is ritual. Akabike and Anizoba (2021) maintain that traditionally, an *Ozo* title without ritual is "incomplete cermony". It is devoid of the sanctity and the feeling which the customary *Ozo* as an institution possesses and diffuses among its members. The whole essence of the institution of *Ozo* is bound up with the ritual sacrifice (Akabike and Anizoba, 2021). Hence, Basden (1969, p. 133) upholds that men admitted to the order, by ceremonies enacted, become, "ex opera operato", "holy". Therefore, the omission of the essential rites and ceremonies would, to all intents and purposes, destroy the foundation upon which *Ozo* title is based. It no longer deserves the name if the ritual dimension is removed because it is incomplete.

Against this background, Aniago (2015) clarifies that part of the basic tenets of Christianity includes love, truthfulness, justice, uprightness and many more and that African Traditional Religion is equally not devoid of these but were only misconceived by the early missionaries.

Needless to say that certain Christian teachings and principles are also inherent in some practices of African traditional religion. They are often characterised by the following prohibitions:

- Do not take the life of a member of the community
- Do not steal
- Do not commit incest
- Do not defraud strangers
- Do not hide abominations that pervert the course of nature Aniago (2015).

Therefore, it is arguable that if the tenets of Christianity as mentioned above, correspond with those of the African traditional religion, as well as *Ozo* institution, then, compromising Onicha-Ugbo's cultural heritage like the ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title taking just to accommodate Christians is misleading because the two traditions share a lot in common. Here, Aniago (2015) is of the opinion that Christians are admitted into *Ozo* institution so long as they keep to what is within their practice of faith (*and maintain the conditions they were given*).

Okwechime (2012), Akabike and Anizoba (2021), and Madukasi (2018) broadly agree that missionary Christianity disrupted important aspects of the traditional social and religious order in Onicha-Ugbo. Their arguments indicate that because *Ozo* title taking was historically embedded in African Traditional Religion, Christian converts encountered a conflict between their new religious identity and the religious requirements of traditional ritual ceremony. The major disagreement in the literature concerns whether the ritual component of *Ozo* title taking is indispensable or whether the institution can be adapted to accommodate Christian participation.

The study does not conclude that Christian participation in *Ozo* is inherently impossible. Rather, it demonstrates that removing the ritual dimension creates consequences for the traditional functions of the institution. The study suggests that the adaptation created a distinction between the title as a social status and the title as a ritually constituted institution. Christians could acquire the social recognition associated with *Ozo* title without necessarily undergoing the traditional ritual process through which candidates were morally, spiritually and communally incorporated.

In this regard, the study extends the existing scholarship by linking Christianity-induced ritual adaptation with the broader process of commodification of the *Ozo* institution. Christianity did

not necessarily cause commodification by itself. Rather, the removal of ritual occurred alongside other forces including modernity, urbanisation, economic individualism and changing social aspirations which collectively altered the meaning of title acquisition.

The scholarly gap is that existing literature adequately documents the historical conflict between Christianity and traditional *Ozo* title taking practices and explains the emergence of ritual-less ceremony, but it does not sufficiently examine the long-term implications of this modification for the moral authority, cultural identity, social cohesion, and institutional integrity of *Ozo* in Onicha-Ugbo. More importantly, the literature largely diagnoses the problem without identifying how the *Ozo* institution can preserve its essential cultural and social functions within a religiously pluralistic community. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the implications of removing *Ozo* rituals ceremonies and considering their significance for the future of the institution and the cultural identity of Onicha-Ugbo.

2.3.3 Impact of Urbanisation

Just as Okot p'Bitek laments the loss of Acholi traditions in East Africa, a similar crisis of cultural alienation is occurring among the modern-day Onicha-Ugbo elites of Nigeria (Sokotnono, 2015). With the surge of urbanisation, Onicha-Ugbo society was exposed to critical modes of thought. Accordingly, residing in rural environment became somewhat outdated since urban cities provided more comfort and higher economic advantage. With this, the urban class of Onicha-Ugbo people became rather alienated from what tradition is and are gradually beginning to abandoned their age long cherished customs.

By the self-imposed crusade, P' Bitek hopes to make meaning out of African traditions to modern-day Africans and the modern day Onicha-Ugbo elites, hemmed in on all sides by the destabilising effects of western and urban oriented lifestyles (Sokotnono, 2015). The drift to urban centers has both positive and negative side. Positive in the sense that it provided an avenue for family financial support and other developments such as good jobs, access to electricity, technology and better education.

Negative because many left home for greener pastures and gradually they established themselves and lost contact with their traditions (Adibe, 2009). Some of them rarely visit home and so do not know what happens when it comes to traditions. These group of people are likely to become strangers in terms of the customs of Onicha-Ugbo but a good number of them may have been admitted into *Ozo* society done for them by "proxy" - by proxy, I mean taking

the title on behalf of another who probably is in diaspora. In fact, Isiani et al, (2021) explicitly identify Christianity, education, urbanisation and industrialisation as forces that have contributed to the marginalisation of Igbo (Onicha-Ugbo) indigenous creativity and material culture.

Hence, Akabike and Anizoba (2021) vilify the loss of community sentiments in the urban cities which equally affect the sacredness of the *Ozo* title institution. The traditional awe and respect around the title have been ripped because many urban dwellers did not experience what it means to be ritually addmitted. Although, they are *Ozo* titled men but without ritual, their ceremony is seen as incomplete. They often import city and urban ideas to solve traditional problems and more often than not it does not work that way. It is important to understand the role of ritual in *Ozo* title taking so as to make tradition meaningful to the modern thoughts in order to avoid applying urban solutions to local problems (Sokotnono, 2015). Lawino further laments the rejection of African tradition for urban ways by the educated elite and city dwellers and in a refrain reminded them that "The pumpkin in the old homestead must not be uprooted" (Gikandi, 2021.p. 15).

Consequently, Lewis Nkosi encourages the need to "celebrate" one's society's sense of being and not to subvert its social values or moral order (Sokotnono, 2015). Similarly, Okwechime, (2012) remarked that the urban dwellers and elite class in Onicha-Ugbo became increasingly cut off from their cultural foundations and live their lives without any meaningful knowledge and understanding of the land of their origin and its people. Hence, they tend to associate ritual with more primitive cultures, where the emphasis is on conformity to and harmony with a larger social and cosmological whole. As a result, cross-cultural patterns emerged with little or no regard for rituals (Seligman et al 2008).

Sokotnono (2015), drawing on Okot p'Bitek's critique of cultural alienation, argues that African elites exposed to Western and urban lifestyles can become increasingly disconnected from indigenous traditions. This argument is consistent with Adibe's (2009) observation that migration to urban centres may cause people to lose contact with their cultural practices. Okwechime (2012) similarly admits that Onicha-Ugbo's urban dwellers and elite class have become increasingly detached from their cultural foundations and may possess limited knowledge of the traditions of their ancestral community.

Thus, while the existing literature establishes the general relationship between urbanisation and cultural alienation, the present study provides a more specific institutional manifestation of that

alienation: an individual can acquire the social status associated with *Ozo* without physically undergoing the ritual experience through which that status was traditionally constituted. The study extends this proposition by showing that physical separation can directly affect participation in *Ozo* ritual ceremony and facilitate proxy title taking. The principal contribution of the present study is that it moves the discussion from the broad proposition that "urbanisation causes cultural alienation" to the more specific finding that urbanisation can alter the very mechanism through which cultural membership and traditional authority are constituted.

The Scholarly gap is that despite the increasing body of literature on urbanisation, cultural alienation and the decline of indigenous institutions in Africa, there is limited scholarship that specifically examines how urbanisation has transformed the ritual process of *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo, cultural knowledge, legitimacy and contemporary meaning of *Ozo* title-taking, particularly through the emergence of proxy *Ozo* title taking and the negotiation of traditional practices within Christian, Western-educated and diasporic contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining how urbanisation, together with Christianity and Western education, has influenced the practice, perception, transmission and continuity of *Ozo* title-taking among the people of Onicha-Ugbo.

2.3.4 Impact of Immigration

Onicha-Ugbo was a traditional society up until the late 1980's. But with development of structures, new avenues opened to outsiders and gradually, Onicha-Ugbo became a hob for immigrants. With good road network and a road junction to many towns, Onicha-Ugbo became a reference point to many people. As a result, it gradually became a multicultural community. Gittins (2017) in his article on cross-cultural or multicultural communities describes intercultural community thus:

> Members of the host community are perfectly "at home" (living in their own "culture A"), but the interloper is "out of place," not "at home," an outsider or stranger who, being now in his or her "culture B," must therefore learn this new culture and its language. But outsiders come in many shapes and forms, typically "participating" or "nonparticipating," and the former can be of great value to the insiders. But "non-participating outsiders" are at best culturally or morally irrelevant (Gittins, 2017.p. 61).

Although Gittins was not talking about Onicha-Ugbo tradition but some of the ideas relate to the present situation in Onicha-Ugbo. Ideally, the incomer is expected to learn the cultural rules, responsibilities and sanctions necessary of the host community for smooth day to day

living. But where this does not work out, the supposed multicultural communities can only be characterised as merely "people living together, separately" (Gittins, 2017).

Although, learning another's traditional values and cultures or adapting to it is not an easy task. Hence, Gittins (2017) likens culture to human skin which he says is difficult or even impossible to graft. Culture, he says, is transmitted gradually over time, through the generations and it is an ongoing process rather than a simple social fact. As a result, it becomes difficult for "outsiders" to value the mores or traditions of their host community and the reasons for observing such. This is one of the challenges posed by the increasing influx of people of different cultural backgrounds to Onicha-Ugbo society and the preserving of their traditions.

Becoming a multicultural community through immigration and intermarriages has exposed Onicha-Ugbo to various cultures. Although outsiders or strangers are not admitted to take *Ozo* title but those by marriage are now integrated into the community by virtue of marriage. Since they do not understand some of the practices, they do not also appreciate the importance of ritual for instance, in the rites of *Ozo* title taking. Gittins, (2017) remarks that the inability to learn from other's culture and adapt accordingly, destroys the integrity of a community. He goes on to recommend that serious thought should be given to the formative power of each person's social location, and to know how much individual variety and preference is compatible with the demands of the broader community and its mission. Understanding others' social geography, socialisation, and social mobility, he emphasised, is a prerequisite to appropriate responses. His ideal is a welcome idea but the practicality of it is something that requires going a step further to understand better.

The findings of this study therefore confirm and extend Gittins' argument. They confirm his emphasis on the importance of participation, socialisation, and cultural adaptation in multicultural communities. However, the findings extend his argument by demonstrating a specific religious and institutional consequence of inadequate cultural transmission: the weakening of ritual practices within an indigenous institution. In the case of Onicha-Ugbo, multiculturalism has not merely produced differences in cultural expression; it has contributed to a situation in which the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking is increasingly regarded as negotiable rather than constitutive of the institution. The problem, therefore, is not multiculturalism itself, but the absence of an effective mechanism through which cultural diversity can coexist with the preservation and transmission of the core values embedded in indigenous institutions.

While immigrants and strangers may not traditionally be admitted into the *Ozo* institution, immigration provides a pathway through which individuals from different cultural backgrounds become integrated into the community. This raises questions about how indigenous ritual knowledge is transmitted to such persons, the extent to which they understand and appreciate the meanings attached to *Ozo* title taking rituals, and whether their incorporation into the community contributes to the continuity, modification or weakening of established cultural practices. Furthermore, there is insufficient scholarly understanding of how Onicha-Ugbo can accommodate cultural diversity arising from immigration while maintaining the integrity of its indigenous traditions. Simply put, how best can Onicha-Ugbo community address the problem arising from immigration and still maintain its cultural values? This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between immigration, intermarriage, cultural integration and the preservation and transmission of *Ozo* title ritual practices in Onicha-Ugbo.

2.3.5 Impact of Inter-Marriage

Being in a cross-cultural relationship can broaden one's views on other cultures outside one's culture and reduces the negative prejudice. However, in matters of tradition it becomes difficult to understand and assimilate the other culture wholeheartedly without fear of losing one's cultural values. It requires conscious sacrifice for a non Onicha-Ugbo woman to understand why her husband should engage in ritual ceremony into *Ozo* institution unless she already had a background knowledge of it. Conflict could therefore, arise when traditional practices are modified or even abandoned. This could cause tension within the community and challenges in maintaining cultural uniqueness. When both husband and wife are insiders, it is easier to follow the traditions because they both understand the values but when they are mixed it becomes more difficult to sustain.

Often, the outsiders see others' rituals as alien, not of meaning, unimportant and something to be abolished. While intermarriage fosters social integration, it can pose challenges to cultural heritage. These include the erosion of indigenous languages, loss of traditional rituals, and weakened ethnic identities in future generations. Often, it leads to the assimilation of minority customs into the dominant culture. Children who are a product of cross-cultural relationships often face challenges in their day to day lives as well as in their self-identity Nnadi, 2016). They often feel a decreased sense of belonging, due to having a split identity. These children that come because of cross-cultural relationships often struggle with their identity, because they cannot fully identity with one culture or the other.

A person's identity is what makes them who they are and tells a story of where they come from. When a person loses a sense of belonging, it can cause a ripple effect for other emotional and mental problems. In a study conducted by Mitchell (2022) some couple may face a loss of identity once they enter a cross-cultural relationship.

They may find themselves sacrificing their own values and traditions to make space for the other person's values and traditions. The partner's own sense of identity may be lost in its entirety or in parts due to compromise. While in a relationship, certain traditions and customs may not be practiced as frequently because the other partner does not understand. Out of respect people push aside traditions in attempt to create a space of inclusivity or their partner. Over time certain traditions will completely die off, and as new generations come these customs will get more diluted. The loss of traditions can impact future generations negatively since one person's culture may get drained out by the other, especially if the person is not highly knowledgeable on the matter in this case, Ozo title taking (Benko, 2023).

The existing scholarship indicates that inter-marriage does not necessarily cause the erosion of *Ozo* rituals; rather, it creates a context of cultural negotiation in which the survival of those rituals depends increasingly on intentional cultural education and intergenerational transmission. The findings suggest that where cultural exchange occurs without deliberate transmission of Onicha-Ugbo traditions, it may contribute to the weakening of ritual practices. In this sense, the study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that the consequences of inter-marriage for cultural heritage can become particularly visible in the transformation of ritual institutions such as *Ozo* title taking.

However, there is a distinct lack of empirical research on how intermarriage specifically destabilises the transmission of the *Ozo* title taking rituals to successive generations. Most scholars focus on the sociological benefits of mixed marriages while ignoring the domestic resistance faced by traditional institutions. This study aims to fill this specific gap by investigating how intermarriage alters the domestic support system required for *Ozo* title taking ritual ceremony, and what adaptive strategies the Onicha-Ugbo community can employ to safeguard the sacredness of the institution within multi-ethnic households.

2.4. Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

In the absence of ritual, the question is: Which alternative ways do individuals and groups utilise to fill the void left by the absence of rituals and which reactions does this absence

provoke? This question was prompted during the cancelled ritual ceremony of Territorial Belonging Practices of Inclusion and Coexistence in Geneva, Turin, and Zurich March, 2020 due to the Covid-19 Epidemics. The cancellation was welcome with sadness, melancholy, nostalgia for the traditional festival, and sense of loss. The reason for this feeling finds expression in the words of Gamba and Cattacin (2021) that cities are "inclusion Machines." Cattacin, Gamba and Alzola (2023 lament that the cancellation drastically reduced the number of participants and raised discontent among the citizens who felt deeply deprived of a collective celebration. "Every revolution demands its price", they emphasised. This is because in the place of the traditional ritual festival, improvised and made-shift practices (digital) were put in place but unfortunately, these did not produce a symbolic emotional intensity. The improvised alternatives did not have a fundamental role and the basic needs of social interaction, emotional support, and sense of continuity that ritual provides. They stressed that there is need to keep rituals alive through a collective narrative or alternative forms as the way to fill a void. The people therefore hoped to witness when they will once again celebrate the festival in ritual as it used to be.

In like manner, Han (2020) regrets that the disappearance of symbols points towards the increasing atomisation of society and at the same time, society is becoming increasingly egotistic. The egotistic process of internalisation develops a dislike to form. He maintains that objective forms are avoided in favour of subjective states. Rituals, he says, evade selfish interiority. Unfortunately, symbolic perception is gradually being replaced by a *serial perception* that is incapable of producing the experience of duration. Serial perception, he continues, and the constant registering of the new like the modern and information technology, does not linger.

Rather, it rushes from one piece of information to the next, from one experience to the next, from one sensation to the next, without ever coming to closure (Han,2020). Nelson-Becker and Sangster (2019) also affirm that we live in an age that has seemingly lost its capacity to engage in the rituals that bring us back to the center of who we are. Instead of participation in rituals that help quell anxiety, remotivate purpose, forge a collective identity and a sense of belonging, many individuals have lost connections with ceremony. In like manner, replacing ritual ceremony of *Ozo* title taking with money may not bring about closure and the people know this: that *Ozo* title devoid of ritual is incomplete.

In describing the lack of ritual practice in this modern age Han (2020) illustrates it as an excess of openings and dissolving boundaries and by so doing, we are losing the capacity for closure globally, and this means that life is becoming a purely additive process. For something to die, he stresses, life must find its own closure. If life is deprived of any possibility of closure, it will end in non-time. Pangti (2022) takes the impact of ritual-less society further to include interpersonal relationships, social relationships and traditional festivals. These he said, were important social glue that are losing their power due to rapid urbanisation and globalisation. They are becoming more personal and less social and the ensuing gap is being filled by new festivities like "New Year's Eve, Mother's Day, Father's Day, 'Earth Day' and 'everything-under-the-sun day' one can think of. For him these are all nothing but modern rituals in the process of getting established.

Similarly, Arnett (2000, 2004) although writing from the American background on rites of passage and the coming of age of youth, stated that the present cultural rituals (*improvised*) and secular strategies in modern American society do not effectively assist children's transition to adulthood because these lack the coordinated ritual process. She indicated that lack of clearly established rites of passage (*in ritual form*) in any society results in ambiguity about when and how one becomes an adult in contemporary society.

Sil (2019) shares a moral lesson found among the Temne's *Poro* society in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Northwest Ghana, western Burkina Faso; the Kpelle people of Liberia, Ivory Coast and Guinea; and the Vai people of Liberia, where discipline, submission to authority, cooperation, keeping secrets and abiding by established rules are the components of the ritual ceremonies. Everything of value to life of the individual and society is imparted: moral requirements, legal expectations, techniques for survival, social and aesthetic requirements. But where this is lacking due to the absence of ritual ceremonies, it becomes difficult to keep track of things in the society just as it is now happening in Onicha-Ugbo. It is becoming almost impossible to tell when one becomes an *Ozo* titled man since even toddlers are admitted into the *Ozo* institution. Unfortunately, the custodians of culture and traditions in Onicha-Ugbo seem to be forgetting that transmitting values and knowledge that inform individuals about their responsibility and rights as members of a group is essential. Today, *Ozo* title taking ceremony is becoming more personal and less social or communal which is not good for communal living. Arnett (2004), therefore holds that ritual is a necessary tool for closure, for integrating force in a community and for the stability of the group. Absence of it could bring about the following implications:

2.4.1 Weakened Social Structure

Ideally, *Ozo* title taking is limited to freedom by birthright, financial strength and a reserved for adult men who were qualified. It also showed the candidate's ability to "make" money and would be commended for his astuteness (Basden, 1969). Just as a Christian proselyte is catechised in the "Way" so that he/she can qualify to be admitted to baptism, so also the intending *Ozo* candidate must be a man of good character, morally sound, a man of integrity and a responsible man. This is because rituals bring forth a community in which resonances occur, one that is capable of accord, of a common rhythm. Rituals produce sociocultural axes of resonance along which may be experienced three different kinds of resonant relationship: *vertical* (e.g. to the gods, the cosmos, time, or eternity), *horizontal* (within one's social community), and *diagonal* (with respect to *things*) (Hartmu, 2019).

Rituals are vital for establishing a rhythm, rendering stability, and fostering a sense of belonging and identity within a community (Han, 2020). But the removal of these practices, motivated by the relentless pace and individualistic nature of contemporary society in Onicha-Ugbo, has serious implications. Without these routine and ceremonial practices, Han continues, the communal bonds and social structures that provide collective meaning and order, gradually weaken. This collapse leaves individuals isolated and unanchored, drifting in the short-lived, momentary relationships that characterise much of modern existence.

At the forefront of this decline is the rise of individualism, which prioritises personal autonomy, self-expression, and individual achievement over communal values and shared experiences. In a society increasingly focused on the individual, collective rituals, which require participation and a sense of belonging, often lose their significance and appeal (Han, 2020). Again, the original norm was that *Ozo* membership was not to be approved by 'anyhow', 'anybody' without the approval of the deities, ancestors, the king, the members of existing *Ndi-chie* (elders) as this would constitute a violation of Onicha-Ugbo cosmology.

This also sees the men in such position as privileged since it is believed that they are divinely selected and appointed (Madukasi, 2018). But the social structure is compromised now and this procedure is being violated, thus, bringing about serious impact on society ideals. Furthermore, due to individual self-interests, *Ozo* title is now: being conferred on children who could neither express themselves nor defend their families or community; can be conferred on candidates by proxy who do not have idea of what the title is all about and can be bought by anyone. But as Basden (1969) remarks: "The sale of honours degrades them to a monetary level and ends by

producing an indifferent attitude towards them and their holders" (p. 133). Also, Han (2020) decries that the erosion of rituals has both economic and political effects.

Chinua Achebe in his popular novel: *Things Fall Apart"* describes what happened in Umuofia and (what is happening in Onicha-Ugbo presently) as: "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" (Achebe, 1995). Although one may disagree with the long protocol of ritual process of *Ozo* title taking: waiting until one becomes an adult before taking the title, one may lose leadership position because members advance in rank by lowest. This could be the reason underage males are admitted into *Ozo* title so that they can advance in rank because death does not announce when it will come. But then the removal or absence of the corresponding ritual in the rites of *Ozo* title taking also questions the validity of the title (Akabike and Anizoba, 2021). This is because as it is said that: "Before you talk to rats, you must come to their level" (*Onicha-Ugbo Proverb*). Ritual process qualifies one to be a full member of an *Ozo* institution. But without the ritual process the wrong men can be admitted to *Ozo* institution while it debars some of the best men because of the difficulty in raising the fees.

Before the removal of ritual, every stage in the *Ozo* title taking signified some values. As such, 'his attire: the 'red cap', 'elephant tusk' and 'white woven cloth' reminded him always of who he was and the rigorous ritual process he underwent (Okoronkwor, 2014). But in the absence of the ritual, *Ozo* titled man is like a man without portfolio. Han (2020) upholds that rituals historically provided a framework within which individuals could operate, offering moments of reflection, connection, and pause. But in the absence of these structures, meaningful activities will experience existential apprehension. Furthermore, the collapsing of rituals has profound social implications because rituals traditionally, served as the glue that held communities together, fostering solidarity and a sense of shared identity. But as these rituals fade, so does the social cohesion they engendered. The weakening of communal bonds can lead to increased alienation, where individuals feel more disconnected from one another and from society as a whole.

Consequently, today, in Onicha-Ugbo, many adult men do not relate to the order of things in the community because the values have been compromised; confirming that one cannot give what one does not have. As a result, anomaly is no longer corrected like before. In the past, differentiated ritual practice itself was one of the defining markers of group membership and its associated identity. This helps individuals to know who they are or, in reference to group terms, who speaks through them (Kemper & Goffman 2011). Today, in Onicha-Ugbo people

tend to mind their personal life without bothering so much about whether the community's social norms and ethos are preserved.

Awkwardly, Onicha-Ugbo social system have been compromised. As custodians of the people's traditions, Ikediugwu (2015) submits that *Ozo* title holder ordinarily, should cherish and observe all the cultural norms of his people because they are seen as models of the traditional society. Although, his study focused more on the discrimination, none admittance of all classes of people and lack of gender balance in *Ozo* institution. Ikediugwu criticises the deviation from justice and from sound moral standards that have become the new values as well as the "bastardaization" of *Ozo* institution, exhibited by the custodians of truth and tradition. He suggests that when men who are custodians of tradition compromise values, tell lies and politick in matters of culture and tradition, then they have defiled their "*washed tongues*" (Ikediugwu, 2015). Against this backdrop, many *Ozo* title holders in Onicha-Ugbo today seem to be unsure about their identity because of the watered down social structure. Ideally, ritual is supposed to demarcate the boundaries of the different grades so that the ritual practice is a form of both responsibility and accountability to themselves, their families and the entire community. Obasi's (2020) argues that ritual regulates relationships, communicates collective values, defines identity and helps rebuild social relationships. Therefore, when ritual components are removed from an institution such as *Ozo*, the consequences may extend beyond religion to moral formation, social cohesion, authority, identity and communal accountability. When the social structure is weakened, the outcome is manifold:

- it undermines the legitimacy of hierarchy;
- it weakens the authority of Ozo title holders;
- it disrupts mechanisms of accountability;
- it makes membership boundaries unclear;
- it diminishes intergenerational transmission of values;
- it reduces trust in traditional institutions;
- it weakens the community's capacity to regulate behaviour through recognized norms.

Akabike and Anizoba (2021) regret that this sellout has made men with questionable character to penetrate into the *Ozo* society due to the moral laxity on the part of some elders and traditionalists who watered down the values. They posit that most of the challenges experienced in communities today with regards to *Ozo* title taking are partly from the elders who have compromised their integrity because of monetary gain. This attitude of the elders, they claim,

has contributed to the present predicament of *Ozo* title institution. Some of them they say, have become so corrupt and gullible and can easily be bought over by people of double character who were wrongly admitted into *Ozo* society because they bypassed the ritual ceremony.

Before now, the idea of witnessing ritual performance in person during ritual ceremony provided one with a story to tell and retell, hence augmenting one's status in one's crowd and in wider circles. It ignited in others, the desire to do likewise. Unfortunately, this desire has been stifled in men since they can easily become titled men by proxy with money. The importance of witness is now frequently undervalued, but it is highlighted when the witness is gone or the opportunity for witness is unavailable (Nelson-Becker & Sangster, 2019). A witness validates. Equally, being a witness to self and others is a sacred task fulfilling. One can be a witness to one's own experience, a witness to the experience of others, be aware of the witness of others to one's experience, and provide witness to an event. Again, ritualising it, helps the witnesses to appreciate the level of meaning. "To think about witness is to think about others". It means that someone is a watchful observer or providing validation, attesting to the reality or experience (Nelson-Becker & Sangster, 2019: 162/3).

However, a primary witness is the self says Schneider. "We are the most important and only full witness of our own lives" (2012, p. 361). In the case of *Ozo* title taking, this is very important as it helps people identify who has undergone the ritual process because they witnessed to the ceremony. The above authors illustrated the many roles and importance of ritual presented above including the need to make people appreciate the importance of ritual in integrating, validating witness and mediating tradition.

Existing scholarship generally agrees that rituals perform integrative and regulatory functions but scholars differ in the aspect of social life they emphasise. The present study builds on these perspectives by demonstrating, from the Onicha-Ugbo context, that the removal of ritual from *Ozo* title taking has consequences not only for religious practice but also for the legitimacy and functioning of the wider traditional social structure. The present study substantially agrees with this body of scholarship: Hartmu, (2019; Han, 2020 and Obasi, 2020) but provides a more context-specific demonstration of what occurs when such ritual functions are removed from a traditional institution. The study therefore advances existing scholarship by connecting ritual discontinuity, institutional legitimacy, moral formation, social cohesion, cultural identity and contemporary social change within a single analytical framework.

Scholars have extensively described the decline and social consequences of traditional *Ozo* titla taking rituals, but have given insufficient attention to the reconstruction/adaptation of ritual practices as a means of restoring the social functions of *Ozo* title and strengthening the contemporary social structure of Onicha-Ugbo. This study therefore addresses the gap by examining how the transformation of *Ozo* ritual practices has weakened the social structure of Onicha-Ugbo and by exploring possibilities for ritual renewal that can restore identity, accountability, communal cohesion, and continuity within the Ozo institution.

2.4.2 Breakdown in Moral and Social Order

Rituals play cultural roles. Okoli (2016) stated that in time past, mistakes, misdeeds, faults of character, and perceived wrongs were freely and publically aired ritually. This process relieves such wrongs of their potency to spread or generate violence. Such ritual actions he added, serve as deterrents to other people. Citing an example, he said that any *Ozo* who commited an abomination (*alu*) or an abominable act (*nso ani*) or convicted of stealing, automatically forfeited his title because it is usually regarded as a desecration of the *Ozo* title. The *Ozo* concerned must undergo full cleansing, makes an atonement, reparation and remediation before he can be readmitted into the Fraternity (Okoli, 2016). In the past also, *Ozo* title was not taken by any man other than the one upon whom the office of "*Di-okpala"* (elder) devolved. Furthermore, the financial requirements for the title were the responsibility of the whole family. Unfortunately, things have changed now.

Okoli, writing on the origin and development of *Ozo* title such as the different names and types of *Ozo*, the requirements, the regalia and the objectives, states that the *Ozo* institution grew out of the need for priests and upright men who would preside at extended family and lineage worship and supervise the worship of the ancestors and keep the family *Ofo* (staff which is a symbol of truth, justice and fairness). It was believed that the continuity of the lineage, clan or community depended on the existence of God-fearing men who shared in the spirit of the land through their special relationship with the earth goddess (*Ani*), and also who knew how to placate the spirit of dead ancestors and upheld the ordinances of the land (Okoli, 2016).

Ozo title then was done in ritual process and was conferred on the one who merited it by the gods. Ajaebili, Eze and Omeje (2020) thus, explained that the presence of *Ofo,* given during the ritual, in any gathering fostered a sense of unity and conformity among all members of the group. This is because it was highly feared, because it could kill or be used to ostracise any erring member of the society. *Ofo* is believed to have mystical aura and power which makes

the holder exudes influence among the people. Therefore, it implies that he must be transparent, impartial, upright and honest in all his dealings, otherwise, he will be struck down by a series of calamities. But in a situation where *Ozo* title is now conferred randomly on people, by proxy, even to infants without rituals, leaves one to question the moral values to justify such steps.

Odigbo (2023) though, focusing on the relationship between *Ozo* title and social recognition in Igboland (Onicha-Ugbo) reminded, his audience that *Ozo* title taking originally, was designed to determine economic capability by rewarding hard work and productivity especially to people who were "economically capable" enough to produce what they needed and to achieve the redistribution of food to the wider community. Hence, *Ozo* title was by and large for the accomplished and wealthy. This factor meant that many well-meaning men in the community could not afford to take the title either for lack of money or because they were Christians, who at this time, were not allowed to take part in *Ozo* title (Odigbo, 2023).

The reported removal of the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title-taking raises questions about its implications for moral accountability, social authority and communal order in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo." The modern Onicha-Ugbo now sees this development as progress but to Basden, for a man to become "sacrosanct", in return for a money payment, is in itself absurd' (Basden, 1969, p. 145). This could bring anout value disorientation. Odigbo (2023) also traced an evolutionary trajectory of the *Ozo* institution from the traditional to the modern time in the context of social dynamics and fast-changing moral and recognition order. He explained that *Ozo* title is a social institution characterised by social recognition on grounds of the merit or achievement of the title-holder on the one hand and on the other hand his economic contribution to the common good.

Although, Odigbo did not really focus on the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking which is a gap. Instead he is of the opinion that *Ozo* title should be updated and its frontiers expanded beyond the context of globalisation and expanding socio-moral order. Odigbo's view underscores an orderly protocol of becoming an *Ozo:* merit, hard work, achievement and respect. To violate this could negate the moral and social order, encourages laziness and demoralises people who have the interest of the community at heart. This is part of the problem of the failed social structure where people can lobby their way through because some custodians of tradition have allowed people who do not merit it into *Ozo* institution for monetary benefits. They no longer care about character screening or engage in the ritual process.

The implication of this practice is that the "*red cap*" meant for title holders is now won by anyone who can afford it without invoking respect. It is now difficult to identify a true *Ozo* title holder in the public gathering since the ritual that should have been the determining factor is no longer there. Okoronkwo (2014) also remarks that the "*red cap''* worn by *Ozo* title holders is supposed to be a symbol of authority, culture and tradition and it represents the chieftaincy institution, its power, and authority. He likewise states that the categories of chiefs who are permitted to wear this sacred cap must have met certain standards which they still maintain in their respective communities. For instance, they are not expected to swindle or engage in any activity that can bring the traditional institution into disrepute.

Okoronkwo regrets, that people no longer care so much about morals and social order. He disparages the fact that it is now "normal" to see men without traditional titles wearing the "*red caps''* meant for chiefs. Though he explains that while some of these men wear the "*red cap''* out of sheer ignorance; others wear the "*red cap"* out of utter mischief, deceptively parading themselves as chiefs. Consequently, the authority of the *Ozo* in the community is gradually being over looked since some of the chiefs themselves are also involved in some unacceptable practices (Okwechime, 2012). Regrettably, some custodians of the tradition and stakeholders themselves, lament the deliberate and sustained abuse of the "*red cap"* and the Igbo (Onicha-Ugbo) chieftaincy institution in general (Okoronkwo, 2014).

Unfortunately, the removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking has given room to people of questionable character to now wear the "*red cap*" and paraded themselves as chiefs or even got chieftaincy titles through fraudulent means (Okoronkwo, 2014). The candidates are supposed to show both physical and moral maturity; an indication that they have been approved by the ancestors of the clan. This is what is inculcated in them verbally and symbolically during ritual ceremony. But where the ritual ceremony is absent, there is no obligation binding on the persons.

Odigbo, Okoronkwo and Basden uphold that order and protocol are very important for a society to maintain the status quo and the absence of these, impact so negatively on the moral, social order as well as contribute to the weakening of the social structure. Some` (1998), remarks that the ordeal of ritual ceremony: physical, psychological or emotional, was meant to stretch the physical self far enough to release something else that brings awareness, more sense of responsibility and more wisdom. It gave rise to discipline, creates a wound which impresses

on the candidate, a deep life changes in progress and the completion of it leaves a mark that reminds the bearers of where they have been.

There is therefore substantial agreement between Okoli (2016) and Ajaebili, Eze and Omeje (2020): both understand traditional Igbo (Onicha-Ugbo) institutions as mechanisms of moral regulation rather than merely cultural performances. Their difference lies primarily in emphasis. Okoli focuses specifically on *Ozo* and the disciplinary consequences of violating its moral code, whereas Ajaebili et al. examine the wider *Ofo* institution and its relationship to justice, authority and social order. The present study brings these perspectives together by demonstrating that the weakening of *Ozo* ritual affects precisely those mechanisms through which moral expectations were historically embodied and enforced. It does not argue that every traditional *Ozo* ritual must be reinstated exactly as it existed in the past.

Rather, it argues that the functions of ritual, moral formation, public accountability, communal recognition, social incorporation and cultural transmission, should not disappear merely because particular ritual forms have become difficult to maintain in a contemporary religious and social environment. The contribution of the present study therefore lies in moving the debate from ritual description to institutional consequence. The question is no longer merely whether *Ozo* rituals are disappearing. The more significant question is what social functions disappear, weaken or become transformed when they disappear.

Although existing studies have examined the historical development, social recognition, economic significance and changing status of the *Ozo* institution, there remains insufficient scholarly attention to the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title-taking and its relationship with moral accountability and social order in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo. Studies such as Odigbo (2023) have traced the transformation of the institution from a system based on merit, achievement, economic capacity and social recognition, while Okoronkwo (2014) has highlighted the declining observance of standards associated with traditional titles and their symbols. However, these studies do not sufficiently explain how the removal, reduction or modification of the ritual process affects the moral formation, obligations, authority and accountability of *Ozo* title holders.

In particular, limited attention has been given to how the transition from ritual-based Ozo title taking to monetary, proxy or non-ritual conferment has affected the traditional relationship between *Ozo* title, moral character and communal responsibility. The implications of this transformation for the authority of symbols such as the *Ofo* and the *Ozo* red cap also remain

insufficiently explored. Consequently, there is a need to investigate whether the weakening of the ritual dimension has transformed *Ozo* title from a moral and religious institution into primarily a marker of social status and recognition, and how such transformation has affected moral accountability and social order in Onicha-Ugbo. This study therefore seeks to examine the role of *Ozo* title taking rituals in moral formation, social regulation and communal responsibility, and to determine how changes in the ritual process have influenced the contemporary legitimacy and authority of the *Ozo* institution.

2.4.3 Loss of Cultural Heritage

The impact of modernisation, Christianity, urbanisation, multiculturality and immigration on Onicha-Ugbo traditional rituals is a complex phenomenon that reflects the wider changes occurring within the community as it tries to adapt to contemporary realities. Chleo, (2024) states that as globalisation accelerates and technological advancements reshape daily life, traditional rituals (especially), of *Ozo* title taking, faces significant challenges. For instance, there is loss of: ritual procedures, ritual language and symbolism, knowledge of taboos and prohibitions, ancestral beliefs, moral instruction, meanings attached to *Ofo*.

These rituals, he continues, which have historically served as vital expressions of cultural identity and community cohesion, could be increasingly at risk of being diluted or transformed in response to modern and other influences. This transformation manifest in various ways, from the adaptation of rituals to fit new contexts, to the outright abandonment or removal of practices deemed irrelevant in a fast-paced world (Chleo, 2024). In the past, rituals were predominantly tied to agricultural cycles, religious observances, ritual ceremonies and communal gatherings. However, with industrialisation and globalisation, the nature of rituals ceremony has shifted toward individualism and personal expression. Consequently, ritual practices have equally undergone significant transformation, reflecting cultural shifts and community changes. As Onicha-Ugbo community evolves, the traditions that define their rituals have also adapted to new circumstances, merging or altering their functions just to respond to contemporary needs.

One of the reasons for the modification or the removal of rituals of the *Ozo* title was to give concession to people who could not afford all the elaborate and expensive rituals and ceremonies involved, thereby making it possible for all and especially Christians to become members of the institution without personal crisis of conscience. But the danger with this concession is that as the community becomes more modern or becomes more multicultural,

and as more and more people become Christians, the possibility of losing the cultural heritage rises.

A new set of values has emerged since people are not ready to go through the rituals because it can be waved for them. In the traditional Onicha-Ugbo society one gained honour and respect through the *Ozo* title because of the dignity it commanded as well as the responsibility accorded to it. These days, one gains popularity and fame through wealth and high level of education. There is therefore the tendency to look down on the elderly who know no more than the village history. This research revealed that these new generation "millionaires" do not need membership of the *Ozo* institution and its rituals to become famous, or exude influence. Though they want the title for social and prestige purposes but not for what it really means.

This is further buttressed by an argument advanced by some scholars that the modern enlightened people (Onicha-Ugbo elite) have undervalued the central importance of ritual to social life (Stephenson, 2015). Stephenson maintains that they fail to realise that ritual is a window through which one can peer in two directions toward our biological or animal being and our cultural being. It is also the point at which these dimensions intersect, mingle, and influence one another because ideally, humans are products of their culture. This is because, ritual increases the likelihood of species survival given both its universality and generally collective and public nature (Stephenson, 2015).

There is considerable agreement between Chleo (2024) and Stephenson (2015). Both recognise that ritual is an important vehicle of cultural continuity and that contemporary social transformations can weaken its significance. Chleo emphasises the consequences of globalisation, technological advancement and changing social contexts, while Stephenson provides a broader theoretical explanation of ritual as the intersection between human existence and cultural life. Both perspectives support the argument that the disappearance of ritual can have consequences for collective identity.

Their difference lies primarily in analytical emphasis. Chleo concentrates on the cultural effects of contemporary transformation, including the loss of ritual procedures, language, symbolism, ancestral beliefs and moral instruction. Stephenson, by contrast, concentrates on the fundamental relationship between ritual and human cultural existence. The present study combines these perspectives but extends them by demonstrating that the loss of ritual in *Ozo* title taking has identifiable consequences for the transmission of Onicha-Ugbo cultural heritage.

Existing scholarship does not sufficiently explain what happens when *Ozo* continues to exist as a title, status and visible cultural institution but its ritual process is substantially diminished. The present study addresses this gap by demonstrating that the loss of *Ozo* ritual in Onicha-Ugbo has implications for the preservation of cultural heritage at both tangible and intangible levels. At the tangible level, symbols such as the *Ozo* regalia and title may continue to exist. At the intangible level, however, the knowledge and meanings associated with ritual procedures, ritual language, taboos, ancestral beliefs, moral instruction and *Ofo* may become increasingly difficult to transmit to younger generations. The present study contributes to scholarship on African Traditional Religion by demonstrating that ritual is simultaneously a religious practice and a mechanism of cultural transmission. It contributes to Igbo (Onicha-Ugbo) studies by providing a context-specific analysis of how the transformation of *Ozo* affects the preservation of Onicha-Ugbo cultural knowledge. It also contributes to Religious Studies by demonstrating that religious accommodation can produce unintended consequences for indigenous cultural heritage where religion and culture are institutionally intertwined.

2.4.4 Uncoordinated Value Orientation

Values are said to be inculcated through the process of socialisation: home, peer groups, schools, and societies. This is aimed at ensuring continuity in the society. In the words of Hutcheon (1999, p. 40) "socialisation is a process by which people acquire habits, intuitions, attitudes, standards, values, concepts and beliefs of their species in general… It provides for all encompassing humanisation without which members of our species are incapable of functioning in civilised society…" Similarly, Adibe, (2009) affirms that value is built into the system of the members of the society for the good of the society and such values build human society with common conscience. The kind of value acquired by individuals affects what and who they become. As a result, when persons in the same society have different orientations as it is in Onicha-Ugbo, their value orientation also differs in the same society and consequently, conflicts are generated in social matters.

In traditional Onicha-Ugbo society, values were expected to be collectively defined and transmitted through the family, community, elders, religion, customs and rituals. These shared values provided standards for determining: what was right or wrong, that constituted acceptable behavior, how younger people should relate to elders, what responsibilities, accompanied social status, how conflicts should be resolved, or who was worthy of honour and authority. Unfortunately, the community now experiences uncoordinated value orientation. Onicha-Ugbo

community no longer share, recognise, or consistently practice a common set of moral, cultural and social values. Instead, individuals or groups increasingly adopt different and sometimes conflicting standards of behaviour based on their personal beliefs, religion, education, wealth, urban experience, family background or other influences.

Odigbo (2023) also submits that the diversification and urbanisation of society seems to have equally neutralised the general perception of what *Ozo* stands for. This study reveals that different value orientation is also prominent and this is part of the problem experienced in Onicha-Ugbo community today. Ilogu (1974) observes that value is objective when it is guided by laws and customs, but becomes subjective when it is guided by individual impulses and notions. When the values are guided by laws and customs they become community values because the community will own them and these are in turn transmitted to the general public.

These are the strongholds that keep the society together. Unfortunately, values, here are gradually becoming individualised in Onicha-Ugbo social structure where people choose and pick what suits them at the expense of the communal values. Ukaegbu (1991) opines that ideally, values should be the expression of cultural tone, moral, affective, social and spiritual marked by the human society. But in a situation where these are guided by individual impulses and notions, it gives room to uncoordinated value orientation because individuals are left to design their own values as they suit them. This should not be so especially, as Argyle (1982) posits that 'values and ideals are meant to function as restrains which control and inhibit certain spontaneous patterns of behavior".

Removal of ritual in *Ozo* title taking came about because of some individuals and circumstances and gradually it has become the ideal. The importance of ritual has been subdued and this affects the harmony of the community because there is disorder, disrespect for the elderly, and all manner of social ills abounds now in Onicha-Ugbo community. A situation where a young man insults and disrespect someone much older than he is, simply because he has taken *Ozo* title is not far from uncoordinated value orientation. This is why it is said that a group of people becomes a society through a shared experience of the sacred in form of object, idea, fundamentally valued belief.

The changing perception of *Ozo* title has been associated with urbanisation and social diversification, but it remains unclear how different groups within contemporary Onicha-Ugbo interpret the meaning and obligations of the title and how these divergent interpretations affect intergenerational relationships, respect for elders, communal authority and social cohesion.

The scholars reviewed generally agree that values are socially produced rather than merely individually invented. Hutcheon (1999) emphasises socialisation as the process through which individuals acquire the habits, standards and beliefs required for social life; Adibe (2009) stresses the contribution of shared values to a common conscience; Ilogu (1974) distinguishes communal or objective values from individually determined subjective values; Ukaegbu (1991) relates values to the moral, social and spiritual character of a society; and Argyle (1982) emphasises their regulatory function.

These perspectives collectively support the proposition that social order depends upon sufficiently shared standards of conduct. Their differences lie mainly in their analytical emphasis. Hutcheon focuses on socialisation, Adibe on common conscience, Ilogu on the distinction between communal and subjective values, Ukaegbu on the cultural expression of values, and Argyle on their restraining function. Odigbo (2023), by contrast, brings the discussion closer to the contemporary *Ozo* institution by highlighting the effect of diversification and urbanisation on its social meaning.

However, these studies do not sufficiently explain how the removal of ritual from an indigenous title institution affects the coordination and transmission of values within the community. The present study addresses this gap by demonstrating that the problem of contemporary *Ozo* is not simply a decline in participation in traditional rituals. It is a transformation in the mechanism of value coordination. When ritual no longer functions as a common experiential and symbolic framework, different members of the community may interpret the title according to different value systems.

2.5 Research Gap

The ritual theories associated with scholars such as Bell, Royce, Pickering, Turner, Somé, Stephenson and Blumenkratz, drawing substantially on Durkheimian thought, provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding the social, cultural and integrative functions of ritual. These perspectives demonstrate that ritual is not merely a ceremonial activity but a mechanism through which societies transmit values, reinforce social solidarity, regulate conduct, mark transitions in status and identity, and reproduce collective meanings across generations.

Applied to *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo, this perspective suggests that the ritual process constitutes an important means through which cultural values, moral responsibilities and

communal identity are transmitted and legitimised. The weakening or removal of these rituals therefore raises questions about the continuity of the cultural and moral structures traditionally associated with the institution.

However, ritual theory does not sufficiently explain how traditional ritual systems respond when societies undergo rapid processes of modernisation, urbanisation, religious transformation and cultural diversification. While some ritual theorists acknowledge that rituals may change or that new forms of ritual may emerge in response to changing social conditions, insufficient attention has been given to how such transformation occurs within a specific indigenous institution such as *Ozo* title-taking. In particular, the literature does not adequately explain what happens to the social control, moral, integrative and cultural functions of a traditional ritual when its established forms are modified, simplified, performed by proxy or removed altogether. This creates an important gap for the present study.

Modernity theory provides a complementary perspective by explaining the processes of rationalisation, secularisation, individualisation, industrialisation and urbanisation that have transformed traditional societies. Modernity has undoubtedly contributed to technological advancement, education, economic development and improvements in many aspects of social life. Nevertheless, its processes of social transformation may also challenge traditional institutions and value systems.

In the context of Onicha-Ugbo, modernisation has interacted with Christianity, urbanisation, Western education, immigration, multiculturalism and changing socioeconomic aspirations to alter the conditions under which *Ozo* title-taking is practised and understood. Yet, existing modernity-oriented studies tend to examine these processes at broad social levels and give insufficient attention to how they intersect within the ritual dimensions of a specific indigenous institution.

Consequently, an important gap exists in understanding the relationship between modernity and the transformation of *Ozo* ritual practice. There is inadequate empirical attention to how modernisation, urbanisation, Christianity, multiculturalism and intermarriage collectively influence the performance, meaning, transmission and legitimacy of *Ozo* title taking rituals in Onicha-Ugbo. Existing studies have identified the decline or modification of traditional practices, but have not sufficiently examined whether these changes constitute cultural loss, ritual adaptation, or the emergence of new forms of cultural expression. Similarly, insufficient attention has been given to the implications of ritual transformation for the transmission of

communal values, respect for elders, moral accountability, social authority and cultural identity.

The literature specifically devoted to *Ozo* title-taking reveals a similar gap. Existing studies have examined *Ozo* title taking from different perspectives, including its relationship with traditional religion, patriarchy, leadership, social recognition, justice, history and contemporary challenges. These studies generally acknowledge the significance of *Ozo* title as an indigenous institution associated with social and political status and recognise that traditional *Ozo* title-taking involved ritual processes, sacrifices and ceremonies. Some studies also acknowledge the historical tension between Christianity and *Ozo* title taking because of the ritual and religious elements involved, as well as the subsequent concessions that have enabled some Christians to participate in the institution under modified conditions.

Nevertheless, the reviewed literature pays comparatively limited attention to the ritual dimension as a central mechanism for transmitting and legitimising the moral, cultural and communal responsibilities associated with *Ozo* title-taking. In particular, there is insufficient examination of the implications of removing, modifying or bypassing ritual requirements through monetary payment, concessions or proxy conferment. The literature does not adequately establish how such changes affect the moral formation of candidates, the legitimacy of title holders, the authority associated with *Ozo* title symbols, the transmission of cultural heritage, or the capacity of the institution to maintain communal values and social order.

The central gap addressed by this study, therefore, lies at the meeting of ritual, modernity and cultural continuity. While existing theories explain the importance of ritual and the transformative effects of modernity, and existing *Ozo* title scholarship documents, the historical development and contemporary challenges of the institution, there remains insufficient understanding of how these forces interact to transform the ritual foundations of *Ozo* title-taking in Onicha-Ugbo. This study addresses this gap by examining the changing ritual dimensions of *Ozo* title-taking and their implications for cultural heritage, moral and social order, value orientation, communal identity and the legitimacy of traditional leadership. It further considers how the strengths and benefits of modernity can be negotiated with the enduring cultural functions of traditional ritual, rather than assuming that modernity and tradition must necessarily exist in opposition. The study thus seeks to contribute to the understanding of how an indigenous institution can adapt to contemporary realities while

retaining those ritual and cultural elements that continue to provide meaning, identity, responsibility and social cohesion.

2.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature from theories of modernity, and ritual theories as well as empirical reviews from individual authors and journals. They share common features on how ritual occurs as a socially shared response to socially shared conditions. Ritual's mechanisms are socially celeberated and facilitated, its specific forms are socially determined, and when practiced, it is as part of a socially transmitted system of belief and practice. Therefore, the importance of ritual in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo can never be overemphasised. Ritual makes for social cohesion, harmony, integration; it preserves cultural heritage, promotes cultural values. It enhances respect for elders and identity with the community

Rituals have served as foundational elements throughout human history, often reflecting the values, beliefs, and social structures of ancient civilisations. They created frameworks through which societies organised their experiences, marked significant events, and reinforced collective identity. The historical significance of ritual can be seen in various contexts, ranging from religious ceremonies to everyday practices. Rituals have also contributed to cultural continuity by passing down traditions and communal knowledge through generations. These shared practices of rituals helped individuals connect to their ancestors, reinforcing cultural identities that endured despite external influences.

However, these values have been compromised due to the impact of modern civilisation, Christianity, urbanisation and immigration and inter-marriages. Consequently, when things fall apart, surely, the center cannot hold. Some of the reviewed works attest to the fact that ritual is an important instrument in marker events. It is that sole action that unites, strengthens and binds members and community together such that an absence of it means a society cannot exist culturally, sociologically, psychologically and religiously. Therefore, the absence of ritual in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo following the above factors has resulted in weakened social structure, breakdown in moral and social order, loss of cultural heritage and uncoordinated value orientations.

There is commercialisation and commodification of rituals, particularly in modern consumer culture in Onicha-Ugbo. This has equally impacted on traditional rites which affected their meaning and raised questions about authenticity and the preservation of cultural heritage. This

commodification has stripped rituals of their original meanings, reducing them to mere performances for entertainment rather than genuine expressions of cultural heritage. More information on this research that guided the researcher on more reliable and informed researched work are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discussed the following: the research design the study adopted, the study area, the target population, the sample population that was studied, as well as the techniques and sampling procedures that were applied, and the instruments that were used for data collection. The chapter equally highlighted the procedure that the researcher employed during data collection, and the methods that were used to analyse and interpret the data that was collected. It also included the ethical considerations that the researcher followed during the study.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a mixed research design of survey quantitative and phenomenological qualitative methods. Mixed methods approach unites the results of quantitative and qualitative patterns and helps to expand the scope of the study (Mvumbi and Ngumbi, 2015). The use of quantitative research was to facilitate data collection and analysis of numerical data so as to describe and clarify, the value of ritual, reasons for the removal and the implications of its absence in *Ozo* title taking and on the community.

In employing quantitative research method, the study wanted to know the value of ritual ceremonies in *Ozo* title taking and the degree of the impact of lack of ritual in *Ozo* title taking ceremony. Qualitative research approach was also used because it explored the experience and perception of participants regarding a phenomenon. It allows an in-depth investigation of a social or human phenomenon in non-numeric terms (Kimalu and Mrimba, 2015). Here the researcher tried to ascertain how people generally explain what is going on in Onicha-Ugbo social structure, how it affected the value system and communal living and how they intend to address the situation or the way forward.

3.3 Description of the Study Area

Onicha-Ugbo is a town in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The traditional ruler is his Royal Majesty (HRM), Agbogidi Victor Chukwuma-lieze 1, the Obi of Onicha-Ugbo. Its rulership is directly from Ezechime. Onicha-Ugbo is among the nine towns that make up the ancient Ezechima clan in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State. However, though the nine towns are from the same clan, (*Anioma*), they

have very distinct ways of conferring *Ozo* title (Uba and Ani, 2018). Onicha-Ugbo people are known as *Anioma* people. *Anioma* is commonly referred to as "*Ndi Enuani*" that is *Enuani* people. *Anioma* comprises of communities and towns in present Delta State, South-South region of Nigeria. They are also designated as Delta North for administrative reasons.

Onicha-Ugbo is a conglomeration of people who migrated from different origins. It is boarded by the following communities: East – Issele Uku and Idumuje Unor, West – Igbodo and Obior, North – Idumuje Ugboko and Ewohimi. South – Ubulu Uku. Onicha -Ugbo, is made up of four villages known as *Ogbe*: *Ogbe Obi, Ishiekpe, Ogbekenu* and *Umuolo and Agba* (Okwechime, 2012). Each village is a compact settlement divided into wards or quarter (*Idumu*) and each quarter consists of non-nuclear extended families (*ebo*) made up of smaller nuclear extended families (*umunna*).

They all live in close proximity and recognizing the authority of the oldest man and or the most senior *Ozo* title holder who is a custodian of Nze (spiritual leader) of the quarter (Okwechime, 2012). The *Nze* custodian keeps the *Ofo* (the symbol of authority) of the village while each *Ozo* titled man has his personal *ofo*. Quarters consisting of single non-nuclear extended families are characteristic and members do not marry from within the quarter. The quarter is usually an exogamous unit and each unit by virtue of unique historical antecedents or ceremonies has its specific greeting (Okwechime, 2012).

Onicha-Ugbo was chosen as the study area because Onicha-Ugbo is the head of the Ezechime clan. Whatever happens in Onicha-Ugbo influences what happens in other communities and whatever cultural or traditional problems or challenges that affect Onicha-Ugbo can spill over to other communities. Therefore, addressing the issues around ritual ceremony in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, provided a gateway to similar issues in other communities even though they confer *Ozo* title differently. They share a common local institution, be it *Ikpa*-alo or *Ichiozo*, they are all different names of the same institution.

3.4 Target Population

The target population is the total aggregation of items from which the sample is selected (Selvam, 2019). It is the entire people or all items from which samples are taken for measurement (Kombo and Tromp, 2018). The total population of men in Onicha-Ugbo from the latest population census of 2015 records it at 10,000 of them (Onicha-Ugbo Population: Population Change from 2000 to 2015, nd). About 7,900 of them have taken *Ozo* title. This

research was carried out among Onicha-Ugbo men in five different groups. The research was carried out on men because the title is solely for men and it is an institution that every man desires to belong to.

The first category were Christian men whether or not they were *Ozo* title holders. Some of them brought their insignia to the Church for blessing after the ceremony in a solemn celebration and commitment to abide by the Church's laid down rules. While others skipped bringing their insignia to the Church. They took the title monetised and by proxy. The reason for including the above category was so as to inquire from Christians who are *Ozo* title holders, their thoughts about ritual actions in *Ozo* title taking as well as find out the thinking and feeling of the non – members among them.

The second group were home based young adult men of 20-40 years. These are already title holders probably; their fathers were influential to have secured the title on their behalf. They did not undergo the ritual process and though they might be younger biologically, but by virtue of *Ozo* title taking, they are senior citizens. The reason for having this category was to enable the researcher find out what they think of those who are not yet *Ozo* members and how they relate to them in matters of tradition.

The third group is made up of urban dwellers of 30-70 years, some of whom were born in the city and so have lived most of their lives in the city. They have little or no knowledge of *Ozo* title taking ceremony. Yet, they are *Ozo* title holders. They might have taken the title by proxy, monetised. They were included in this research in order to give the researcher an understanding of how urban life impacts on the people and how much of their culture they know.

The fourth group is made up of home based adult men of 45-65 who have not taken *Ozo* title possibly for lack of finance and have nobody to stand for them and consequently face humiliation and embarrassment from time to time. The researcher wanted to know how they feel and react before the *Ozo* members. Home based elders of 75-90 years, men, were the fifth group. These were elders who have lived through the days of ritual ceremonies and who understand the values. This group of respondents were necessary in this research because they are well versed in matters of culture and tradition. They had lived through the era of ritualised *Ozo* title and are now witnessing the age of no ritual at all. Their contribution helped to enrich the study.

The above information, according to the 2015 Indices of Population of Onicha-Ugbo, Aniocha North, Delta State, Nigeria (Onicha-Ugbo Population: Population Change from 2000 to 2015, nd), and from traditional records is explained in the table below.

Table 1: ***Target Population Table***

Categories	**Population**
Christian men: *Ozo* title holders: with or without presenting insignia to Church for blessing and non-*Ozo* members	1,500
Home based young adults who are *Ozo* title holders, 20-40 years	2,250
Urban dwellers: young adults & elders of 30-70 years who are *Ozo* title holders	2,200
Home based adults without *Ozo* title who are 45 - 65 years	1,550
Home based elders who are *Ozo* title holders 75-90 years	2,500
Total Population	**10,000**

3.5 Description of Sample and Sampling Procedures

The overall number of respondents that were engaged in this study is referred to as the sample size, and this number was split down into sub-groups based on demographics such as age, status, religion and residence as shown above to ensure that the total sample accurately represents the entire population. The purpose of determining sample size for this study was to ensure that the conclusions gained after analysis could be applied to the full population under investigation. Sample size determination is the process of choosing the right number of people from a larger group to use in a sample. The individuals selected form the sample and the larger group from which the sample is selected forms the population (Kimalu and Marimba,2014).

Yamane's (1967) formula was used to calculate a sample size which represented the total target population of 10,000. A 50 per cent confidence level and p = .05 was assumed for this equation. Therefore, to calculate sample size (Yamane, 1967) (where 'n' is the sample size, 'N' is the population size, and 'e' is the level of precision). A calculation of sample size in this

survey from the formula, gave a total of 200 sample size for this study: The target population divided by fifty percent confidence level. The formula for determining the size is thus:

n = N/ 1+ N(e)2

n = is the required sample size from the population under study

Where N = is the whole population that is under study

e =is the sampling error or level of precision

Therefore, n =10,000/1+ N(e)2

n = 10,000/1 + 10,000 (0.05)2

n = 10,000/50.0025

n = 200

The total sample for the study was 200 respondents. The need to identify the desired population and the sample size from the accessible population was necessary because of the difficulty in having to subject the entire target population to investigation. Given the different strata of respondents, the researcher used Walpole (1982) formula for proportions in order to ensure equal distribution of respondents.

ni = (Ni/ N) n

ni = Quota size required

Where: Ni =Number of respondents in each stratum

N= Total study population

n=Total sample size that will be used

With the above formula, the researcher was able to derive the sample for each category in this way: ni = (200÷ 10,000) x 1,500 = 30

ni = (200÷ 10,000) x 2,250 = 45

ni = (200÷ 10,000) x 2,200 = 44

ni = (200÷ 10,000) x 1550 = 31

ni = (200÷ 10,000) *x* 2,500 = 50

The table below shows sample frame that was derived from using the formula above. The researcher tried to avoid sampling bias in the selection of the different categories by ensuring that all categories were represented.

Table 2: Sample and Sampling Matrix

Participant categories	**Target Population**	**Sample size**	**Sampling Method**
Christian men: *Ozo* title holders with or without presenting the insignia and non-Ozo members	1,500	30	Simple Random sampling
Home based young adults of 20-40 years with *Ozo* title	2,250	45	Simple Random sampling
Urban dwellers: young adults & elders: of 30-70 years with *Ozo* title	2,200	44	Simple Random Sampling
Home based adults of 45- 65 years without *Ozo* title	1,550	31	Purposive sampling
Home based elders of 75-90 years with *Ozo* title	2,500	50	Purposive and Snowball Samplings
Total Population	**10,000**	**200**	

3.6 Sampling Procedures

The essence of sampling was geared towards selecting some cases from the whole population of study. Sampling is economical because it helps to reduce cost since it is more beneficial and effective to interview a few people than to interview many. There are different types of sampling procedure and the researcher adopted three of these types that helped to get the right size. Here is a description of the three.

i) Probability Sampling Method

The study used a simple random of probability as well as purposive and snowball samplings of non-probability sampling procedures to select target groups. Probability sampling, also known as random sampling, is a situation where each unit has an equal access of being included in the sample. It gives each of the elements in the population an equal probability of getting into the sample (Kimalu and Marimba, 2014). In this study probability sampling of a simple random sampling was employed for the following groups namely:

A simple random sampling was used to sample Christians who have taken *Ozo* title with or without bringing their insignia to Church and non *Ozo* members with a sample size of 30. Likewise, home based young adults of 20-40 years of age who have taken the title with a sample size of 45 and urban dwellers comprising of young adults and elders of 30 and 70 years who have taken *Ozo* title, with a sample size of 44. The researcher ensured that the sampling was devoid of bias by making sure that respondents were randomly selected from the different categories of respondents and not from one particular category.

ii) Non-Probability Sampling Method

In Non-probability sampling, items for the sampling are selected deliberately (Kimalu and Marimba, 2014). In this study, the researcher used purposive non- probability sampling and snowball sampling as shown below.

A. Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling formed the basis of choosing the sample population, to get the sample size of the following age bracket of male adults: home based adults without *Ozo* title: 45-65 years with sample size of 31. This group of men have not taken *Ozo* title and their response was important to this study. It enabled the researcher to have an idea of what the respondents think and feel about being in a system and yet do not belong to it. The home based elders with *Ozo* title: 75-90 years with sample size of 50 were equally sampled because the researcher thought this group had lived through the years of ritual exercise and are now in the present era of no ritual. Hence, their response in this research was highly important. The researcher tried to guard against bias by allowing respondents respond freely to the questions.

B. Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was used to identify sub-groups in the given population. The researcher identified one or two elders who willingly assisted and who in turn, gave a reference for

another elder. Snowball sampling was therefore used to sample home based elders with *Ozo* title because of their wealth of experience.

3.7 Description of Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments are tools by which data are collected from respondents. The fieldwork analysis examined the data collected through the following instruments: interview guide, questionnaires and focus group discussion guide.

3.7.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is an instrument used to gather data over a large sample. Questionnaires were sent to respondents in the above categories of target population and sample sizes. The questionnaire for this study included both closed and open-ended questions. The researcher distributed the questionnaire directly to respondents. This gave the respondents freedom to respond to questions and gave further explanations where necessary. Each section of the questionnaire was developed on a specific objective and research question for the five categories of participants above. It helped to facilitate an in-depth investigation of the topic.

3.7.2 Interview Guide

Interviews are orally asked questions. In an interview the researcher asked the respondents some relevant questions regarding the research topic. In this study, the information gathered were eventually used for data analysis. Both structured and semi-structured or unstructured interviews were adopted in this study. Interview guide was employed to help the researcher to establish, clarify certain arears of the research by probing the respondents. It helped the researcher acquire relevant information in relation to the research topic and the objectives. It also guided the respondents to give more comprehensive and authentic information to the topic of the study. The researcher used interviews through physical and WhatsApp means to reach out to respondents. Interviews were administered to *Ozo* title elders and non *Ozo* title holder. These were used to collect qualitative data information on individual's perspectives and experiences.

3.7.3 Focus Group Discussion Guide

Five different focused group discussion of three home based *Ozo* titled elders, three home based adults without *Ozo* title, three Christian men who are *Ozo* title holders, three home based young adults with *Ozo* title and three urban dwellers were formed for discussion on relevant sets of

ideas about *Ozo* title taking. With the help of a focus group discussion guide, the researcher selected the participants directly by the researcher herself. The aim was to ascertain their thoughts on the value of rituals in *Ozo* title taking, their absence and the implications of not engaging in the ritual dimension.

3.7.4 Observation Guide

Ideally, in observation the investigator becomes an active functioning member of the culture under study. But in this study, the researcher was not able to function actively in person because *Ozo* title is solely for men and because the public ceremony no longer happens. However, to ensure a more authentic result, a research assistant was employed for the purpose of furnishing the researcher with relevant information that was needed for the study. The following account was observed by an elder, the number one citizen, in the days of ritual ceremony:

> In the past, one who has not taken *Ozo* title does not wear the red cap nor take *Ozo* title while one's father was still alive. Hence, the institution was mainly for the elderly men. But much later, some wealthy individuals broke this protocol which is an aberration. Some influential fathers started taking the title for their sons because it was usually a cost effect project that many men could not afford. In the time past also, "*Ina Obibi*" (an apprenticeship living and character formation in the house of an older *Ozo* titled men) was practiced. It was a ceremony that followed after *Ozo* title taking. It lasted for a couple of days. The essence was for the new *Ozo* to understudy the *Okpala* (the *Ozo* titled elder) on how to live the new status, how to mediate cases when an *Okpala* deviates and how he should behave generally. He went with his wife who in turn understudied the wife of the older *Okpala* as well. These were some of the stages of becoming a full *Ozo* man that we have now lost to monetised *Ozo* title taking. Part of the reason for monetising it was just to accommodate Christians who wished to take the title. It is now like becoming a professor without education. The certificate bought and the one acquired are not the same. The two owners do not have the same experience. Therefore, it is very necessary we go back to our root. Ritual in itself is not fetish but how it is used.

3.8 Pilot testing

Pilot test is necessary to make sure questions are clear enough and that respondents will not face challenge responding to them as well as to get a general feel of the questions. Pilot testing was carried out on four men from Christian group, who have taken *Ozo* title, four young adults who have not taken the title, four men who have taken the title and who reside in the city and four elders who are home based and have taken the title as well. The choice was a representative of the study population. Pre-testing helped the researcher to modify the data collection instruments in accordance with the responses received. Equally, it facilitated the researcher to

assess the significance and the reliability of the data collection instrument as well. The respondents in the pre-test study responded positively, affirming to the researcher that the responses from the field would equally be feasible.

3.8.1 Validity of Research Instrument

Validity is the measure of how accurate a test measures what it is meant to measure and the results obtained which represents the topic under study. It validates the confidence that what is revealed by the finding tallies with the reality and that the scale will produce results that will correspond to reality. The researcher applied construct validity to ensure that data collection tools measured what the study intended them for quantitative data while for qualitative data the study adopted the validity that ensures the confidence that the scale produced results that resonated to reality. Hence, data collection tools were well understood and relevant to the research questions and objectives

3.8.2 Reliability of Research Instruments

Reliability in research seeks to prove that if the same research questions were repeated at any other time, the answer will be similar. To ensure the reliability of this study, the same questions in the questionnaire were administered to all the groups. The researcher interpreted the questions where necessary, to different respondents in accord to their level of understanding. The researcher also ensured there was no bias response. This was to ensure accuracy and consistency

3.8.3 Description of Data Collection Procedures

Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used. Quantitative data came from questionnaires, while qualitative data flowed from oral interviews, and focus group discussion schedules. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents by the researcher and these were returned directly to the researcher. Elders, young adult men of different age group brackets who have either taken *Ozo* title or who have not as well as from Christian men who are *Ozo* title holders and non-*Ozo* members were invited to participate in focus group discussion. The number one citizen of the community, his royal highness, was invited in participation observation. Five different sets of questions were administered to the five selected focus groups: elders, young adults, Christians, urban dwellers and non-*Ozo* members.

3.9 Description of Data Analysis Procedures

The responses from the filled questionnaires and interviews formed the collected raw data for analysis. Triangulation was used for the purpose of obtaining complementary quantitative and qualitative data on the same topic. This involved the concurrent though separate collection and analysis of the two types of data. To facilitate the data analysis, the researcher used Statistical Package for Social Science version 20 (SPSS) software to calculate and generate results for the quantitative data.

The data was coded to convert them into a version that SPSS can interpret. Since the researcher used mixed method design in order to improve evaluation, the open- ended items were analysed qualitatively. The raw data in quantitative data were analysed systemically by arranging, organising and breaking data into manageable units. Data was categorised into themes and thematic analysis was used to discuss the findings. This helped the researcher gain deeper understanding of the dynamics of the value of ritual, reasons for its removal and the implications of its absence in *Ozo* title taking as in the objectives

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research is very necessary to ensure that the researcher seeks authority from relevant offices for the data collection. In the first instance, this research is the work of the researcher. It is original. Permission was sought and letter of authorisation to carry out research was given by the Department of Religious Studies, Catholic University of Eastern Africa. In this study, ethical issues like safeguarding of the respondents' privacy and anonymity were ensured. The researcher made sure participants were not manipulated or induced in any way to falsify information. The researcher trusted and respected the confidentiality of the respondents. The purpose of the study was made known to the respondents and their consent was sought. Respondents were assured that all the information collected was used for academic purposes only. Respondents were given a free hand to respond to questions as they dimed fit. Works consulted were duly referenced. The data collected were used for this study only. A letter of permission for the use of the photos was given and the photos were stored and used solely for this study.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the various procedures involved in research, beginning with identification of research design, study area, drawing up the sample population and sample

frame. The chapter also captured the various methods and tools used for data collection from respondents. The chapter equally highlighted the various ways employed in analysing interpreating, the result, as well as the presentation. Finally, the chapter looked at the role of ethics in research of this kind and the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the ethical standards are adhered to.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4. 1 Introduction

This chapter presents the general information, the demographic information. It also presents the data analysis, the research findings and interpretation.

4.1.1 General Information

The study focused on general and demographic information in order to provide a contextual overview of the respondents. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants for data collection and all 200 questionnaires were duly completed and returned, representing the actual number of participants involved in the study. This gave a response rate of 100%. The returned questionnaires provided both quantitative and qualitative information, which helped in examining how *Ozo* title taking rituals were perceived and experienced. This information also provided a strong foundation for interpreting the findings within the context of the respondents' demographic backgrounds and general profiles.

Table 3: General Information

Questionnaire Distribution	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires distributed	200	100%
Questionnaires returned	200	100%

4.1.2 Demographic Data of the Respondents

The demographic data of the respondents were analysed in order to provide background information on the people who participated in the study on the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking. The analysis focused on the respondents' age brackets, religious denomination, *Ozo* title status, participation in ritual ceremony, and whether they brought their insignia to church. The demographic data helped to show the characteristics of the respondents and provided a foundation for understanding their views on the ritual dimensions of *Ozo* title taking.

4.1.3 Age Distribution of Respondents

Table 4: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Bracket	Frequency	Percentage
20–40	30	15%
30–70	90	45%
45–65	30	15%
75–90	50	25%
Total	**200**	**100%**

The table above showed that the majority of the respondents were within the broader 45–90 years' age range. This indicated that most respondents were mature and elderly men who were more likely to understand the cultural, social, and ritual significance of *Ozo* title taking. Respondents aged 30–70 formed a major part of the sample, with 90 respondents representing 45%. Those aged 45–65 and 75–90 also formed an important proportion of the respondents. The least represented group was the 20–40 years and 45-65 years' age bracket, with 30 respondents representing 15%. This finding suggested that *Ozo* title taking and its ritual practices were more common among older adult men, especially those between 75 and 90 years because they had lived through the years of ritual ceremony and had the experience and exposure.

4.1.4 Religious Affiliations/ Denomination of Respondents

Sampling for the study was done by selecting respondents from different religious denominations within the study area in order to obtain views from both Christians and non-Christians participants. A total of 200 respondents were sampled for the study. The sampling ensured that the respondents represented the religious composition relevant to the investigation, especially because the study examined the relationship between Christianity and traditional *Ozo* title-taking practices. Respondents were therefore grouped according to their religious denomination, as shown in Table 5.

4.1.5: Affiliation/Denomination of Respondents

Table 5: Affiliation/Denomination of Respondents

Denomination	Frequency	Percentage
African Traditional Religion	120	60%
Catholic	60	30%
Others	20	10%
Total	**200**	**100%**

The results revealed that 120 respondents, representing 60%, were affiliated with African Traditional Religion, 60 respondents, representing 30%, were Catholics, while 20 respondents, representing 10%, belonged to other religious denominations. This showed that the majority of the sampled respondents were adherent of African Traditional Religion. However, the presence of respondent's Catholics was also important because it reflected the continued co-existence of traditional beliefs and Christian practices within the community.

The findings suggest that *Ozo* title taking exists within a religiously diverse setting where traditional religion, Catholicism, and other denominations interact. This is due to the concession that allowed Christians take *Ozo* title without the ritual experience. Many who ordinarily would not have taken the title where encouraged to do so since the ritual has been removed. It equally explains the facts that these Catholics who have taken the title are more inclined to the observant of traditional religious practices than to the observant of catholic teachings because some of the respondents said that culture is important.

Therefore, the finding demonstrates a clear interaction between African traditional religious identity, Catholic affiliation, and other Christian denominations within the practice of *Ozo* title taking.

4.1.6 *Ozo* Title Status of Respondents

Table 6: *Ozo* Title Status of Respondents

***Ozo* Title Holder**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Yes	150	75%
No	50	25%
Total	**200**	**100%**

Table 6 showed the *Ozo* title status of the respondents. The analysis revealed that 150 respondents, representing 75%, were *Ozo* title holders, while 50 respondents, representing 25%, were not *Ozo* title holders. This result indicated that a large proportion of the respondents had direct experience with the *Ozo* institution. Since most of the respondents were *Ozo* title holders, the information collected from them was likely to be reliable and relevant to the study because they had some ideas associated with *Ozo* title taking.

The finding further suggested that the sample was appropriate for examining the ritual dimension in ritual ceremony of *Ozo* title taking. This is because the majority of the respondents although they did not have firsthand knowledge of the practices involved but they learned through shared stories, including the procedures, requirements, cultural expectations, symbolic acts, and changes associated with becoming an *Ozo* title holder. Their personal involvement enabled them to provide informed responses on how *Ozo* title taking is carried out, the meaning attached to the rituals, and the extent to which such practices are still observed or modified in the study area. Therefore, their responses provided useful evidence for understanding the relationship between *Ozo* title taking, ritual practice, and contemporary cultural and religious influences.

4.1.7 Participation in Ritual Ceremony

Table 7: Participation in Ritual Ceremony

Went Through Ritual Ceremony	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	4	2%
No	196	98%
Total	**200**	**100%**

The table indicated that only 4 respondents, representing 2%, had gone through the ritual ceremony, while 196 respondents, representing 98%, had not. The data presented in the table reveal a striking decline in direct participation in the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking. This overwhelming disparity demonstrates that ritual participation is no longer a normative or widespread feature of *Ozo* title taking among the respondents. The finding therefore provides strong empirical support for the argument that, in contemporary Onicha-Ugbo, the *Ozo* institution has survived to a much greater extent than the ritual processes that traditionally constituted and legitimised membership in the institution.

This finding is significant because it qualifies any assumption that the persistence of the *Ozo* title necessarily implies the persistence of *Ozo* rituality. The data demonstrate that the two can no longer be treated as synonymous. The institution remains socially recognisable, but its ritual foundation appears to have been substantially weakened. In this sense, the finding confirms the broader argument of ritual scholarship that ritual is central to the constitution, transmission and legitimisation of social institutions, while also extending that scholarship by demonstrating what may occur when an institution survives after significant elements of its ritual system have been removed. Rather than producing the complete disappearance of the institution, ritual reduction in Onicha-Ugbo, *Ozo* title taking appears to have produced an institutional transformation, in which the social identity of *Ozo* has been retained while some of its traditional ritual mechanisms have become marginal.

The finding also confirms earlier observations in this study concerning the influence of Christianity on the transformation of *Ozo* title taking. The acceptance of *Ozo* title taking among Christians without participation in significant traditional rituals created a pathway through which title membership could be separated from ritual ceremony. This development is

important because it represents more than the simple abandonment of traditional religious practices. It illustrates a process of religious negotiation and ritual substitution, whereby an institution originally embedded in the indigenous religious worldview is retained but adapted to conform to a Christian framework.

The present finding therefore supports scholarship on the interaction between Christianity and African Traditional Religion, particularly arguments that Christianisation does not always result in the total disappearance of indigenous institutions but may instead generate selective retention, rejection and reinterpretation of traditional practices. The result also showed that knowledge of *Ozo* ritual ceremony was not limited to those who had personally participated in the ritual.

Many respondents may still understand the meaning, value, and cultural importance of *Ozo* title taking through family discussions, community teachings, and observation of title holders, oral tradition, and social interaction. Therefore, although the ritual itself appears not to be actively practiced by most respondents, knowledge of *Ozo* ritual ceremony still exists within the community. This means that the cultural memory of the ritual remains, even when direct participation in the ritual ceremony has greatly declined.

4.1.8: Knowledge of *Ozo* Title Taking Ceremony

Table 8: Knowledge of Ozo Title Taking Ceremony

Knowledge of *Ozo* Ritual Ceremony	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Yes	160	80%
No	40	20%
Total	**200**	**100%**

Table 8 illustrates that 160 respondents, representing 80%, had knowledge of *Ozo* title taking rituals, while 40 respondents, representing 20%, did not. This shows that awareness of *Ozo* title taking remains high even though actual participation in the ritual ceremony is very low. The finding therefore suggests that respondents may know about the *Ozo* title taking ritual process without necessarily undergoing the ritual. This supports the view that the ritual aspect is no longer commonly practiced, but the knowledge and cultural understanding of *Ozo* ritual ceremony are still in existence within the community.

4.1.9 Bringing of Insignia to Church

Table 9: Bringing of Insignia to Church

Brought Insignia to Church	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	20	10%
No	180	90%
Total	**200**	**100%**

The data showed that 20 respondents, representing 10%, brought their insignia to Church, while 180 respondents, representing 90%, did not. This result indicated that only a small proportion of the respondents publicly displayed their *Ozo* insignia within the church setting. The majority appeared not to bring the insignia to church, possibly because of personal conviction, denominational restrictions, Church teachings, or the belief that traditional symbols should not be displayed during Christian worship. This finding suggested that many respondents separated their traditional *Ozo* identity from their church participation.

In summary, the demographic data showed that the respondents were mainly adults, with the majority falling within the 45–90 years' age bracket. The age categories began from 20–40 years, showing that the study included both younger and older respondents. The data further revealed that most of them did not undergo the ritual ceremony, reflecting the gradual removal or reduction of ritual practices in *Ozo* ritual ceremony. Similarly, only 10% brought their insignia to church, while 90% did not. This suggested that many respondents viewed the church setting as separate from the public display of traditional *Ozo* symbols. Overall, the demographic analysis provided a clear background to the study and showed that the respondents possessed adequate experience and knowledge relevant to the investigation of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking.

4.2 Research Questions and Findings

4.2.1 The Values of the Ritual Dimention in *Ozo* title Taking

The *Ozo* title has historically been one of the most significant traditional institutions in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria. The institution functioned as a vital mechanism for preserving cultural heritage, regulating social behavior, and establishing community hierarchy. Central to

the *Ozo* title was the ritual dimension, which involved structured ceremonial processes, spiritual observances, and formal instruction in community norms and values. Over time, however, the ritual dimension of the *Ozo* title taking was increasingly diminished or entirely removed. This shift occurred due to a combination of factors, including modernisation, religious influences, economic pressures, (immigration and intermarriage, urbanisation). The removal raised concerns regarding the preservation of traditional knowledge, social cohesion, and community survival.

To investigate the implications of the removal, a survey was conducted among home-based young adults aged 20–40 years who were *Ozo* title holders or closely familiar with the institution. The survey focused on four key areas: understanding of the *Ozo* title, perception of the role of rituals ceremony in promoting moral and social order, recognition of rituals' importance for community survival, and acknowledgment of the role of rituals as sources of social "emotional energy." The data were analysed descriptively to assess trends in perception and to evaluate the cultural and social consequences of the removal of rituals.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Perceptions of Ozo Rituals

Question	**Yes (%)**	**No (%)**	**I Don't Know (%)**
1. Do you have an idea what *Ozo* title means?	85	10	5
2. Does ritual ceremony of *Ozo* institution promote moral and social order as well as preserve cultural values and heritage of Onicha-Ugbo people?	78	12	10
3. The primary purpose of ritual in *Ozo* title taking is to ensure the survival of the community and this depends on the righteous way the community celeberates and employs the ritual process.	80	15	5
4. Ritual holds the society together because it is "emotional energy" produced by ritualised social interactions.	75	18	7

Source: Field survey conducted in Onicha-Ugbo (2026)

The first survey question assessed whether respondents had an understanding of what the *Ozo* title meant. Findings revealed that 85% of respondents had a clear understanding of the title,

while 10% indicated they did not know, and 5% were uncertain. This finding suggested that despite the removal of ritual practices, knowledge of the *Ozo* title itself persisted among the majority of young adults. Ethnographic evidence indicated that this understanding was often derived from family narratives, community elders, and historical texts, rather than direct participation in ritual ceremonies.

Nevertheless, the absence of ritual engagement meant that the experiential and practical understanding of the *Ozo* title was likely diminished. Rituals had historically served not only as symbolic ceremonies but also as practical mechanisms for transmitting knowledge of social responsibilities, ethical behavior, and leadership expectations. Without active participation, younger generations were at risk of developing only a theoretical understanding of the institution, potentially weakening the depth of cultural knowledge and the practical application of traditional norms.

However, the finding also extends this understanding by demonstrating that the survival of cultural knowledge does not necessarily imply the survival of cultural practice. Although a substantial majority understood what the *Ozo* title represented, this knowledge existed alongside the near absence of direct ritual participation. The implication is that *Ozo* knowledge may increasingly be transmitted in a descriptive or intellectual form rather than through embodied experience. When ritual transmission declines, cultural knowledge may survive cognitively while becoming progressively weaker experientially.

4.2.1.1 Rituals Promotes Moral and Social Order

On the perceived role of rituals ceremony in maintaining moral and social order while preserving cultural heritage. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of respondents affirmed that rituals historically promoted these objectives. These rituals functioned as structured processes that instilled societal values, reinforced respect for authority, and encouraged ethical conduct. Respondents noted that rituals provided a framework for addressing conflicts, ensuring fairness in leadership, and reinforcing the importance of communal responsibilities.

Their response confirms the wider anthropological and sociological argument that rituals are not merely symbolic or religious performances but mechanisms through which societies reproduce shared norms and regulate conduct. In this respect, the finding is consistent with the classical functionalist position that institutions survive relatively because they perform

functions necessary for the stability and continuity of society. The evidence also supports the Durkhein's understanding of ritual as a means through which collective values are reaffirmed.

Participation in *Ozo* title taking ritual historically placed the man within a moral framework in which membership required obligations as well as privileges. The significance of the ritual therefore lay partly in its ability to transform abstract cultural expectations into lived and publicly recognized responsibilities. The man did not only acquire a title; he underwent a process through which his relationship to elders, the community, authority, and accepted standards of conduct was symbolically redefined.

Conversely, 12% of respondents disagreed with this assertion, indicating that some believed that societal values could be maintained through alternative methods, such as formal education or religious institutions. Ten percent (10%) were uncertain, reflecting the uncertainty created by the absence of direct ritual experience. The diminishing practice of rituals had reduced opportunities for young adults to internalise these values through lived experiences. Consequently, the socialising function of *Ozo* rituals had been partially weakened, potentially leading to a gap in moral guidance and community cohesion.

This minority response is analytically significant because it indicates that ritual is not universally perceived as indispensable to moral regulation. Some respondents believed that formal education, Christianity, modern law, and other contemporary institutions could perform comparable regulatory functions. Thus, the findings do not support the argument that social order necessarily collapses when traditional rituals decline. Rather, they suggest a functional displacement: some functions formerly performed through *Ozo* title rituals can be transferred to modern institutions, but the cultural meanings and experiential dimensions attached to those functions may not be transferred with equal effectiveness.

This finding therefore both confirms and extends existing scholarship. It confirms the proposition that rituals contribute to social regulation, but extends it by showing that modernisation does not necessarily eliminate social regulation; instead, it changes the institutional location through which regulation is achieved. In Onicha-Ugbo, formal education and religious institutions may continue to transmit moral values, but respondents perceived them as lacking some of the culturally specific symbolism, communal participation, and intergenerational authority historically associated with *Ozo* title taking rituals.

The finding is particularly important in relation to modernity theory. Modernity introduces alternative institutions, rationalities, and systems of authority that gradually displace traditional mechanisms of social organisation. The reduction of *Ozo* ritual practice can therefore be interpreted as part of a wider transition from a culturally embedded system of moral regulation to a more pluralistic system in which traditional, religious, educational, legal, and individualistic forms of authority coexist. The consequence is not necessarily the disappearance of morality, but the weakening of one culturally specific mechanism through which morality was previously internalized.

Table 11: Rituals Promotes Moral and Social Order

Item	Affirmed/Agreed	Disagreed	Uncertain/Unsure	Key Interpretation
Rituals promote moral and social order	78%	12%	10%	Rituals instilled values, respect for authority, ethical conduct, conflict resolution, fairness, and communal responsibility.
Rituals ensure survival of the community	80%	15%	5%	Rituals sustained cohesion, identity, belonging, accountability, governance, and intergenerational continuity.

4.2.1.2 Perception of the role of rituals in ensuring the survival of the community.

Eighty percent (80%) of respondents recognised that ritual practices were essential for sustaining social cohesion and ensuring continuity. Rituals historically reinforced hierarchical structures, facilitated communal decision-making, and provided mechanisms for conflict resolution. For example, ceremonial oaths and symbolic acts during *Ozo* ritual ceremony instilled a sense of

collective responsibility and accountability, which ensured the effective governance of the community.

The finding that 80% of respondents regarded rituals as important for the survival and continuity of the community provides even stronger evidence of the integrative significance attributed to *Ozo* ritual practice. Respondents associated ritual with social cohesion, communal identity, belonging, accountability, governance, conflict resolution, and intergenerational continuity. This finding confirms the scholarship that views ritual as a mechanism through which communities reproduce themselves socially and culturally.

From a functionalist perspective, the finding suggests that *Ozo* rituals performed integrative functions by connecting individual members to the wider social system. The *Ozo* institution created a structured relationship between the *Ozo* candidate and the community and provided expectations concerning leadership, responsibility, and service. Ritual participation therefore helped reproduce not only individual identities but also the institutional structure of the community. The finding also corresponds closely with Durkheim's conception of collective consciousness. The ritual brought members of the community together around symbols, values, and shared experiences, thereby reinforcing a sense of belonging. The significance of the ritual was consequently not exhausted by the individual candidate. Its performance reaffirmed the community's collective identity and reminded participants of their membership in a social order that preceded and would outlive them.

Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents disagreed, arguing that modern governance structures or education systems could substitute for traditional mechanisms. The remaining 5% were unsure. The findings nevertheless extend previous scholarship by distinguishing between institutional survival and cultural continuity. Modern institutions may preserve administrative governance and social order, but they may not reproduce the same symbolic identity, emotional attachment, historical memory, and sense of belonging generated through ritual participation.

Thus, the removal of *Ozo* rituals may not immediately threaten the physical or administrative survival of Onicha-Ugbo, but it may gradually affect the cultural processes through which members understand what it means to belong to the community. This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study. The evidence suggests that ritual should not be understood as a simple alternative to modern institutions. Rather, ritual performs a distinctive cultural function that cannot always be reduced to governance, education, or administration. Its contribution lies partly in its ability to integrate these functions into a culturally meaningful experience.

4.2.1.3 Rituals Functions as Emotional Energy

The fourth question assessed whether respondents acknowledged that rituals functioned as a source of "emotional energy" that held the society together. Seventy-five percent (75%) agreed, reflecting a recognition that rituals generated collective emotional experiences that reinforced social bonds. Rituals fostered shared joy, reverence, and solemnity, which created a sense of unity among participants. The finding also strengthens the Durkheimian conception of collective effervescence. The emotional intensity associated with communal ceremonies can produce feelings of unity that are difficult to generate through purely individual experiences. *Ozo* rituals therefore did not simply communicate cultural information; they made the values of the community emotionally meaningful. The *Ozo* title ceremony can therefore be interpreted as an interactional process through which participants generated and accumulated emotional energy. The candidate for *Ozo,* family, elders, title holders, and wider community were brought into a common social experience, and that experience reinforced their sense of membership in the collective way.

Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents disagreed, suggesting that some individuals perceived rituals as ceremonial formalities with limited social impact. This demonstrates that this emotional function should not be treated as universal or uncontested. Some respondents interpreted rituals primarily as ceremonial formalities and did not attribute significant social consequences to them. This disagreement may also reflect generational change and declining direct experience of traditional ritual. Where individuals have not participated meaningfully in ritual practice, they may be less likely to recognize its emotional or integrative significance. Seven percent (7%) were uncertain, reflecting the loss of direct experiential knowledge due to the removal of rituals. This is an important extension of the existing scholarship: the decline of ritual does not merely remove a ceremony from the social calendar; it can interrupt the experiential process through which individuals learn why the ceremony matters.

Consequently, the study demonstrates that the social consequences of ritual decline operate at both the cognitive and affective levels. At the cognitive level, younger generations may possess less knowledge of the meanings, symbols, and historical narratives associated with *Ozo*. At the affective level, they may lack the emotional experiences through which attachment to those meanings was historically produced. The weakening of both dimensions helps explain the respondents' concern about declining communal solidarity. Anthropologists: Claude Levi-Strauss, Margaret Mead and sociologists: Emile Durkheim and Max Weber have long

emphasised that rituals produce social energy by facilitating communal engagement, reinforcing group identity, and consolidating emotional and moral investment in collective norms. The absence of such rituals diminished these shared experiences, leading to a potential decline in social cohesion and collective emotional resilience.

Table 12: Rituals Functions as Emotional Energy

Theme	Finding/Response	Percentage	Explanation
Rituals as Emotional Energy	Agreed	75%	Rituals created shared emotions and strengthened social bonds.
Rituals as Emotional Energy	Disagreed	18%	Some viewed rituals as ceremonial formalities with little social impact.
Rituals as Emotional Energy	Uncertain	7%	Some lacked direct ritual experience due to ritual removal.

A respondent affirmed that, the reduction in ritual engagement weakened intergenerational knowledge transfer. Previously, rituals provided a structured context for elders to transmit wisdom, ethics, and social expectations to younger participants. With fewer opportunities for direct participation, cultural knowledge was increasingly mediated through indirect channels, which could result in incomplete understanding. Secondly, the diminished ritual engagement impacted social cohesion. Rituals historically facilitated shared experiences, emotional bonding, and mutual accountability. These processes fostered a sense of belonging and reinforced collective identity. Without active participation, the communal emotional energy that bound members of the society together was substantially weakened.

An Elder explained that the cultural heritage embedded in rituals was at risk of erosion. Rituals were repositories of symbolic knowledge, oral history, and community values. Their reduction threatened the transmission of these traditions and potentially compromised the cultural integrity of the Onicha-Ugbo people. The findings indicated that although younger generations were aware of the *Ozo* title, their experiential understanding of its rituals was limited, reducing the depth of cultural engagement.

A respondent affirmed that, the removal had implications for moral and social regulation. *Ozo* rituals functioned as mechanisms to instill discipline, resolve disputes, and reinforce ethical behavior. The reduction of ritualised social control increased reliance on alternative institutions, such as formal education or religious instruction. While these alternatives could maintain certain norms, they lacked the integrated cultural and social reinforcement historically provided by rituals.

The participants generally viewed ritual ceremonies in *Ozo* title taking as an important part of Onicha-Ugbo cultural identity. They did not see rituals as outdated practices that should be completely removed. Instead, they observed that rituals give meaning, respect, dignity, and seriousness to the *Ozo* title institution. The participants believed that removing rituals would weaken moral values, reduce respect for elders, and make the title lose its traditional importance.

A respondent strongly emphasised that rituals help maintain moral and social order in the community. He observed that without rituals, respect would decline and the society could experience moral breakdown. His response showed a deep concern that removing rituals may create cultural emptiness and weaken communal discipline. He also described the *Ozo* outing ceremony as a moment of pride, celebration, and social recognition.

A respondent observed that ritual gives the *Ozo* man a sense of mystery, responsibility, and belonging. He believed that *Ozo* title taking ceremony is not complete without ritual because ritual acts as a rite of passage. His responses suggested that many people today want the benefits of the *Ozo* title without understanding the duties attached to it. He also compared *Ozo* rituals with Christian baptism, showing that both traditional and religious institutions depend on ritual actions to give meaning to membership. Respondent took a more moderate position. He did not support total removal of rituals, but he also recognised the need for purification and adjustment. He observed that some ritual practices may need to be reviewed so they do not appear fetish in the modern age. However, he insisted that the stages of *Ozo* title taking should still be respected because they help the *Ozo* candidate understand the value and purpose of the title.

A common observation among the participants was that *Ozo* title taking should not be reduced to money or social status. They criticised the monetisation of the institution because it weakens its moral and cultural value. The participants believed that when money becomes the main determinant, undeserving people may enter the institution without proper understanding or

discipline. The participants also strongly rejected the admission of infants and underage males into the *Ozo* institution. They observed that children are too young to understand the meaning, responsibility, and moral expectations of the title. A respondent noted that underage title holders may abuse authority, while another described it as socially unjust for a child to become an elder institutionally while still being young biologically. A respondent also saw this as humiliating to older men and harmful to the traditional order.

Focus group discussion revealed that participants valued *Ozo* title taking rituals as a source of identity, morality, social order, and community unity. They supported reform, but not total abolition. Their observations suggest that the future of *Ozo* title taking should involve cultural preservation, moral discipline, leadership reform, and careful adaptation to modern religious and social realities.

Finally, modernisation and secularisation introduced new perspectives regarding the *Ozo* institution. Some respondents indicated that removal reduced economic and temporal burdens associated with rituals. Fewer resources were required, and participation became more accessible. However, these practical benefits were often viewed as secondary to the cultural and social costs of eroded ritual practice. The challenge was to balance modernisation with cultural preservation to ensure the ongoing relevance and resilience of the *Ozo* institution.

Bring into line with the theoretical framework of modernity theory, the study reveals that the removal of rituals from *Ozo* title taking therefore has significant implications for Onicha-Ugbo society. It weakened intergenerational knowledge transfer, reduced emotional and social bonding, diminished cultural heritage, and limited the moral and social regulatory functions that rituals had historically performed. These are consequences from the impact of modernity. Although modernisation had introduced some benefits, such as reduced financial and material demands, these benefits have not fully compensated for the cultural and social losses experienced by the community.

The findings therefore support the theoretical argument that modernity replaces the traditional values of a society with modern thoughts and traits. Again, rituals contribute to the social order, identity formation, and community survival. This also agrees with the literature review, which emphasised that the removal of ritual practices could disrupt cultural continuity and weaken communal solidarity. The study upholds that maintaining meaningful ritualised practices, or developing culturally grounded alternatives, remains necessary for preserving the identity,

cohesion, and continuity of the Onicha-Ugbo community while adapting to contemporary social realities.

In conclusion, the study demonstrated that rituals had been central to the *Ozo* title institution in Onicha-Ugbo. In line with the theoretical framework, the findings showed that rituals had functioned as important social mechanisms through which cultural values, moral obligations, authority structures, and communal identity were sustained. The study confirmed the view presented in the literature review that rituals were not merely ceremonial activities, but meaningful practices that produced social cohesion, emotional energy, collective memory, and moral regulation within traditional societies. Through ritual performances, elders had transmitted cultural knowledge to younger generations, while title holders had been reminded of their responsibilities to the community.

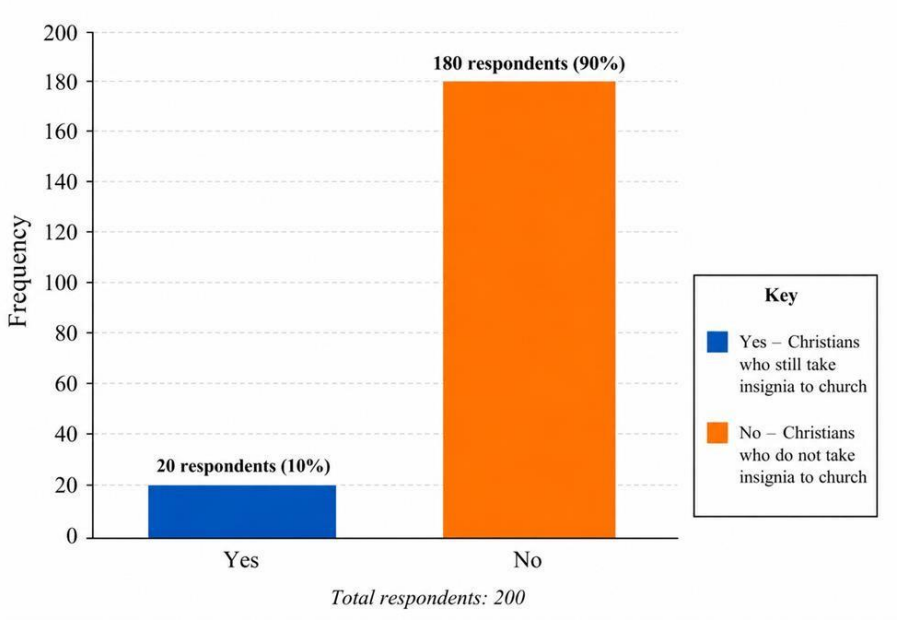
4.2.2 Reasons for the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking.

The *Ozo* title in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria, has historically signified social status, spiritual commitment, moral responsibility, and cultural identity. Traditionally, admission into the *Ozo* institution involved rigorous rituals, spiritual observances, symbolic rites, and communal recognition that reinforced social cohesion, moral order, and cultural continuity.

However, the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking has significantly declined due to the influence of Christianity, urbanisation, modernity, intermarriage, and immigration. Christianity, in particular, created tensions between indigenous religious practices and Christian beliefs, resulting in concessions that allowed Christians to take the *Ozo* title without undergoing the full traditional ritual. Instead, *Ozo* candidates could present their insignia to the Church for public blessing and commitment (Gbuji, 1984). Urbanisation and migration further weakened cultural attachment, while intermarriage and immigration transformed Onicha-Ugbo into a more culturally pluralistic community.

Against this background, the study examined the factors responsible for the removal of *Ozo* title taking rituals among home-based adults aged 45–65 who had not previously taken the title. Descriptive statistics were used to examine respondents' perceptions of the religious, social, and cultural factors underlying the removal of the ritual dimension and the acceptance of alternative forms of ceremony.

Figure 2*: *Factors Affecting Removal of the Ozo title taking ritual



From the survey, 70% of respondents affirmed that missionary activities significantly affected the social fabric of Onicha-Ugbo, leading to the degradation of sacred traditions. This indicated that the advent of Christian influence altered the traditional systems of cultural transmission. Historically, *Ozo* rituals reinforced social norms, communal cooperation, and moral conduct. The introduction of Christianity, which often condemned indigenous practices as idolatrous or incompatible with Christian values, eroded these traditional rituals. This finding aligns with scholars (such as Oket P' Bitek observations that colonial and missionary interventions disrupted indigenous institutions, reshaping social hierarchies and cultural practices.

This finding confirms the existing scholarship on Christian disruption of indigenous ritual systems, but it also qualifies a purely replacement-oriented interpretation. Christianity did not completely eliminate the *Ozo* institution. Instead, it contributed to the reconfiguration of the institution. The title survived, its social prestige persisted, and the desire for communal recognition remained, but the pathway through which legitimacy was established changed. This gave rise to a transformation of the relationship between ritual legitimacy, religious legitimacy, and social legitimacy. An individual could reject traditional ritual on Christian grounds while still seeking the social recognition associated with *Ozo* membership. Thus, Christianity challenged some of the religious meanings of *Ozo* title without necessarily destroying its social value.

A minority (16.7%) missionary activities did not have such a significant impact, possibly reflecting respondents who had minimal engagement with Church teachings or who maintained strong allegiance to traditional beliefs. About 13.3% of respondents expressed uncertainty, reflecting generational or experiential differences in exposure to traditional versus Church-influenced practices. This further demonstrates that Christian influence was neither universal nor experienced identically by all respondents. This finding qualifies any deterministic interpretation of Christianisation. It suggests that cultural change was mediated by individual religious commitment, generational experience, attachment to tradition, and the degree of exposure to Christian institutions.

Table 13: Respondents' Perception of the Impact of Missionary Activities on *Ozo* Title-Taking

Response	Frequency (%)	Interpretation
Yes	70.0%	The majority of respondents affirmed that missionary activities significantly affected the social fabric of Onicha-Ugbo, contributing to the degradation of sacred traditions. Christianity altered traditional systems of cultural transmission by discouraging practices such as *Ozo* rituals, which historically reinforced social norms, communal cooperation, and moral conduct. This finding supports scholarly observations, including those of Oket P'Bitek, that colonial and missionary interventions disrupted indigenous institutions and reshaped social hierarchies and cultural practices.
No	16.7%	A minority of respondents believed that missionary activities did not significantly affect the social fabric of Onicha-Ugbo. This view may reflect individuals with limited exposure to Church teachings or those who maintained a strong commitment to traditional beliefs and practices.
Undecided/Not Sure	13.3%	Some respondents were uncertain about the impact of missionary activities. This uncertainty may reflect generational or experiential differences in exposure to traditional cultural practices and Christian influences.
Total	100%	The responses indicate that most respondents perceived missionary activities as having a significant influence on the erosion of traditional institutions and cultural practices in Onicha-Ugbo.

Regarding whether Church blessings constituted a form of ritual, 46.7% affirmed that it was indeed a ritual in disguise, recognizing that these blessings symbolically fulfilled functions similar to the traditional *Ozo* title taking rituals: public declaration of commitment, moral accountability, and communal recognition. This underscores the adaptive nature of ritual, where the form may change, but the societal function remains. This finding supports the anthropological insight that rituals can change in form while retaining particular social functions. In this sense, the Church blessing may be interpreted as a form of ritual substitution or ritual adaptation.

The finding is also consistent with scholarship on religious hybridity and the creative adaptation of African religious practices within Christianity. Rather than completely abandoning indigenous forms, communities may retain selected symbols, institutions, or social functions while placing them within a new religious framework. The *Ozo* case illustrates this process particularly well: the traditional ritual form is weakened, but the social desire for recognition, incorporation, and legitimacy remains.

A smaller proportion (33.3%) believed that the Church blessing was not a ritual, viewing it solely as a religious practice devoid of traditional connotations. For these respondents, it is an incomplete ceremony. About 20% were uncertain, reflecting the ongoing negotiation between cultural and religious interpretations of ritual practices. The finding therefore, contradicts a strong functionalist assumption that the replacement of a ritual is straightforward once an alternative institution performs the same function. Although Church blessing may provide public recognition, respondents did not consider it automatically equivalent to traditional *Ozo* title taking. This distinction is demonstrated by the 75% who rejected Church-only ceremony as a valid form of *Ozo* ritual ceremony.

Thus, the findings indicate that functional equivalence is not necessarily symbolic equivalence. A Church blessing may perform some functions of traditional *Ozo* title taking, but it does not necessarily carry the same historical meanings, cultural symbols, ancestral associations, or embodied experience. This is an important contribution of the study because it demonstrates that ritual cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the functions it performs. Its particular cultural form also matters. The finding extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that the substitution of one ritual form for another cannot be understood solely in terms of functional equivalence. The finding further contributes to scholarship on ritual transformation by showing that ritual substitution is not automatic but involves negotiation and contestation

Table 14: Respondents' Perceptions of Church Blessings as a Ritual in Disguise in the *Ozo* Title Taking Ceremony

Response	Frequency (%)	Explanation
Yes, Church blessings are a ritual in disguise	46.7%	A majority of respondents agreed that Church blessings function as a ritual in disguise because they symbolically perform roles traditionally associated with *Ozo* ritual ceremony, including public declaration of commitment, moral accountability, and communal recognition. This suggests that although the form of the ritual has changed, its social and cultural functions have largely been preserved.
No, Church blessings are not a ritual	33.3%	These respondents viewed Church blessings strictly as religious ceremonies without traditional ritual significance. They considered them distinct from *Ozo* title ceremony and regarded them as an incomplete form of ceremony that lacks the cultural elements of the traditional rite.
Not sure/Undecided	20%	A smaller proportion of respondents were uncertain whether Church blessings should be regarded as a ritual. Their responses reflect the continuing negotiation between traditional cultural values and Christian religious beliefs in interpreting ritual practices.
Total	**100%**	

When asked whether taking the insignia to Church without traditional *Ozo* ritual ceremony constituted valid ceremony, 75% responded “No”, indicating that the community largely viewed traditional rites as essential for full recognition within the *Ozo* institution. From the perspective of ritual theory, therefore, the removal of passage stages potentially interrupts the transformative character of *Ozo* title taking ceremony. The individual may acquire the symbol

of status without experiencing the full ritual process through which that status was traditionally constituted.

This finding also helps explain why respondents repeatedly described traditional ritual as necessary for "completeness." The concern was not merely attachment to ceremony. It reflected the belief that *Ozo* status historically involved duties and obligations that were communicated, internalised, and publicly validated through ritual. The finding therefore extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that authenticity is socially negotiated. The Church may recognize an individual religiously, and the individual may regard himself as a legitimate *Ozo* member, but the wider community may still question the cultural completeness of his ceremonies. Legitimacy consequently operates at multiple levels: religious legitimacy, personal legitimacy, institutional legitimacy, and cultural legitimacy do not necessarily coincide.

Only 20% considered the Church alternative valid, suggesting that while some accepted symbolic substitutes, the majority still recognized the intrinsic value of ritualised induction. Five percent (5%) were uncertain. The reasons provided emphasised that traditional rituals impart moral discipline, communal responsibility, and spiritual legitimacy that a Church blessing alone could not confer. This highlights the tension between religious adaptation and cultural preservation: while rituals were modified to accommodate Christian beliefs, the underlying social and symbolic meanings remained partially contested.

Table 15: Respondents' Views on the Validity of Taking the Ozo Insignia to Church Without Traditional *Ozo* Title Taking Titual Ceremonies

Response	Frequency (%)	Interpretation
No	75%	Majority believed that taking the insignia to Church without undergoing traditional *Ozo* title taking ceremony does not constitute valid ceremonies.
Yes	20%	A minority accepted the Church alternative as a valid symbolic substitute for traditional ceremony.
Not Sure	5%	A small proportion of respondents were uncertain about the validity of the Church alternative.
Total	**100%**	

The findings demonstrate that removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking was driven primarily by the interaction between Church activities and the Christianisation of indigenous practices on one hand. Missionary presence provided both ideological and institutional authority that challenged ritualistic aspects deemed incompatible with Christian doctrines. In response, concessions were made to allow for *Ozo* title taking without traditional rituals, but with optional Church blessings to maintain symbolic continuity.

The relationship between Christianity and the traditional *Ozo* title system represents a complex negotiation between religious beliefs and cultural heritage. Focus group respondents revealed that Christianity has influenced certain aspects of ritual performance, but this influence has not been uniform or absolute. One respondent observed that "*the answer is yes and no*," indicating that while some individuals adopt a Christian approach in alignment with their faith, the social significance of *Ozo* title remains intact. The public visibility of the title continues to indicate social status and achievement, whether one observes the traditional rituals or follows Christian practices. This suggests that Christianity has influenced the method of *Ozo* title taking but has not entirely erased its symbolic and communal functions.

The persistence of Church blessing as a symbolic practice shows an adaptive compromise, where the community sought to reconcile traditional authority with religious conformity. However, the widespread perception that Church-only ceremony was insufficient indicates that the social and spiritual functions of ritual remained highly valued. Scholars such as Afe Adogame and Ezra Chitando of African religion and sociology of culture note that such adaptations often lead to "ritual hybridity," where indigenous forms are retained in modified formats that align with new religious paradigms.

Furthermore, the removal of rituals had broader implications for cultural continuity, moral authority, and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Older adults, as reflected in this research, tended to uphold traditional validation methods and expressed concern about the potential erosion of communal values. Without traditional ceremony, the social and moral obligations historically enforced by ritual ceremonies risked being weakened, raising questions about the long-term sustainability of cultural norms and heritage.

The removal of the ritual dimension in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo represented a complex interaction of religious influence, cultural negotiation, and social adaptation. Missionary activities significantly disrupted traditional practices, but symbolic substitutes such as Church blessings allowed for partial preservation of the functions of ritual. While these adaptations

facilitated Christian participation, the community largely maintained that full legitimacy and cultural continuity depended on engagement with traditional rites.

Another point from the focus group discussion highlighted that:

> Culture cannot be set aside. For Christians and modern people, there could be a middle way but not total annihilation of culture. Our culture is a guideline for us. Every community has some norms that govern the people. As Onicha-Ugbo, we should behave as Onicha-Ugbo according to our customs and traditions. Christianity and modern age are realities. But we can only push aside the negative side of our culture and not the life-giving areas. I do not believe that tradition is primitive. It can be advanced not destroyed. Jesus was born into culture. Christianity and tradition have values. The rituals of tradition and that of the Church share a lot in common. Therefore, our values should be preserved. Note that both traditions can be compromised and both of them can be lived well just as corruption and injustice can be found in both. So let truth be said and honest life be lived.

Other respondents presented a more critical view of Christianity's role, emphasising the socio-political dynamics that facilitated the adoption of Christian norms. One participant explained that "*it is normal for people to take to what is new*" and that traditional practices were often condemned to make space for Christian practices. They further highlighted that communities often abandoned indigenous rituals only to realize that Christian ceremonies replicated many of the traditional elements. The participant pointed to the influence of economic and political power in driving this transition, suggesting that the adoption of Christian practices was not entirely voluntary but influenced by broader societal pressures. This perspective underscores the interconnectedness of religion, culture, and power in shaping the evolution of cultural practices, illustrating how religious adaptation is influenced not only by personal belief but also by societal structures.

A different perspective emphasised individual autonomy in choosing between Christian and traditional pathways. One respondent remarked that "*Christian doctrine is not binding on all taking Ozo title*" and emphasised that the removal of rituals primarily affects Catholics. They argued that individuals could pursue ritual ceremony either in the Christian way or in accordance with cultural tradition, depending on personal conviction. This view reflects a pragmatic approach that allows coexistence of religious beliefs and traditional customs, preserving positive cultural elements while discarding harmful practices. It suggests that while Christianity has influenced ritual practices, it has also coexisted with cultural norms in ways that respect personal choice and diversity within the community.

The monetisation of the *Ozo* title represents another factor contributing to the weakening of social structures in Onicha-Ugbo. A Respondent observed: The reduction of ritual to financial transactions compromises both the credibility and authenticity of the institution. He highlighted the essential role of traditional elements such as the cola-nut, palm wine, and kaolin. He emphasised that money cannot represent presence. Certain elements and objects must be present. They cannot be ruled out because there are stages of each process, he stressed.

The monetisation of the *Ozo* title has transformed it from a merit-based and morally significant institution into a status symbol obtainable through wealth. This commodification undermines the integrity of the title and diminishes its capacity to instill moral responsibility and societal respect. A respondent further argued that the *Ozo* title should reward genuine distinction and commitment rather than allowing anyone to acquire it instantaneously through payment.

This finding extends the discussion of modernity by introducing the concept of commodification. The transformation is not only religious but also economic. A title that was historically associated with achievement, responsibility, moral standing, and social recognition risks becoming something that can be acquired primarily through financial capacity. The statement that once an individual deposits the stipulated amount with the *Onishe*, "one becomes an *Ozo* man," captures the perceived transformation particularly clearly. The concern expressed by respondents is that money has become a substitute for the social processes through which worthiness was historically established.

This finding confirms scholarship on the effects of commercialisation on traditional institutions, but it also adds a specific dimension to the present study. The concern is not simply that traditional practices are becoming expensive or commercialised. Rather, respondents perceive a shift in the criterion of legitimacy: from character and ritual qualification towards purchasing power. The traditional objects mentioned by respondents such as kola nut, palm wine, and kaolin are important in this respect because they represent more than material objects. They function symbolically within a ritual sequence. The respondent's assertion that "money cannot represent presence" indicates that monetary substitution cannot necessarily reproduce the symbolic meanings attached to physical participation in ritual. Thus, the findings challenge an exclusively economic interpretation of modernisation. Simplification may reduce cost and inconvenience, but it may simultaneously reduce the cultural content through which social institutions communicate meaning.

Another key theme emerging from the discussion was the economic and practical motivations behind the decline of ritual observances. Respondents highlighted that modern lifestyles, urbanisation, and the monetisation of the *Ozo* title have significantly reduced adherence to traditional ceremonies. One participant stated, "*these days, people see the elaborate ceremonies as tedious, tasking, and unnecessary*". They emphasise that the availability of monetary alternatives has replaced ritual acts as the primary means of gaining recognition. The respondent's comments reflect a broader societal shift where convenience and efficiency take precedence over the time-intensive and often expensive rituals of the past.

The monetisation of the *Ozo* title represents a major adaptation to contemporary realities. It highlights how economic transactions have supplanted ritual performance. This approach aligns with broader societal changes, where financial capacity is increasingly seen as a measure of social worth, paralleling global trends in commodification and transactional social structures. While monetary alternatives simplify the process and reduce individual burden, they also signify a departure from traditional mechanisms of moral and character assessment that were embedded within ritual acts.

Respondents highlighted the broader social and moral consequences of ritual removal. While not always explicitly stated, the discussions implied that traditional rituals functioned as mechanisms for evaluating character, ensuring social cohesion, and transmitting moral standards. By replacing these rituals with monetary transactions, communities risk undermining these social and ethical functions. One respondent indirectly addressed this concern by noting the convenience of monetary alternatives and reduced ceremonial participation, suggesting that efficiency and accessibility are prioritised over traditional moral oversight. This shift may result in a broader adjustment of social norms, where monetary capacity replaces ritual performance as a marker of legitimacy.

Modern life and urbanisation have significantly influenced the decline of ritual practices. Younger generations, in particular, perceive traditional ceremonies as burdensome or irrelevant. This highlights the preference of younger individuals for monetary transactions over ritual performance. Another participant observed that modern life has transformed priorities, making traditional rituals impractical or overly expensive. These insights underscore the role of urbanisation, professional obligations, and exposure to global cultural practices in reshaping community norms. Urban dwellers often prioritise efficiency, convenience, and social

recognition through accessible pathways, which has led to the adoption of monetised and simplified processes.

The finding therefore supports the modernity framework adopted in this study. Traditional *Ozo* ceremony required time, participation, material resources, social obligations, and extensive communal involvement. Modern lifestyles, by contrast, encourage mobility, individual autonomy, economic efficiency, and flexibility. The conflict between these two orientations helps explain why simplified pathways to *Ozo* membership became attractive.

Although, Modernity did not make *Ozo* irrelevant. Instead, the evidence demonstrates continuing attachment to the *Ozo* title alongside declining attachment to some of its traditional rituals. This means that modernity has transformed the form and conditions of participation without eliminating the social desire for the status, identity, and recognition associated with *Ozo*. The study therefore challenges a linear understanding of modernisation in which traditional institutions simply disappear as societies become modern. The Onicha-Ugbo case demonstrates a more complex process of selective modernisation, in which some traditional practices are abandoned, others are modified, and still others remain because they continue to satisfy social and cultural needs.

Urbanisation, multiculturalism, and intermarriage have further challenged the traditional celebration of *Ozo* rituals. A respondent noted that *the integration of migrants and outsiders into the Onicha-Ugbo community has weakened traditional authority structures*. Corruption among elders, compromised social grades, and flouting of traditional rules have created an environment where: *"Strangers are left unguided and boundaries are broken and there is anarchy in the town."*

This shift has implications for intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. Traditional rituals served not only as markers of social status but also as vehicles for teaching cultural norms, values, and ethical conduct. As monetary and simplified Christian alternatives replace these rituals, younger generations may miss opportunities for direct engagement with traditional moral frameworks. The focus group discussions suggested that while modern adaptations are efficient, they may inadvertently weaken the transmission of cultural heritage and social values across generations.

The decline of ritual observance also has implications for communal authority and cohesion. Rituals historically provided a structured framework for collective participation, ensuring that

titleholders were recognized for both social status and ethical conduct. The removal of these practices reduces opportunities for communal validation and shared cultural experience. As one respondent noted, the simplification of ritual ceremony has made it easier for individuals to achieve title without engaging in collective ceremonial acts, which could have long-term implications for community solidarity.

Participants also emphasised the role of practicality in reducing ceremonial observances. One respondent observed that "*nobody would want to engage in unnecessary expenses when it can easily be done at no cost*." The preference for simplicity and efficiency reflects the influence of modern lifestyles, urban responsibilities, and professional obligations on cultural participation. By prioritising economic and logistical considerations over ritual observance, communities have redefined the pathways to social recognition, balancing tradition with contemporary exigencies.

Christianity's influence facilitated these practical adaptations by providing an alternative moral and ethical framework. One respondent noted that "*Christianity has made it easy not just for themselves but for everybody*," highlighting that Christian principles allow for a simplified approach to ritual ceremony without compromising social legitimacy. This adaptation aligns with broader cultural changes, where communities negotiate between maintaining identity and adapting to modern demands. Christian teachings, particularly those emphasising simplicity, morality, and ethical conduct, provide justification for bypassing elaborate ritual procedures, complementing the practical motivations behind monetisation.

However, the adaptation of rituals through Christianity was not without tension. Some respondents acknowledged that ritual performance historically ensured completeness and legitimacy in ritual ceremony. By reducing or eliminating rituals, communities risked diminishing the perceived authenticity of *Ozo* title. This tension reflects an ongoing negotiation between religious adaptation, economic convenience, and cultural integrity, where communities balance efficiency with the preservation of symbolic and moral significance.

Despite these changes, respondents emphasised the importance of preserving positive cultural elements. This approach reflects a conscious effort to retain cultural identity while adapting to modern realities. Christianity, while facilitating the removal of certain rituals, also offers moral guidance that can help communities distinguish which practices to retain or adapt. By selectively preserving meaningful elements of tradition, communities maintain continuity of

identity while accommodating contemporary values such as efficiency, accessibility, and practicality.

This careful adaptation allows communities to navigate the tension between cultural preservation and modernisation. Ritual practices that reinforce social cohesion, moral integrity, and ethical behavior are valued and retained, while elements deemed burdensome, outdated, or harmful are replaced with practical alternatives. Christianity's influence in this context provides both a moral framework and an avenue for adaptation, highlighting the interplay between faith, culture, and contemporary societal pressures.

Christianity has been the major external force driving the removal of *Ozo* ritual dimensions.

From the lens of modernisation theory, Christianity functions as a modernising agent that somewhat promotes the removal of whatever that is at variant with the Christian teaching. This aligns with modernisation's prediction of a shift from sacred-communal values to rational-individual values. From the ritual theory perspective, *Ozo* ritual ceremony is a passage rite that ordinarily depends on separation, liminality and reincorporation. When Christianity removed the ritual dimension without fully replacing its transformation, the result is incomplete *Ozo*.

This finding linked directly with the theoretical framework because it showed that ritual had previously functioned as a boundary-maintaining mechanism. Through ritual, the community had defined membership, authority, responsibility, and acceptable conduct. When those ritual boundaries were weakened, the community experienced uncertainty regarding who had authority, what obligations titleholders carried, and how cultural norms should be enforced. The literature review had similarly shown that indigenous rituals helped communities regulate social relationships, preserve identity, and transmit values across generations. These factors were highly influenced by modernity theory. Therefore, the decline of *Ozo* ritual practices represented not only a religious change but also a deeper transformation in the moral and social organisation of Onicha-Ugbo.

This finding confirms the broader sociological argument that urbanisation weakens the geographical and social conditions that traditionally sustain communal institutions. Rituals require participation, continuity, shared knowledge, and collective recognition. Increased mobility can weaken each of these conditions. The finding nevertheless extends the scholarship by showing that migration affects ritual in two directions. It contributes to detachment from the home community, but it also increases cultural diversity within the community itself.

Consequently, *Ozo* institution can no longer operate within an entirely homogeneous cultural environment.

The removal of rituals from *Ozo* title taking therefore has significant implications for Onicha-Ugbo society. It weakened intergenerational knowledge transfer, reduced emotional and social bonding, diminished cultural heritage, and limited the moral and social regulatory functions that rituals had historically performed. Although modernisation had introduced some benefits, such as reduced financial and material demands, these benefits had not fully compensated for the cultural and social losses experienced by the community.

The findings therefore supported the theoretical argument that rituals had contributed to social order, identity formation, and community survival. They also agreed with the literature review, which emphasised that the removal of ritual practices could disrupt cultural continuity and weaken communal solidarity. The study concluded that maintaining meaningful ritualised practices, or developing culturally grounded alternatives, had remained necessary for preserving the identity, cohesion, and continuity of the Onicha-Ugbo community while adapting to contemporary social realities.

In summary, the removal of rituals in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo had resulted from the combined influence of Christianity, missionary activities, urbanisation, modernity, monetisation, immigration, intermarriage, and multicultural change. The findings demonstrated that while Church blessings and other modified practices had served as symbolic substitutes, they had not fully replaced the cultural, moral, and spiritual functions of traditional *Ozo* rituals. In line with the theoretical framework and literature reviewed, the study showed that rituals had historically served as instruments of social cohesion, moral regulation, cultural transmission, and communal identity. Their removal therefore weakened the authenticity of the *Ozo* institution and raised concerns about the future continuity of Onicha-Ugbo cultural heritage.

4.2.3 Implications or Risks of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

The *Ozo* title in Onicha-Ugbo has long represented a cornerstone of social cohesion, moral authority, and cultural identity. Traditionally, the title was not merely a symbolic honor but an embodiment of communal values and societal responsibility, transmitted through rigorous rituals that reaffirmed both the social hierarchy and moral obligations of ritual ceremony. However, recent qualitative evidence indicates a significant shift in the practice of *Ozo* title

taking, particularly with urban dwellers. This development has far-reaching implications for cultural continuity, social structure, and communal identity. A Respondent observed that: "Urban dwellers who have not undergone the traditional ritual process still desire the prestige associated with the *Ozo* title but are reluctant to participate in ceremonial obligations. Even those of them who are *Ozo* title holders have no idea what *Ozo* title taking means because they have lived all their lives in the city".

Another respondent explained, *"The public ceremony and commitment of being an Ozo has been destroyed because of the removal of the important aspect of it. These days anybody can wear the 'red cap' and nobody questions them. It is now difficult to know who an Ozo is."*

The removal of ritual elements has therefore diluted the public recognition of genuine *Ozo* title holders, eroding the moral authority traditionally associated with the institution.

Analytically, this finding confirms the ritual-theoretical proposition that ritual functions as a mechanism of social authentication. Ritual does not merely produce an internal religious experience; it publicly communicates an individual's changed status to the community. The ritual process provides visible evidence that a person has passed through the institutionally recognized stages required for membership. The removal of those stages therefore creates what may be described as a legitimacy gap: where the individual possesses the external symbol of status, but the community is less certain about the processes through which that status was acquired.

In this sense, ritual removal separates symbolic possession from institutional authentication. This finding confirms scholarship that understands ritual rites as mechanisms through which societies regulate status transition and establish legitimate membership. However, it extends scholarship by demonstrating that when ritual is removed from a title institution such as *Ozo* title, the consequence is not simply a reduction in religious symbolism. It creates uncertainty concerning the authenticity of membership itself. The study therefore contributes the concept of ritual authentication as an important dimension of indigenous title institutions. The *Ozo* title ritual historically answered the question: *Who is legitimately entitled to occupy this social position?* Its removal makes that question increasingly difficult to answer through culturally shared criteria.

Table 16: Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

Key Area	Findings
Respondent Group	Home-based adults aged 45–65
Main Concern	Need for ritual ceremony in *Ozo* title taking
Reason for Concern	Underage males gained power and position without proper ritual screening
Traditional Practice	*Ozo* title taking involved ritual processes and character screening
Eligibility in the Past	Only men of credible character and merit were addmitted
Current Practice	Wealthy fathers could take for underage sons by proxy
Effect of Ritual Removal	*Ozo* title became common and less respected
Consequences	Abuse of power, immature leadership, disrespect for elders, irresponsible leadership, and lawlessness
Effect on *Ozo* Institution	Decline in moral discipline among some *Ozo* titled men
Overall Implication	Findings indicated the need to return to the ritual process

Descriptive statistics from home-based adults aged 45–65 revealed the need for ritual ceremony because they suffer in the hands of the *Ozo* title holders especially the underage males. They lament the removal of ritual which gave underage the power and position. A Respondent Observed that;

> Traditional *Ozo* title taking served as a mechanism for character screening, recalling a period when only men regarded as credible and deserving were admitted, whereas the contemporary system was perceived as permitting wealthy fathers to addmit underage sons by proxy. The consequences identified included immature leadership, abuse of power, disrespect for elders, irresponsible leadership, and lawlessness.

Furthermore, the historical trajectory of ritual removal was clarified by a respondent, who explained the practical reasons for its gradual removal: *"The reduction in ceremonial duration*

and complexity made Ozo title taking more accessible, particularly for wealthy parents, Christians and urban dwellers, but at the cost of undermining their symbolic and regulatory functions".

He maintained that some rituals remain important and should be retained while others could be discarded. However, he asserted that *"Ozo title without ritual is not a valid ceremony because the same elders might pretend that 'it does not matter' but when the time comes they will demand for detailed rituals."* This view reinforces the notion that rituals are foundational to the legitimacy of the *Ozo* institution, and their absence compromises both the recognition of candidate for *Ozo* and the hierarchical differentiation essential to traditional governance.

This finding confirms the functionalist understanding of ritual and social institutions as mechanisms of social regulation. *Ozo* title taking ceremony did not merely confer honour; it historically provided a procedure through which eligibility and moral suitability could be assessed. The ritual therefore operated as a form of institutional guideline. The findings, however, extend the conventional functionalist interpretation in an important way. The issue is not simply that ritual "maintained social order." The evidence suggests that ritual helped determine who was qualified to exercise socially recognized authority. Its removal consequently changes the criteria through which leadership is constituted.

The disruption of social order illustrates how the erosion of ritual practices intersects with broader demographic and social changes, creating vulnerabilities in cultural preservation. A respondent emphasized that the preservation of values and structured social practices is essential to maintain cultural integrity in multicultural settings. The erosion of ritual practices has not only affected the symbolic value of the *Ozo* title but also the ability of Onicha-Ugbo men to construct meaningful social identities in the modern era. A participant emphasised the importance of intergenerational transmission of culture as a means of maintaining relevance in contemporary society. He argued that those who still value the *Ozo* title must actively engage with younger generations to preserve its significance.

According to this perspective, the preservation of cultural identity is an active endeavor that requires intentional mentorship and community engagement. Without these efforts, modern Onicha-Ugbo people risk losing a vital connection to their heritage, and the *Ozo* title becomes a hollow symbol devoid of its traditional significance. Cultural continuity depends not only on direct mentorship but also on documentation and public education. A respondent highlighted

the importance of committing traditional knowledge to writing and exposing children to cultural practices as methods to ensure ongoing transmission.

This approach demonstrates that the survival of cultural practices requires both formal and informal mechanisms. Writing, storytelling, and active participation create tangible pathways for young people to internalise and perpetuate traditions, especially when ritual enactments are reduced or removed. A respondent suggested: *"Those who manage to know the culture and tradition should commit it to writing so that we can read about and practice it so others can know about it. Parents should take their children home from time to time. Teach them our culture and they will internalize it."*

The consequences of ritual removal extend beyond cultural transmission to affect the social authority and prestige of the *Ozo* title itself. A respondent's voice underscores the regulatory role of ritual oaths and ceremonies, noting that these functions historically in reinforced respect for the title and provided mechanisms for accountability. Rituals, therefore, were not merely performative; they structured social expectations, reinforced moral accountability, and legitimised the authority of *Ozo* title holders. Their removal undermines these functions and risks creating a title that is more symbolic than substantive.

Moreover, the diminished ritual practices have implications for the community's moral fabric. By circumventing traditional ceremonies, participants lose the moral and social accountability historically embedded in the *Ozo* title ritual process. Rituals functioned as both an individual and collective ethical framework, guiding behavior and reinforcing communal norms. Their absence reduces the *Ozo* title to a mere symbol of social prestige, stripping it of its role in promoting moral conduct, civic responsibility, and social cohesion.

The qualitative insights gathered from respondents indicate that reviving and sustaining the *Ozo* title requires a multifaceted approach. Restoration efforts must balance tradition and modernity, recognising the practical constraints of contemporary life while preserving the symbolic and regulatory essence of rituals. Initiatives could include selective ritual retention, cultural education, mentorship, community engagement, and reinforcement of traditional social structures. These interventions would not only preserve cultural heritage but also enhance social cohesion, moral accountability, and identity formation among Onicha-Ugbo men.

With modernisation theory rituals are removed, there is a shift in value orientation: from communal sacred accountability to individual legal responsibility. Again, traditional values

like fear and respect for customs fade and are replaced by universal rational values. It tends to save money and time thereby making *Ozo* title taking more efficient and accessible to younger men. From the perspective of modernity theory, the findings demonstrate the movement from communal and sacred forms of accountability toward more individualistic, rationalised, and economically efficient forms of social organisation.

This confirms the modernisation argument that traditional institutions are increasingly subjected to rationalisation, secularisation, individualisation, and economic efficiency. Implications for ritual theory involves the removal of the important aspects of *Ozo* title taking. The society also becomes more secularised as taboos regarding *Ozo* title are equally removed. No ceremonies and so the candidate for *Ozo* title does not experience the stages of passage rites: no separation, no liminality and the threshold is so artificial because it was monetised.

This confirms the theoretical proposition that *Ozo* title taking derives its significance partly from the transformative process itself. More importantly, it extends ritual theory by demonstrating what happens when the social status survives but the transformative process is weakened. The individual may receive the title, insignia, and public recognition, but the ritual process through which the community traditionally communicated the meaning and obligations of the status is diminished. Ritual symbols are how values are embodied. Without them, respect for elders, honesty becomes abstract rules, not lived experience.

In summary, the removal of ritual practices in *Ozo* title taking represents a critical challenge to cultural continuity, social order, and moral authority in Onicha-Ugbo. The qualitative responses from *Ozo* title holders collectively illustrate the consequences of this trend, highlighting both the cultural erosion that has occurred and the potential strategies for cultural revitalisation. Urbanisation, monetisation, multiculturalism, and modern religious considerations have all contributed to the weakening of ritual practices, but proactive measures such as mentorship, documentation, public engagement, and selective ritual retention can mitigate these effects. Without deliberate interventions, the Ozo institution risks becoming a symbolic and commercial artifact, devoid of the moral, social, and cultural significance that historically underpinned its role in Onicha-Ugbo society.

Table 17: Summary of Ozo titles' Insights on *Ozo* Title Ritual Removal

Respondent	Main Point	Key Theme
1	Urban dwellers seek the prestige of *Ozo* without participating in rituals; the public recognition and authority of the title are weakened.	Ritual removal, loss of cultural respect, social identity erosion
2	Mentorship of younger generations is essential to preserve identity and maintain relevance in modern society.	Intergenerational transmission, cultural continuity, identity formation
3	Documentation and active engagement are crucial; parents should teach children about traditions to internalize culture.	Cultural preservation, education, experiential learning
4	Ritual oaths act as social regulators; absence of rituals diminishes respect, authority, and prestige.	Social accountability, moral authority, institutional integrity
5	Revitalisation requires culturally-minded individuals, funding, and organised community initiatives like seminars and storytelling.	Cultural revival strategies, community engagement, resource mobilization
6	Monetisation undermines authenticity; essential ritual elements cannot be replaced by money. *Ozo* title should reward genuine distinction.	Commercialisation impact, ritual integrity, merit-based recognition
7	Reduction and removal of rituals were motivated by practical concerns; Ozo title without ritual is not valid.	Ritual legitimacy, adaptation vs. preservation, hierarchical differentiation

4.3 Summary

Chapter Four examined the implications of removing the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, using survey and qualitative responses to assess its cultural, moral and social consequences. The findings indicate that traditional rituals served important functions in character screening, moral formation, social accountability and the preservation of communal values. Their removal, alongside the monetisation of title taking, has weakened

these functions and created concerns about individuals acquiring *Ozo* status without corresponding ethical responsibilities.

The findings further show that Christianity, modernisation and urbanisation have contributed to the simplification and transformation of *Ozo* practices, although their effects are mediated by economic, generational and practical considerations. While monetisation and ritual reduction have increased accessibility and convenience, they have also weakened the experiential and regulatory functions of traditional ritual ceremony.

Respondents therefore emphasised inculturation, dialogue and selective cultural adaptation as possible ways of reconciling Christian values with the preservation of *Ozo's* cultural identity and ethical foundations. Collaboration between traditional leaders and religious institutions, together with cultural education and intergenerational engagement, can help preserve the meaningful elements of the institution while accommodating contemporary realities.

In conclusion, the focus group discussions reveal a nuanced relationship between Christianity, modernisation, and the removal of ritual practices in *Ozo* title taking. Christianity has contributed to the simplification and adaptation of rituals, but its influence is mediated by socio-economic, generational, and practical factors. The monetisation of titles, modern urban lifestyles, and the desire for efficiency have all played a significant role in shaping contemporary ritual practices. While these adaptations provide convenience and accessibility, they also challenge traditional moral and social frameworks embedded in ritual observance.

Respondents emphasised the importance of preserving positive cultural elements while discarding practices deemed unnecessary, reflecting a pragmatic approach to cultural continuity. Urbanisation, generational change, and Christian moral frameworks have created a landscape in which traditional rituals are selectively retained, adapted, or replaced. The discussions underscore the ongoing negotiation between cultural heritage, religious adaptation, and modern societal pressures, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of the *Ozo* title system.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations as drawn from the findings of the study and from the discussions derived from various sources that the researcher reviewed.

5.2.1 Summary of the Findings

The study examines the removal of the ritual dimension in Ozo title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, with attention to its cultural, moral, and social implications. A total of 200 respondents participated in the study, 200 questionnaires were filled and returned which is a 100% and their demographic background helped to explain their views on *Ozo* title practices. The age distribution shows that the majority of the respondents were within the 40–60 years' age bracket, while others fell within the 60–70 and 75–90 years' age brackets. This shows that the study mainly involved mature and elderly members of the community who had better knowledge of *Ozo* title practices and the changes that had taken place over time. Their responses were therefore useful because they reflect both personal experience and communal memory of the ritual practices associated with *Ozo* title taking.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the ritual dimension of *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo was not merely ceremonial or religious in character; it constituted an important mechanism through which cultural knowledge, moral expectations, social responsibility, leadership ideals, and communal identity were reproduced. The central significance of the findings is therefore that the removal or substantial reduction of ritual practices did not simply shorten the process of *Ozo* title taking. It altered the social processes through which the meaning and responsibilities associated with the institution were learned, experienced, legitimized, and transmitted. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that, although 85% of young adult respondents understood the meaning of the *Ozo* title, practical and experiential knowledge of its ritual dimension had considerably diminished.

5.2.2 The Values of the Ritual Dimension in Ozo Title Taking

The first objective, which focused on understanding the contemporary knowledge and significance of the *Ozo* institution, was substantially achieved by the finding that 85% of

respondents demonstrated knowledge of what the title represented. This finding is significant because it challenges the assumption that the reduction of ritual practices has resulted in the complete disappearance of cultural knowledge. Rather, the institution remains intelligible to a substantial proportion of younger people. However, the finding becomes more analytically important when the distinction between knowing about the *Ozo* title and experiencing its ritual formation is considered.

The evidence suggests that much of the younger generation's knowledge is mediated through family narratives and the instruction of elders rather than through participation in the rituals themselves. This distinction reveals a transformation in the mode of cultural transmission. Traditionally, knowledge was not simply communicated verbally; it was embodied in participation. The candidates for *Ozo* learned through observation, instruction, symbolic acts, restrictions, obligations, communal interaction, and the experience of being publicly incorporated into the institution. Once these experiential elements are reduced, cultural knowledge may survive intellectually while losing some of its practical and affective depth.

The implication is that cultural continuity cannot be measured solely by whether younger people can define the *Ozo* title. The more important question is whether they understand why the institution exists, what obligations accompany membership, and how its values are to be enacted in communal life. Thus, the 85% finding demonstrates continuity at the level of cultural awareness, while the accompanying evidence of diminished participation indicates discontinuity at the level of cultural practice. The finding therefore points to a transition from embodied cultural transmission to predominantly indirect transmission.

This is particularly important for leadership. If *Ozo* traditionally functioned as an institution through which prospective titleholders were prepared for social responsibility, then the reduction of the formative ritual process may produce titleholders who possess the status of the institution without acquiring the same depth of knowledge concerning its ethical expectations. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether the title survives, but whether the institutional meaning attached to the title survives with it.

The second objective examined the contribution of *Ozo* rituals to moral and social order. The finding that 78% of respondents affirmed that the rituals promoted ethical conduct, respect for authority, and communal responsibility provides strong empirical support for the argument that the rituals performed a regulatory function. Analytically, this finding demonstrates that ritual operated as a form of social education and moral regulation. The importance of the ritual

process lay partly in the fact that moral expectations were not left as abstract principles. They were embedded in a structured process through which the *Ozo* candidate was introduced to the norms and responsibilities associated with *Ozo* membership. Ritual consequently transformed cultural values into socially recognizable obligations.

The significance of the finding becomes clearer when the consequences of ritual removal are considered. If rituals formerly provided a culturally legitimate framework for teaching discipline, accountability, respect for authority, and responsibility, their removal creates a need for other institutions to perform these functions. The study found that formal education, religious organizations, and civil governance increasingly assume some of these regulatory responsibilities. However, these institutions do not necessarily combine ethical instruction, symbolic affirmation, communal participation, and cultural identity in the same way that the traditional ritual process did.

The finding therefore does not necessarily mean that morality disappears when rituals are removed. Rather, it indicates a relocation and transformation of moral regulation. The community moves from an integrated traditional system of moral formation toward a more pluralistic arrangement in which morality is negotiated among traditional, Christian, educational, and civic institutions. The problem identified by respondents is that the replacement institutions may not carry the same cultural legitimacy or symbolic force within the *Ozo* institution.

The 12% who disagreed and the 10% who were uncertain are also analytically relevant. Their responses indicate that some members of the community perceive modern governance, wealth, education, or contemporary social institutions as capable of performing functions previously associated with ritual. The findings therefore support neither a simplistic claim that ritual is the only source of social order nor the opposite claim that its removal has no consequences. Instead, they reveal a functional transition accompanied by a loss of cultural integration.

The third objective examined the significance of ritual for the continuity and survival of the community. The finding that 80% of respondents regarded rituals as essential to sustaining social cohesion and continuity is particularly important. The meaning of this finding extends beyond the survival of particular ceremonies. Respondents were effectively identifying ritual as a mechanism through which the community reproduced itself socially and culturally. Ritual connected individuals to collective history, reinforced relationships between generations, established expectations of responsibility, and created a shared understanding of membership.

This finding is especially significant in the context of Onicha-Ugbo's transition from a relatively cohesive traditional community to a more urbanised, religiously pluralistic and socially differentiated society. Under these circumstances, ritual previously provided a common cultural language. Its reduction means that members can still belong to the same community while possessing increasingly different understandings of what that belonging requires. The finding therefore suggests that the principal threat is not necessarily the disappearance of the *Ozo* title itself but the possibility of institutional survival without equivalent cultural integration. An institution can continue to exist in name while gradually losing the practices that gave it social meaning. This explains why respondents could simultaneously acknowledge the continued importance of the title and express concern about the weakening of its ritual foundation.

The 15% who believed that modern governance or education could partially substitute for traditional mechanisms further demonstrate that cultural adaptation is already occurring. Modern institutions can perform certain practical functions of governance and social regulation. What they cannot automatically reproduce is the symbolic and emotional experience through which community members perceive themselves as part of a shared cultural history. Thus, the findings indicate that modernisation has produced functional substitution in some areas but not complete cultural substitution.

The study also investigated the extent to which ritual generated collective or social "emotional energy." Approximately three-quarters of respondents recognized this function. The importance of this finding lies in demonstrating that ritual performed an affective function in addition to its moral and regulatory functions. Participation brought individuals together in shared experiences and generated feelings of belonging, solidarity, mutual recognition, and collective responsibility. Ritual therefore helped transform a collection of individuals into a culturally connected community.

The removal of these shared experiences has implications that cannot be captured simply by measuring the number of ceremonies performed. When ritual occasions become less frequent or are replaced by monetary transactions or abbreviated ceremonies, opportunities for communal interaction also decline. The result may be a gradual weakening of the emotional bonds that supported social cohesion. This finding is particularly relevant to the research objective concerning the implications of ritual removal. It suggests that the consequences extend beyond religious practice to the social custom of the community. The loss is not simply

the loss of a ceremony; it is the reduction of occasions through which community members collectively experience their identity.

One of the most significant findings concerns the effect of ritual removal on intergenerational transmission. Historically, *Ozo* rituals provided structured contexts in which elders transmitted knowledge, ethical expectations, communal responsibilities, and leadership principles to younger generations. With the reduction of ritual participation, this transmission increasingly occurs through indirect means such as oral narratives and informal instruction. The analytical significance of this finding is that cultural transmission is not merely a matter of transferring information. Experience itself constitutes knowledge. A young person may know that an *Ozo* title carries prestige and understand some of its historical meaning without fully appreciating the discipline, obligations, restrictions, accountability, and communal expectations historically associated with becoming an *Ozo* titleholder.

Consequently, the removal of ritual creates what may be described as a knowledge-practice gap**:** knowledge about the institution survives, but knowledge acquired through participation in the institution becomes weaker. Over time, this may affect the ability of the community to reproduce the institution according to its underlying values. This finding directly reinforces the 85% awareness finding. Together, the two findings demonstrate a paradox: cultural awareness remains relatively strong while cultural practice is weakening. This is arguably one of the most important findings of the study because it shows that cultural erosion does not necessarily begin with ignorance. It can begin with the separation of knowledge from practice.

The study further found that the reduction of ritualized practices affected social cohesion by weakening shared experiences and mechanisms of mutual accountability. This finding demonstrates that the ritual dimension of *Ozo* functioned as a social integrative mechanism. It created occasions for individuals to interact across generations and social categories, reinforced relationships between titleholders and the wider community, and connected individual achievement with collective recognition.

The significance is particularly evident in the context of contemporary individualism. When monetary capacity becomes increasingly important in determining access to status, the meaning of title-taking can shift from communal achievement to individual status acquisition. This does not mean that every modern titleholder is motivated solely by status or wealth. Rather, the institutional structure increasingly permits status to be acquired without the same degree of communal formation that previously accompanied it. Thus, the concern expressed by

respondents about weakened cohesion should be understood as a concern about the transformation of the relationship between individual status and collective responsibility.

The findings also demonstrate that the removal of rituals threatens the preservation of cultural heritage because rituals served as repositories of symbolic knowledge, oral history, collective values, and cultural memory. The significance of this finding is that heritage is not preserved merely by recording the names of institutions or describing ceremonies in written documents. Cultural heritage is sustained when people continue to practice, interpret, and adapt the meanings embodied in those traditions. The decline of ritual practice therefore creates the possibility that the *Ozo* institution may survive as a title while becoming progressively detached from the cultural worldview that historically gave it significance.

However, the findings also suggest that cultural identity is not necessarily static. The coexistence of Christianity, modernisation, urbanisation, and traditional norms demonstrates that Onicha-Ugbo culture is undergoing transformation rather than simply disappearing. The challenge is consequently not to reproduce every historical ritual exactly as it existed but to determine which values and meanings can be retained, reinterpreted, or expressed through culturally appropriate contemporary forms. This distinction is important because it allows cultural preservation to be understood as adaptive continuity rather than cultural preservation.

The findings identify Christianity, modernisation, urbanisation, and practical considerations as major influences on the removal of ritual practices. Christianity encouraged the removal or modification of practices considered incompatible with Christian teachings, while Church blessings and monetary alternatives became acceptable substitutes for some traditional ceremonies. The findings indicate that these changes should be understood as a process of religious negotiation and cultural adaptation. Christianity did not simply eliminate the *Ozo* institution; in some cases, Christian participants retained the title while modifying its ritual content. This produced a hybrid form in which Christian identity and traditional social status coexist.

However, 75% of respondents regarded Church-only ceremonies as insufficient because they believed traditional rituals imparted discipline, accountability, and communal legitimacy that monetary or symbolic substitutions could not fully reproduce. The significance of this finding is that the conflict is not simply between Christianity and tradition. Rather, it concerns what is lost when one dimension of an institution is removed while its social status is retained. Christian adaptation may resolve the religious problem associated with participation in

traditional rituals, but it does not automatically reproduce the socialisation, communal participation, and cultural instruction formerly embedded in those rituals.

The finding therefore supports the interpretation that Christian adaptation has produced inclusion but also institutional differentiation. It has enabled Christians to participate in the *Ozo* institution while simultaneously creating different pathways into the same title. This raises questions about whether all pathways confer the same degree of cultural knowledge, moral formation, and communal legitimacy. A particularly important consequence identified by the qualitative findings is the increasing role of money in the acquisition of *Ozo* status. Younger people reportedly preferred monetary alternatives because of convenience, cost, and the demands of contemporary lifestyles. The study consequently observed a shift in which financial capacity increasingly becomes a marker of social status.

This finding has major implications for the meaning of the institution. Traditionally, status was connected to a process of social formation and communal recognition. When monetary payment becomes sufficient to secure the title without equivalent ritual formation, the basis of legitimacy can shift from demonstrated cultural and moral preparedness to economic capacity. This explains the respondent's description of the monetised ceremony as “soup or stew without salt.” The metaphor suggests that the external structure remains recognisable, but an important element that gives it meaning has been removed.

The concern is therefore not that money has entered the institution. Economic contributions may be necessary for organising ceremonies in a modern society. The deeper concern is when payment becomes a substitute for formation rather than a means of facilitating formation. At that point, monetisation changes the institution's logic from one based primarily on socialisation and communal legitimacy toward one increasingly based on purchasing access to status. This is why respondents associated ritual removal with the commodification of the *Ozo* title. The title risks becoming a symbol of wealth and prestige rather than an institutional expression of responsibility and moral authority.

5.2.3 Reasons for the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

The *Ozo* title has historically constituted one of the significant traditional institutions of the Onicha-Ugbo community, embodying social prestige, moral responsibility, spiritual commitment, leadership, and communal recognition. Traditionally, *Ozo* title taking was not simply the conferment of an honorary status but a structured process of ritual ceremony through

which the prospective titleholder was incorporated into a network of cultural, moral, spiritual, and communal obligations. The rituals associated with the institution therefore served a formative as well as symbolic purpose. They transmitted cultural knowledge, reinforced acceptable social behaviour, established accountability, and publicly affirmed the legitimacy of the *Ozo* title holder. The findings of this study indicate, however, that the ritual foundation of the institution has been substantially altered, particularly through the influence of Christianity, modernisation, urbanisation, and changing practical considerations.

Among the factors responsible for the removal of *Ozo* rituals, Christianity emerged prominently from the findings. Seventy percent (70%) of respondents affirmed that missionary activities significantly altered the social and cultural fabric of Onicha-Ugbo and contributed to the weakening of indigenous ritual practices. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that the transformation of *Ozo* title was not merely an internal generational development but was also connected to a wider religious transformation that challenged the legitimacy of indigenous spiritual institutions.

The finding supports the position of scholars such as Falola (1999) and Chitando (2010), who have examined the transformative consequences of Christian missionary activities on African cultural institutions. However, the Onicha-Ugbo evidence adds an important local dimension to this scholarship. Christianity did not simply cause the disappearance of *Ozo* title ritual; rather, it created a situation in which participation in the institution had to be reinterpreted in relation to Christian religious identity. The result was therefore not straightforward cultural extinction but institutional adaptation.

The 16.7% who perceived missionary influence as having little impact and the 13.3% who were uncertain are equally important. Their responses demonstrate that the process was neither uniform nor universally experienced. Traditional institutions possess a degree of resilience, and individuals encounter Christianity through different generational, family, educational, and experiential contexts. Thus, the finding should not be interpreted as meaning that Christianity mechanically caused the removal of *Ozo* rituals. Rather, Christianity became a significant promoter within a broader process of cultural negotiation, in which some members rejected traditional ritual practices, others retained selected elements, and others combined traditional and Christian forms.

This finding therefore directly addresses the research objective concerning the factors responsible for the removal of the ritual dimension. It establishes Christianity as an important

explanatory factor while simultaneously demonstrating that the transformation resulted from interaction between religious conviction, cultural resilience, generational change, and practical considerations. One of the clearest manifestations of this transformation was the practice whereby Christian *Ozo* title aspirants or titleholders could take their *Ozo* insignia to the Church for blessing instead of participating fully in the traditional ritual process. The survey found that 46.7% of respondents recognised Church blessing as a symbolic substitute for aspects of traditional *Ozo* title-taking rituals.

The significance of this finding extends beyond the existence of Church blessing itself. It demonstrates that the community attempted to preserve the social recognition attached to *Ozo* while modifying its ritual expression to accommodate Christianity. Church blessing therefore represented a form of institutional compromise. It enabled Christian members to participate in a culturally prestigious institution without necessarily engaging in practices they regarded as incompatible with their faith.

This is better understood as ritual transformation rather than simple ritual disappearance. The form of the ritual changed, while some of its social functions public recognition, communal acknowledgement, and moral affirmation were retained. In this respect, the findings are consistent with the concept of ritual hybridity associated with studies of religious and cultural transformation (Turner, 1969; Matory, 1994).

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal the limits of this substitution. The fact that 46.7% reported that Church blessing was no longer practiced indicates that even the adapted form has become unstable. This suggests that the removal of traditional rituals does not automatically result in a stable alternative system. Instead, once the original ritual framework is weakened, subsequent generations may also lose knowledge of the adapted form. What begins as religious accommodation may therefore eventually become broader cultural disengagement. The findings consequently reveal two stages of transformation: substitution and subsequent decrease. Traditional ritual was first modified to accommodate Christianity; with generational change and declining knowledge, even the substitute practice became less consistently maintained.

The finding that 46.7% of respondents considered Church blessing a ritual in disguise, while 33.3% regarded it solely as a religious act and 20% remained uncertain, reveals a deeper contestation over the meaning of ritual itself. This division is analytically significant because it demonstrates that the issue is not simply whether a ceremony occurs but how the ceremony

is interpreted and what social meaning is attached to it. For those who regarded Church blessing as a ritual, the blessing could be understood as performing some functions traditionally associated with ritual ceremony: public recognition, symbolic incorporation, moral affirmation, and communal endorsement. For those who regarded it purely as a Christian religious act, however, the ceremony could not legitimately replace the indigenous *Ozo* title taking because its symbolic reference and institutional authority were different.

The disagreement therefore reflects a struggle over cultural definition and institutional legitimacy. It shows that ritual meaning is socially constructed and contested rather than automatically transferred from one religious setting to another. A Christian blessing may reproduce certain outward or social functions of traditional ritual without necessarily reproducing the entire cultural worldview, moral instruction, symbolic system, and communal authority embedded in traditional *Ozo* ritual ceremony. This finding consequently strengthens the argument that ritual cannot be evaluated merely by its external form. What matters is the combination of symbolism, participation, instruction, social recognition, moral obligation, and institutional legitimacy that gives a ritual its meaning.

The strongest evidence of this tension is found in the response to whether taking the *Ozo* insignia to Church without undergoing the traditional ceremony constituted valid recognition. Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents rejected this position, while only 25% accepted Church-based recognition as sufficient. This finding is highly significant for understanding the contemporary legitimacy of the *Ozo* institution. Although Christianity has altered the ritual process, the majority of respondents still distinguish between Christian recognition of the title and traditional legitimacy within the *Ozo* institution. In other words, the Church may recognise an individual religiously, but that recognition does not necessarily confer the same cultural legitimacy as traditional ritual ceremony.

The implication is that the removal of ritual creates a distinction between possessing the title and being fully formed within the institution. The title can be retained as a social marker while some of the processes historically used to establish the *Ozo* candidate’s preparedness and legitimacy are bypassed. This finding directly relates to the study's concern with the implications of ritual removal. If the legitimacy of *Ozo* traditionally depended partly upon a recognised process of ritual ceremony, eliminating that process creates uncertainty about the basis upon which authority is conferred.

This explains why respondents emphasised discipline, communal responsibility, and spiritual or cultural legitimacy as dimensions that Church blessing alone could not fully reproduce. The finding therefore suggests that the central issue is not whether Christianity should be regarded as legitimate or illegitimate, but whether a new form of recognition can perform all the institutional functions previously performed by the traditional ritual process. According to the majority of respondents, it cannot.

The removal of traditional ritual also has implications for moral authority. Historically, *Ozo* ritual ceremony was associated with moral expectations, discipline, communal responsibility, and leadership. Ritual therefore served as a mechanism for transforming personal aspiration into socially accountable status. When significant aspects of the process are removed, the pathway through which moral authority is established becomes less visible. The concern expressed by respondents is consequently not merely that an old ceremony has disappeared, but that an important mechanism for demonstrating and legitimising moral preparedness for leadership has been weakened.

This is particularly important because *Ozo* status carries implications beyond the individual titleholder. An *Ozo* titleholder occupies a recognised position within communal life and may participate in decision-making, dispute resolution, representation, and other forms of social leadership. If the formative process is weakened, the community may increasingly judge titleholders according to wealth, social influence, or public status rather than according to the ethical and cultural formation traditionally associated with ritual.

Thus, ritual removal potentially changes the basis of authority. Authority that was historically legitimised through cultural formation and communal recognition can become increasingly associated with economic or social capital. This represents an important transformation of the institution rather than merely a reduction in ceremonial activity. The findings further indicate that the removal of rituals has implications for intergenerational transmission. Traditional ritual ceremony provided a structured context in which elders transmitted knowledge to younger generations through participation, instruction, symbolism, and observation. Once those practices are removed, transmission increasingly depends on oral narratives, family explanations, and fragmented forms of cultural instruction.

The significance of this development is that cultural knowledge can survive while cultural competence declines. Younger people may know what the *Ozo* title represents without possessing the experiential knowledge required to understand its deeper ritual, moral, and

social dimensions. This explains why the persistence of awareness of the *Ozo* institution does not necessarily demonstrate the preservation of the institution's traditional meaning. The findings therefore point to a gradual separation between cultural memory and cultural practice. The community remembers the institution, but fewer people experience the processes through which its values were traditionally learned. If this continues across generations, the cultural knowledge associated with *Ozo* may become increasingly symbolic rather than practical.

An important analytical conclusion from the findings is that Christianity should not be presented solely as a force that destroyed Onicha-Ugbo tradition. Such an interpretation would overlook the adaptive capacity demonstrated by the community. Christian members did not necessarily abandon *Ozo* title altogether. Instead, some sought ways of maintaining the title while removing or modifying practices that conflicted with Christian convictions. The emergence of Church blessing illustrates this process. The community attempted to negotiate between religious conformity and cultural belonging. Christianity therefore became both a force of disruption and a force of transformation.

The more significant question is what happened to the functions formerly carried by the removed rituals. The findings indicate that some functions survived through Church blessing, while others were weakened or lost. Public recognition and symbolic affirmation could be retained, but respondents perceived discipline, traditional accountability, cultural instruction, and indigenous legitimacy as less completely reproduced. Consequently, the study extends the discussion of cultural change by showing that adaptation may preserve an institution at one level while transforming its internal meaning at another. The *Ozo* institution survived, but the relationship between title, ritual, morality, authority, and cultural identity changed.

The respondents' perception that indigenous rituals were associated with idolatry also reveals an important conceptual paradox. The rejection of traditional ritual was partly based on the assumption that ritual itself was incompatible with Christianity. Yet Christian worship is also highly ritualised, involving structured gestures, symbols, sacred objects, prescribed words, communal participation, and ceremonial acts.

The significance of this observation is not to equate Christian ritual with indigenous *Ozo* title taking ritual, since they operate within different theological and cultural systems. Rather, it highlights the need to distinguish between ritual as a form of religious and social practice and the particular theological meanings attached to different rituals. The central issue is therefore not the existence of ritual as such but what a ritual signifies, to whom it is directed, what

worldview it expresses, and what social functions it performs. This distinction is important for understanding the Onicha-Ugbo experience. The rejection of *Ozo* title taking ritual as "idolatrous" resulted not simply from an opposition to ceremonial activity but from the Christian reinterpretation of the spiritual meanings attached to indigenous practices. The consequence was that some practices were removed without necessarily replacing all their cultural and social functions.

The findings are significant because they demonstrate that the removal of ritual has consequences beyond the disappearance of particular ceremonial practices. It affects the basis of legitimacy, moral formation, cultural identity, leadership authority, social cohesion, and intergenerational transmission within the *Ozo* institution. The study consequently establishes that the critical issue is not whether the *Ozo* institution should remain unchanged. Cultural institutions inevitably respond to changing religious, social, economic, and political environments. The more fundamental issue is whether the processes of adaptation preserve the core values and social functions that made the institution meaningful in the first place.

The findings therefore provide empirical support for the argument that cultural preservation should not mean the mechanical reproduction of every traditional practice. Rather, it should involve identifying and sustaining the underlying values of the institution while allowing appropriate forms of adaptation. In the case of *Ozo* title taking, these include moral discipline, communal responsibility, cultural knowledge, accountability, leadership formation, and communal recognition.

Conclusion

The findings establish that Christianity was a major factor in the removal and modification of rituals associated with *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo. However, the evidence does not support a simplistic interpretation of Christianity as the sole cause of cultural decline. Instead, Christianity initiated and intensified a process of religious negotiation and ritual transformation in which traditional practices were rejected, modified, substituted, or selectively retained. Church blessing emerged as one such adaptive response, allowing Christian members to maintain participation in the *Ozo* institution while avoiding practices considered incompatible with Christian belief. Nevertheless, the finding that 75% of respondents did not regard Church-only recognition as sufficient demonstrates that significant sections of the community continue to distinguish between religious accommodation and full cultural legitimacy.

The deeper significance of the findings is therefore that the removal of ritual has transformed the relationship between status and formation, recognition and legitimacy, religion and culture, and individual achievement and communal responsibility. While the *Ozo* institution continues to exist, some of the ritual mechanisms through which its values were historically transmitted and its authority legitimised have been weakened. The future of the institution should consequently not be approached as a choice between Christianity and tradition. Rather, the challenge is to develop a culturally informed framework in which Christian convictions and contemporary realities can coexist with the preservation of the moral, communal, educational, and cultural functions that have historically given the *Ozo* institution its significance.

5.2.4 Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in Ozo Title Taking

The findings demonstrate that the *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo historically functioned as more than a marker of prestige. It constituted an important cultural institution through which social recognition, moral responsibility, leadership expectations, and communal accountability were interconnected. The traditional ritual process was therefore significant not simply because it accompanied the conferment of the title, but because it provided the institutional mechanism through which the prospective titleholder was prepared, recognized, and incorporated into the moral and social order of the community. This interpretation is consistent with earlier anthropological and functionalist perspectives which regard *Ozo* title taking rituals as mechanisms for regulating social relationships, transmitting values, and maintaining social order (Achebe, 1992; Okafor, 2001).

The qualitative findings indicate that the removal of this ritual dimension has altered the meaning and social operation of the institution. The change is particularly evident among younger generations and urban residents, for whom the *Ozo* title may increasingly be encountered as a marker of social status rather than as the outcome of a demanding process of cultural and moral formation. The significance of this finding is that the institution has not necessarily disappeared; rather, the relationship between the title and the processes that historically gave the title its legitimacy has been weakened.

One of the most revealing qualitative findings concerns the perception that virtually anyone can now wear the *Ozo* red cap without necessarily being subjected to the traditional processes through which *Ozo* status was publicly established. A respondent observed: *"These days any man at all, can wear the 'red cap' and nobody questions them… it is therefore difficult to know who an Ozo is."*

This statement provides more than an observation about changes in dress or public behaviour. It identifies a crisis of recognition and legitimacy. Traditionally, ritual served as a visible and socially verifiable boundary between ordinary community membership and recognized *Ozo* status. Once that boundary is weakened, the external symbol may survive while its institutional meaning becomes ambiguous. The significance of this finding for the research objective concerning the implications of ritual removal is substantial. It suggests that the removal of ritual has weakened the capacity of the institution to distinguish between status claimed and status institutionally conferred. The red cap may remain as a symbol, but the ritual process that established who was entitled to the symbol and what obligations accompanied it has become less authoritative.

The respondent's statement that "it is difficult to know who an *Ozo* is" should therefore be interpreted as an indication of symbolic increase. When a culturally significant symbol becomes detached from the institutional process that previously authenticated it, its capacity to communicate social distinction diminishes. The consequence is not merely loss of prestige for individual titleholders but potential erosion of the collective authority of the institution itself. The findings further indicate that traditional *Ozo* ritual ceremony was connected to leadership formation. Ritual did not merely confer status; it established expectations concerning behaviour, responsibility, discipline, and accountability. Its removal therefore has implications for the quality and legitimacy of leadership within the community.

The qualitative evidence suggests that where ritual preparation is bypassed, there is a possibility that individuals may acquire the status associated with *Ozo* without undergoing the same degree of cultural and moral formation historically expected of titleholders. This does not imply that every contemporary *Ozo* titleholder lacks character or leadership capacity. Rather, the institutional mechanism for publicly demonstrating and culturally validating such qualities has become weaker. This distinction is important. The finding does not establish that contemporary titleholders are inherently less moral than earlier titleholders; it establishes that the traditional institution has lost part of the process through which moral authority was cultivated and recognised. The concern is consequently institutional rather than a judgment on individual titleholders.

From the perspective of the research objective on moral and social order, this finding suggests that ritual formerly operated as a preventive mechanism of social regulation. By requiring the candidate to pass through recognised stages and obligations, it established expectations before

authority was assumed. When these stages are removed, the community becomes more dependent on post-ceremonial mechanisms to determine whether titleholders actually embody the qualities expected of them. Another major finding concerns the transmission of *Ozo* knowledge to younger generations. A respondent emphasised: *"As an Onicha-Ugbo man, be proud of your identity, talk about it, speak about it, bring your friends to experience the ceremonies, value it and let others value it because you value it."*

This statement is significant because it shifts attention from ritual as an isolated ceremony to cultural socialisation as a continuing process. The respondent is effectively arguing that cultural identity survives when people actively participate in, explain, demonstrate, and value their traditions. The finding complements the quantitative evidence showing that young adults may retain knowledge of the *Ozo* title while having reduced experiential engagement with its ritual dimension. The implication is that cultural knowledge can remain cognitively available while becoming progressively detached from practice. This creates a distinction between knowing the tradition and knowing how to live the tradition.

The consequence for intergenerational continuity is potentially significant. Ritual traditionally provided an organized environment in which elders could teach younger members not only what the *Ozo* title meant but also what it required. When ritual is absent, cultural transmission becomes increasingly dependent on informal conversations, family narratives, and individual interest. These mechanisms remain valuable, but they may not provide the same consistency, authority, or experiential depth.

Thus, the findings suggest that the challenge facing *Ozo* title taking is not simply that younger people do not know their culture. Rather, the subtler problem is that the institutional processes through which cultural knowledge becomes embodied practice are weakening. The recommendation by respondents that those who possess cultural knowledge should commit it to writing provides an important response to this problem. One respondent stated: *"Those who manage to know the culture and tradition should commit it to writing so that people can read about it and practice it so others can know about it. Parents should take their children home from time to time. Teach them our culture and they will internalise it."*

The significance of this finding lies in its recognition that oral transmission alone may no longer be sufficient under contemporary conditions. Urbanisation, migration, changing family structures, and generational mobility have altered the contexts in which traditional knowledge was historically transmitted.

Documentation can therefore function as a cultural memory mechanism. Written records, oral histories, photographs, audiovisual materials, and other forms of documentation can preserve knowledge that might otherwise disappear as knowledgeable elders become fewer. However, the finding also makes clear that documentation alone is insufficient. The respondent combines writing with bringing children home and teaching them culture. This suggests that preservation requires both archival preservation and experiential engagement. The implication is particularly important for the research objective concerning cultural heritage. Documentation can preserve information about rituals, but cultural continuity requires that such knowledge remain connected to participation, interpretation, and community life. Documentation should therefore be regarded as a support for cultural practice rather than a substitute for it.

The findings also establish a connection between ritual removal and declining respect for the *Ozo* institution. A respondent observed that the absence of ritual could result in *"lack of reverence for Ozo title and diminish the prestige of the institution"*. This finding is analytically important because it demonstrates that ritual functioned as a mechanism of accountability as well as recognition. The significance of being an *Ozo* derived partly from the fact that membership was accompanied by expectations and obligations.

The ritual process publicly communicated that titleholding was not simply an entitlement but a responsibility. When those processes are bypassed, the symbolic value of the title can become detached from its regulatory function. This creates the possibility of what may be described as status without equivalent accountability. The individual continues to enjoy the prestige associated with *Ozo,* but the community may have fewer culturally embedded mechanisms through which to reinforce the obligations associated with that status.

This finding supports Durkheim's (1912) argument concerning the relationship between ritual, collective consciousness, and social regulation. However, the Onicha-Ugbo evidence adds an important empirical dimension: the concern is not only that collective solidarity is weakened, but that the institutional pathway through which authority is morally validated becomes less effective. Monetisation emerged as another significant dimension of ritual removal. A respondent stated: *"Money cannot represent presence. Certain elements and objects must be present… They cannot be ruled out because there are stages of each process."*

The statement captures a fundamental concern about the transformation of *Ozo* from an institution of formation into a potential transaction of status. The issue is not simply that money is involved in contemporary ceremonies. Traditional institutions inevitably require economic

resources to function. The more significant concern arises when financial payment becomes capable of substituting for participation in processes that historically carried moral and cultural meaning.

Under the traditional arrangement, the candidate's achievement was demonstrated through participation in a structured process. Under a highly monetised arrangement, financial capacity can become a more significant determinant of access. This changes the principle underlying the institution from demonstrated preparedness and communal formation toward purchasing social recognition. The implication is a potential transformation from merit-based legitimacy to economic legitimacy. This can weaken the institution because wealth is not necessarily evidence of moral character, cultural knowledge, or commitment to communal welfare. This finding therefore supports the broader argument concerning commodification. The danger is not merely that *Ozo* title becomes expensive; it is that the meaning of what is being purchased changes. If money purchases recognition without equivalent cultural formation, the title risks becoming a status commodity rather than an institution of moral and communal responsibility.

The findings also connect ritual erosion with urbanisation, migration, multiculturalism, and intermarriage. Respondents indicated that the presence of outsiders and the weakening of traditional authority structures created challenges for maintaining established cultural boundaries. One respondent stated that *"strangers are left unguided and boundaries are broken and there is anarchy in the town."*

This finding should be interpreted carefully. Immigration and intercultural interaction are not inherently destructive. They can broaden social relationships, create economic opportunities, and expose communities to new knowledge. The significance of the finding is instead that rapid demographic change can outpace the community's capacity to transmit and negotiate its traditional norms. In a relatively homogeneous setting, cultural expectations may be reproduced through everyday interaction. In a more pluralistic community, however, people may operate according to different religious, moral, and cultural assumptions. Traditional institutions must therefore either become mechanisms of cultural integration or risk becoming increasingly peripheral to communal life.

The finding consequently links ritual removal to a broader transformation in the structure of Onicha-Ugbo society. The weakening of *Ozo* title taking rituals is part of a wider movement from a relatively integrated cultural system toward a more pluralistic social environment. The resulting challenge is not simply to exclude outsiders but to develop mechanisms through

which cultural identity can remain meaningful while accommodating legitimate social diversity. An especially significant finding concerns the continuing belief among respondents that ritual remains necessary for legitimate *Ozo* title taking. One respondent argued that: "*Ozo* title without ritual is not a valid ceremony…"

This observation is important because it reveals a contradiction within the contemporary institution. On the one hand, ritual has been reduced or removed for reasons of religious accommodation, accessibility, urbanisation, and practicality. On the other hand, members of the community continue to invoke traditional ritual when determining whether a ceremony is fully legitimate. This produces what may be described as a legitimacy gap. The institution has developed alternative pathways for conferring or recognizing *Ozo* status, but the traditional standard of legitimacy has not disappeared entirely. Consequently, some titleholders may be socially recognized while still being regarded by others as incompletely ritual ceremony.

This finding helps explain why ritual removal produces tensions that cannot be resolved simply by replacing traditional ceremonies with symbolic alternatives. The issue involves competing definitions of what constitutes authentic membership. It also demonstrates the resilience of cultural institutions. Despite modernisation and religious transformation, the traditional criteria remain sufficiently powerful to influence contemporary judgments about legitimacy. Thus, cultural change has altered the institution without completely displacing the cultural logic upon which the institution was originally constructed. The cumulative findings indicate that ritual removal has implications for community governance because *Ozo* title taking historically formed part of the network through which authority was organised and recognised. When ritual ceases to function effectively as a mechanism of moral formation and social differentiation, the community must increasingly depend on alternative structures to regulate behaviour.

This does not mean that formal government, Christianity, education, or other modern institutions are incapable of producing social order. Rather, the findings indicate that they perform different and sometimes complementary functions. Modern institutions may provide formal legal authority, education, and religious guidance, whereas traditional ritual historically integrated moral instruction, cultural identity, social recognition, and communal participation within a single process.

The removal of ritual therefore contributes to the fragmentation of functions that were previously institutionally integrated. Moral education may occur in Church; formal authority may reside in government; cultural knowledge may remain with elders; and social status may

be expressed through the *Ozo* title taking. The challenge is that these functions are no longer necessarily connected through a single culturally authoritative process. The respondents' recommendations for seminars, storytelling, youth engagement, mentorship, and other forms of cultural mobilisation are therefore significant. They indicate that members of the community do not necessarily advocate an uncritical return to the past. Instead, they recognize the need for deliberate mechanisms through which cultural meanings can remain relevant under contemporary conditions.

This supports an understanding of cultural preservation as adaptive continuity. The objective should not be to reproduce every historical practice without modification. Rather, the community should identify the core functions of *Ozo* title taking moral formation, cultural education, communal responsibility, leadership preparation, accountability, and collective identity and determine how these can be maintained within present circumstances. Selective ritual retention may therefore provide a more sustainable approach than either complete ritual abandonment or complete restoration. Practices whose theological or social meanings remain contested can be critically evaluated, while the formative and communal functions of ritual ceremony can be preserved through culturally legitimate contemporary mechanisms.

Most importantly, these findings demonstrate that the survival of an institution cannot be equated with the survival of its name. The *Ozo* title continues to exist, but the social processes through which its meaning was historically produced have changed. The central issue facing Onicha-Ugbo is therefore how to sustain the legitimacy and functionality of the institution under conditions of religious pluralism, urbanisation, modernisation, and economic change.

Conclusion

The findings establish that the removal of ritual practices in *Ozo* title taking has produced consequences that extend beyond ceremonial change. It has affected the mechanisms through which cultural knowledge is transmitted, moral authority is established, leadership is formed, social boundaries are maintained, and communal identity is reproduced. Nevertheless, the findings also demonstrate considerable cultural resilience. Respondents continue to recognise the importance of the *Ozo* institution and, in significant ways, continue to regard traditional ritual as central to its authenticity.

The appropriate response is therefore neither the uncritical rejection of modernity nor the mechanical restoration of the past. The findings support a third position: deliberate cultural

adaptation that retains the essential functions of ritual while accommodating legitimate contemporary realities. Mentorship, documentation, youth engagement, cultural education, community dialogue, and selective retention or reconstruction of meaningful ritual elements can provide mechanisms for maintaining continuity without denying social change.

The ultimate significance of the findings is that the future of the *Ozo* institution depends not on preserving ritual as ceremony alone, but on preserving the moral, cultural, social, and formative purposes that ritual historically embodied. If these purposes can be retained and meaningfully re-expressed, the *Ozo* institution can adapt to contemporary Onicha-Ugbo without becoming merely a decorative symbol or commercial marker of status.

5.3 Conclusion

The findings of this study highlighted the profound consequences of the removal of ritual ceremony in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria on cultural continuity, moral authority, and social cohesion. Traditionally, the *Ozo* title functioned not only as a marker of social prestige but also as a mechanism for sustaining ethical behavior, social responsibility, and communal identity. Historical literature emphasised that *Ozo* title taking rituals served as structured frameworks through which elders transmitted ethical norms, leadership expectations, and cultural values to younger generations (Mbiti, 1990; Okafor, 2001). Data revealed that 78% of respondents affirmed the role of rituals in promoting moral and social order, while 80% recognised the necessity of rituals for community survival, and 75% emphasised the emotional energy generated through communal participation. These findings indicated that, although knowledge of the *Ozo* institution persisted among younger adults, the practical and experiential understanding of rituals had been reduced, suggesting a weakening of intergenerational cultural transmission.

Qualitative data further elucidated the multidimensional effects of ritual removal. Respondents consistently reported that urbanisation, modernisation, and religious influence had contributed to the simplification or omission of traditional practices. A respondent noted that urban dwellers increasingly sought the prestige of the *Ozo* title without engaging in ceremonial obligations, observing that the public ceremony and commitment associated with the title had been undermined. He emphasised the erosion of ritual as a legitimising mechanism. This phenomenon reflected broader trends observed in anthropological literature, where modernisation often transforms culturally embedded markers of distinction into commodified status symbols, weakening communal moral structures and social cohesion (Smith, 2010).

Respondents also noted that the removal of rituals disrupted intergenerational transmission of knowledge and ethical norms. A respondent emphasised that mentorship and active engagement were essential to preserve the identity and relevance of the *Ozo* title, asserting that younger generations must experience the ceremonies, understand their meaning, and internalise associated ethical responsibilities. These observations underscored the role of active socialisation in sustaining cultural traditions and align with ethnographic studies that highlight rites of passage as central to maintaining cultural identity and continuity, particularly in contexts of urbanisation and globalisation (Herskovits, 1947; Mbiti, 1991).

Documentation and formal teaching were identified as complementary strategies to mitigate the loss of ritual knowledge. A respondent stressed that committing traditions to writing and exposing children to cultural practices allowed for the preservation of cultural memory even when ceremonial enactments were limited. He stated, such approaches reflect contemporary research emphasising the importance of combining formal education, experiential learning, and oral traditions to sustain indigenous practices and cultural continuity (Hogan, 2004).

The study further highlighted that rituals historically functioned as mechanisms for social accountability and moral regulation. A respondent explained that ceremonial frameworks enforced respect for the title and ensured adherence to communal norms. Without these mechanisms, social and moral oversight diminished, potentially weakening both the authority of *Ozo* titleholders and the community's capacity to maintain ethical behavior. This aligns with Durkheim's (1912) assertion that rituals collectively affirm moral codes, and their removal can disrupt social cohesion and normative order.

Monetisation of the *Ozo* title emerged as a critical concern. Respondents noted that reducing *Ozo* title taking to financial transactions compromised authenticity, merit-based recognition, and moral accountability. This perspective reflected broader findings in sociological studies of indigenous institutions, where the commercialisation of cultural practices often undermines their symbolic and functional significance (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). The data suggested that prioritising financial capacity over ethical and communal distinction risks converting the *Ozo* title into a purely symbolic or status-based institution, eroding its social authority and traditional role in governance and ethical regulation.

The impact of Christianity was particularly significant in shaping contemporary practices. Church interventions historically discouraged rituals deemed incompatible with Christian teachings, prompting many *Ozo* title holders to substitute traditional rites with Church

blessings. Findings indicated that 58.3% of respondents reported the possibility of Church blessings as symbolic substitutes, while 41.7% noted that these were no longer observed due to generational shifts or diminished knowledge of traditional customs. While these blessings allowed for moral and communal recognition, 75% of respondents emphasised that Church-only ceremony was insufficient, indicating that traditional rituals imparted unique forms of discipline, accountability, and legitimacy that symbolic substitutes could not replicate (Falola, 1999; Chitando, 2010). This demonstrates the emergence of "ritual hybridity," wherein indigenous practices persist in modified forms under new religious paradigms but do not fully sustain their traditional functions (Turner, 1969; Matory, 1994).

The consequences of ritual removal extended to the symbolic and emotional cohesion of the community. Rituals historically produced shared experiences, collective joy, reverence, and solemnity, which reinforced social bonds and created a cohesive sense of belonging. The reduction or elimination of such rituals diminished these emotional experiences, weakening communal identity and resilience. Survey responses indicated that 75% of respondents acknowledged the significance of rituals in generating social "emotional energy," while 18% disagreed, perceiving them as formalities, and 7% were uncertain, reflecting limited direct experience with rituals among younger adults. This gap between knowledge and experiential participation highlights the risk of cultural discontinuity and the erosion of shared values across generations.

Urbanisation, multicultural influences, and intermarriage further complicated the preservation of ritual practices. Respondents noted that the inclusion of migrants and outsiders, coupled with the commodification of the title, weakened traditional authority structures and created opportunities for manipulation and social disorder. These observations are consistent with sociological studies indicating that pluralistic and rapidly changing communities face heightened challenges in maintaining cohesive cultural norms (Goody, 1962; Smith, 2010). The qualitative evidence indicated that, without deliberate interventions, ritual reduction could exacerbate social fragmentation, diminish ethical guidance, and reduce the effectiveness of communal governance.

The study emphasised the necessity of organised cultural revitalisation. Respondents recommended proactive engagement by culturally-minded individuals to restore the symbolic and regulatory essence of the *Ozo* title. Strategies such as seminars, storytelling, youth engagement programs, and mentorship were proposed as mechanisms to transmit values,

reinforce identity, and ensure continuity. These initiatives correspond with anthropological and historical literature underscoring the importance of intentional cultural preservation in the face of modernisation and religious influence (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Successful preservation requires mobilisation of both human and material resources, highlighting the importance of community leadership in maintaining cultural heritage and social cohesion.

The removal of ritual ceremonies in *Ozo* title taking represents a complex intersection of modernisation, religious adaptation, and social change. While practical considerations and Christian influence facilitated broader participation and reduced ceremonial burdens, they compromised the moral, symbolic, and communal dimensions of the institution. Respondents highlighted that mentorship, documentation, selective retention of rituals, and community engagement are essential for maintaining the legitimacy, ethical function, and cultural significance of the *Ozo* title. These findings align with existing literature on the preservation of indigenous institutions, which stresses the importance of balancing adaptation with retention of core cultural practices to sustain social cohesion and intergenerational knowledge transfer (Achebe, 1992; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Ultimately, the *Ozo* institution remains resilient but vulnerable. The research confirms that deliberate, culturally-informed interventions are necessary to ensure that the symbolic, social, and moral functions historically embedded in the *Ozo* title continue to guide behavior, reinforce cultural identity, and sustain communal cohesion in Onicha-Ugbo. Preservation efforts must harmonise traditional practices with contemporary realities, fostering engagement, ethical responsibility, and respect for cultural heritage. Only through such strategies can the *Ozo* title remain a living institution, ethically grounded, socially authoritative, and culturally meaningful for future generations.

5.4 How the Study Addresses the Identified Gap

The findings address the gap identified in the study by taking the discussion of *Ozo* title beyond historical description and generalised accounts of Onicha-Ugbo ritual decline to an empirical examination of what happens to the social functions of an indigenous title institution when its ritual dimension is removed. The study demonstrates that the central issue is not simply that traditional rituals are disappearing. The more significant question is what happens to the functions previously performed by those rituals. The findings answer this question by demonstrating that ritual removal affects the following interconnected functions:

1. Legitimating function: ritual previously authenticated *Ozo* membership and distinguished legitimate candidates from those who merely possessed the title symbol.
2. Regulatory function: ritual helped establish moral expectations and mechanisms of accountability.
3. Gatekeeping function: *Ozo* ritual ceremony and character screening controlled access to authority and prestige.
4. Cultural transmission function: ritual provided an experiential mechanism through which elders transmitted knowledge, values, symbols, and expectations to younger generations.
5. Transformative function: ritual constituted the process through which an individual was symbolically transformed and incorporated into the *Ozo* institution.

The study therefore addresses the gap by demonstrating empirically that the removal of ritual produces consequences across the entire institutional life cycle of Ozo: from admission and transformation to legitimacy, authority, accountability, and cultural transmission.

5.5 New Knowledge Emerging from the Study

Empirical Contribution

Empirically, the study establishes that institutional survival does not necessarily constitute cultural continuity. The *Ozo* title remains socially recognisable in Onicha-Ugbo, but the ritual meanings, processes of authentication and moral expectations historically associated with it have been substantially weakened. The study identifies a resulting legitimacy gap, whereby individuals may possess *Ozo* symbols without undergoing the traditional process through which membership was authenticated. It further demonstrates a growing separation between status and moral qualification, as economic capacity and accessibility increasingly influence admission alongside or in place of traditional character-based criteria. Monetisation is therefore shown not merely as a change in ceremonial practice but as a factor capable of transforming the basis upon which cultural prestige and authority are acquired. The study also finds that declining ritual participation has made cultural transmission increasingly indirect, thereby increasing the importance of documentation, storytelling, mentorship and parental instruction.

2. Theoretical Contribution:

Theoretically, the study extends rite-of-passage theory by demonstrating that status can be acquired without the complete ritual process of separation, transition and incorporation traditionally associated with Ozo title ritual ceremies. It therefore identifies a condition of status without full ritual transformation. The study also extends functionalist interpretations of ritual by demonstrating that functional equivalence does not necessarily constitute symbolic or cultural equivalence. Although Christian practices such as Church blessing may provide recognition and moral framing, they do not automatically reproduce the historical meanings, symbols, ancestral associations and embodied experiences of traditional Ozo ritual ceremony. Furthermore, the study challenges direct interpretations of modernisation and Christianisation by demonstrating that indigenous institutions may experience adaptation, negotiation, selective retention and hybridisation rather than simple replacement or disappearance.

3. Methodological Contribution:

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining quantitative survey data with ethnographic and contextual interpretation in examining changing indigenous institutions. It shows that ritual continuity cannot adequately be measured simply by determining whether a practice exists or has disappeared. Rather, analysis should distinguish between knowledge, participation, perception, legitimacy and cultural transmission. This approach provides a more nuanced framework for investigating indigenous institutions undergoing religious, social and cultural transformation.

4. Practical and Cultural Contribution:

Practically and culturally, the study demonstrates that preserving the Ozo title alone is insufficient to guarantee the preservation of the values and cultural meanings historically associated with the institution. It therefore supports deliberate strategies for cultural education, intergenerational mentorship, documentation of oral traditions and the transmission of ethical principles to younger generations. It also provides a basis for more constructive dialogue between Christianity and indigenous cultural institutions by demonstrating that adaptation need not entail the complete abandonment of cultural identity. At the same time, the study calls attention to the risks of excessive commercialisation and commodification, particularly where wealth becomes a substitute for character, ritual preparation and communal accountability. The

findings consequently support the preservation of the moral, communal and cultural principles of *Ozo* while allowing its appropriate adaptation to contemporary Onicha-Ugbo society.

5.6 Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that the removal of ritual ceremonies in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria led to significant cultural, moral, and social consequences. Respondents emphasized the weakening of intergenerational transmission, the monetization of the title, underage admission to *Ozo* institution, and the dilution of ethical guidance historically maintained by the rituals. Consequently, recommendations were developed and directed to the policymakers, to address these challenges. This recommendation draws upon insights from structural anthropological and functional sociological, literature, aimed to preserve the symbolic, moral, and communal significance of the *Ozo* title while accommodating contemporary realities such as Christianity, urbanisation, and multicultural interactions. The strategies proposed were intended to benefit *Ozo* men, traditional elders, community leaders, and the wider Onicha-Ugbo society by reinforcing cultural continuity, ethical behavior, and social cohesion.

One of the principal concerns highlighted in the study was the disruption of knowledge transfer due to the removal of rituals. Respondents consistently reported that younger adults were often unaware of the meaning, sequence, and ethical significance of the *Ozo* title taking rituals. A respondent stressed the necessity of experiential learning, arguing that younger generations must actively participate in ceremonies to internalise ethical responsibilities. Based on these findings, it was recommended that organised mentorship programs by elders of every community be implemented. Elders and experienced titleholders were advised to guide youth through ceremonial practices, explaining their historical context and ethical purpose.

Such mentorship programs aligned with Mbiti (1991) and Herskovits (1947), who emphasised that rites of passage are central to maintaining cultural identity and continuity. Structured engagement would allow younger adults to acquire moral knowledge, reinforce communal bonds, and develop leadership qualities consistent with the *Ozo* title tradition. From a Structural Functionalist perspective, such mentorship restores the socialisation function of the institution by transmitting norms, values and expected roles to succeeding generations. From a Ritual Theory perspective, direct engagement with experienced practitioners provides an experiential means of transmitting knowledge that cannot be adequately reproduced through written

information alone. Mentorship should therefore combine explanation, observation, participation and ethical instruction.

In addition to direct mentorship, formal documentation of rituals was recommended. A respondent observed that committing traditions to writing and exposing children to cultural narratives preserved knowledge even when full ceremonial enactments were limited. This strategy was supported by Hogan (2004), who emphasised combining oral tradition with written records to sustain indigenous practices. The study recommended that policymakers should spearhead the production of instructional guides, ritual manuals, and culturally-focused storytelling sessions within schools and community centers. Such resources would allow for broader accessibility and ensure that the meaning and ethical principles of the rituals were not lost over time. Such documentation would strengthen cultural continuity by ensuring that knowledge remains accessible to subsequent generations. However, written documentation should complement rather than replace appropriate communal participation, since the symbolic, emotional and experiential dimensions of ritual are central to its effectiveness.

The study demonstrated that urbanisation, modernisation, and religious influence, particularly Christianity, had simplified or replaced traditional practices. Respondents noted that ceremonial obligations were often bypassed in favor of symbolic recognition or financial transactions. To address this challenge, it was recommended that the *Ozo* institution adopt a selective retention approach. Core rituals that conveyed ethical values, social accountability, and communal cohesion should be maintained, while elements such as financial demands less central to moral transmission could be adapted to contemporary contexts. This approach reflected Turner's (1969) concept of ritual hybridity, which allows for the adaptation of traditional practices without removing their fundamental purposes. This approach will be best carried out by religious leaders of both traditional leaders and Church leaders. This recommendation reflects Structural Functionalism because it enables the institution to adapt while continuing to perform essential social functions. It also reflects Ritual Theory because it recognises that ritual can change in form while retaining significant symbolic meanings and social purposes.

Christian influence was another key consideration. Respondents reported that Church blessings often substituted for traditional rituals, with mixed effectiveness. Falola (1999) and Chitando (2010) highlighted similar phenomena where indigenous rites were modified under Christian paradigms. It was recommended that collaboration between traditional leaders and local

churches be encouraged to harmonise cultural and religious practices. This could involve structured ceremonies where Christian blessings complemented, rather than replaced essential ritual acts. Such integration would preserve the ethical, symbolic, and communal aspects of the *Ozo* title while respecting contemporary religious beliefs. From a structural-functionalist perspective, such dialogue may reduce normative conflict between major institutions within the community. From a ritual-theoretical perspective, it provides an avenue through which ritual meanings can be renegotiated rather than simply discarded.

A significant finding of the study concerned the monetisation of the *Ozo* title. Respondents observed that financial transactions alone could not substitute for the experiential and ethical elements embedded in rituals. Monetisation risks prioritising wealth over merit, eroding moral authority and social legitimacy. To mitigate this, it was recommended that the Obi-in-council (the council of chiefs) make strong statements that monetised *Ozo* title taking and underage admission to *Ozo* institution be discouraged. Traditional councils could establish merit-based criteria, ensuring that *Ozo* candidates demonstrate ethical character, community service, and understanding of *Ozo* values before receiving the title.

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) emphasised that commercialisation of cultural practices often undermines their functional significance; thus, retaining ceremonial requirements preserves social accountability and communal integrity. This recommendation restores the status-allocation and moral-regulation functions of the institution identified by Structural Functionalism. Ritual Theory further suggests that *Ozo* title taking should signify more than the acquisition of a prestigious status; it should represent a public transition into a role accompanied by recognised responsibilities and obligations.

Respondents highlighted the emotional and symbolic importance of communal participation in rituals. Shared experiences generated respect, cohesion, and pride in cultural identity. Survey findings revealed that 75% of participants recognized the role of rituals in creating social "emotional energy." To maintain these benefits, it was recommended that community engagement programs be instituted through village heads. These could include storytelling festivals, cultural seminars and crusades, and youth cultural immersion programs, providing opportunities for participation with complete ceremonial enactments. Such initiatives aligned with Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) assertion that organised cultural revitalisation is critical in preserving heritage under modernisation pressures. Engaging both urban and rural members,

would strengthen social cohesion and reinforce ethical norms embedded in the *Ozo* title tradition.

The study indicated that reliance solely on rituals for ethical education was insufficient in contemporary contexts where many youths lacked exposure to full ceremonies. Respondents recommended combining experiential learning with formal education. Schools, cultural centers, and community programs could provide workshops on history, ethics, and leadership associated with the *Ozo* title. Interactive learning sessions, role-playing, and guided participation in scaled-down ceremonies in primary and secondary schools, would allow younger generations to internalise values even when complete rituals were impractical. This approach reflected contemporary research advocating integration of experiential, formal, and oral traditions to sustain cultural continuity (Hogan, 2004).

To ensure the effectiveness of preservation initiatives, respondents suggested implementing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Traditional councils and cultural associations could track engagement levels, mentorship participation, and community perception of titleholders' ethical behavior. Periodic assessments would allow adjustments to programs, ensuring that the core moral, social, and symbolic functions of the *Ozo* title were maintained. Such evidence-based management of cultural practices aligns with broader sociological literature emphasising accountability in institutional preservation (Goody, 1962; Smith, 2010). Such monitoring is consistent with Structural Functionalism because institutions remain effective only when their expected functions continue to be performed. It also reinforces the ritual-theoretical understanding that ritual ceremony creates a publicly recognised identity accompanied by continuing obligations.

The proposed recommendations were intended to benefit multiple stakeholders. *Ozo* title holders would gain ethical grounding, leadership skills, and cultural understanding. Traditional elders and older titleholders would preserve their authority, legitimacy, and role in cultural transmission. Community members would experience strengthened social cohesion, shared values, and intergenerational continuity. Furthermore, local governance structures could leverage the restored ethical frameworks to maintain communal order and social accountability.

In sum, the interventions sought to reinforce the *Ozo* institution as a living, functional, and respected cultural practice within Onicha-Ugbo. The recommendations derived from this study emphasised deliberate, culturally-informed interventions to mitigate the consequences of ritual

removal. Structured mentorship, documentation, selective ritual retention, community engagement, and educational integration emerged as essential strategies. Addressing the effects of monetisation, religious influence, and urbanisation was crucial to preserving the ethical, symbolic, and communal functions of the *Ozo* title. When implemented effectively, these strategies would ensure that the *Ozo* institution remained ethically grounded, socially authoritative, and culturally meaningful, supporting both intergenerational knowledge transfer and social cohesion. Literature from Mbiti (1990), Okafor (2001), Turner (1969), Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983), and Comaroff & Comaroff (2009) corroborated the need for balancing adaptation with retention of core cultural practices to sustain indigenous institutions in modern contexts.

The deliberate harmonisation of traditional *Ozo* rituals with contemporary realities, including Christian influence and urban lifestyle, represented a feasible pathway for cultural sustainability. By implementing the recommendations outlined, Onicha-Ugbo society could preserve the integrity, legitimacy, and moral authority of the *Ozo* title, fostering cultural pride and ensuring that ethical norms, communal identity, and social cohesion endured for future generations.

5.7 Areas for Further Research

The findings of this study highlighted the complex consequences of the removal of ritual ceremonies in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria, yet several areas warrant further investigation to strengthen cultural preservation and understanding. The study has shown that the removal, substitution, or simplification of rituals relates with monetisation, Christianity, urbanisation, generational change, and changing conceptions of authority. These findings open important avenues for further research, particularly because the *Ozo* institution provides a valuable case through which wider questions concerning continuity, adaptation, cultural identity, and the preservation of African Indigenous Religious knowledge can be examined.

1. Future research could examine the long-term impacts of monetisation on the social authority and ethical legitimacy of the *Ozo* title. While this study identified the risks of reducing *Ozo* title taking to financial transactions, long term studies could provide deeper insight into how commodification affects community cohesion, leadership perception, and intergenerational transmission over time. This area would advance scholarship in African Traditional Religion by demonstrating that the transformation of

indigenous institutions involves not only the disappearance of ritual acts but also changes in the religious basis of authority. In Religious Studies, it would contribute to debates on the commodification of religion by showing how economic processes can reshape sacred institutions and systems of legitimacy. From the perspective of cultural preservation, it would generate evidence for determining which aspects of the institution can adapt to contemporary economic realities without undermining its core ethical and cultural purposes.

2. The role of Christianity and other religious influences in transforming *Ozo* title rituals require further exploration. Although this study observed ritual hybridity and substitution of ceremonies with Church blessings, additional research could investigate how these adaptations shape moral development, identity formation, and communal recognition among younger generations. Such research would extend African Traditional Religion scholarship by moving beyond a simple traditional-versus-Christian binary and highlighting the agency of practitioners in reconstructing indigenous religious institutions. It would also contribute to Religious Studies by providing a concrete African case of religious hybridity, negotiation, and syncretic transformation. For cultural preservation, this perspective is important because it suggests that preservation does not necessarily require the rejection of contemporary religious identities; rather, it may involve identifying ways in which culturally significant elements can be retained, reinterpreted, and transmitted within changing religious environments.
3. Studies could focus on urbanisation and multicultural dynamics, exploring how migration, intermarriage, and exposure to diverse cultural norms affect engagement with traditional rituals. Understanding these patterns could inform the design of targeted preservation programs that are inclusive yet culturally grounded. This would advance scholarship in African Traditional Religion by demonstrating how indigenous religious systems respond to mobility and changing social environments. It would also enrich Religious Studies by connecting the study of religion to migration, globalisation, identity, and social change. In terms of cultural preservation, the findings could inform preservation strategies that recognise that contemporary cultural identity is increasingly maintained across geographical boundaries rather than exclusively within the traditional community.
4. The effectiveness of mentorship and formal documentation strategies for preserving ritual knowledge could be empirically tested. Future research could evaluate the relative

impact of written guides, cultural workshops, and experiential participation on knowledge retention, ethical understanding, and participation rates among youth. This type of research would make an important contribution to African Traditional Religion scholarship by addressing one of its fundamental methodological challenges: the preservation of knowledge that has historically been transmitted orally and experientially. It would extend Religious Studies by demonstrating that religious knowledge is not merely information that can be archived but can also be embodied, performed, and socially transmitted. It would further advance cultural preservation by providing evidence-based models for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage without reducing living traditions to static written descriptions.

5. Research could investigate the psychosocial and emotional outcomes associated with ritual participation. While this study highlighted the generation of emotional energy and communal solidarity, future studies could quantify these effects and examine their relationship to cultural pride, resilience, and identity formation.

   Such research would significantly extend African Traditional Religion scholarship by demonstrating that indigenous rituals perform psychological and social functions in addition to their explicitly religious functions. Within Religious Studies, it would strengthen interdisciplinary engagement between ritual studies, anthropology, sociology, and the study of religion. For cultural preservation, it would provide an important argument against viewing rituals merely as obsolete ceremonies: their value may also lie in the social and emotional relationships they cultivate and sustain.

6. Comparative studies across other communities and indigenous institutions in Nigeria could provide insights into best practices for cultural adaptation and preservation. Comparative research could examine institutions that have retained substantial portions of their ritual systems alongside those that have significantly modified or abandoned them. Such comparison would make it possible to identify the conditions under which indigenous institutions successfully adapt without losing their symbolic, moral, and communal significance. Such research could identify strategies that balance modernisation, religious influence, and urban pressures while maintaining the moral, symbolic, and social significance of traditional rites.

   This would be particularly valuable for African Traditional Religion scholarship, because it would move the discussion from the documentation of individual traditions towards comparative theorisation of religious change within African indigenous

institutions. It would also contribute to Religious Studies by testing whether patterns identified in Onicha-Ugbo such as monetisation, Christian influence, urbanisation, ritual substitution, and generational discontinuity are locally specific or reflect broader processes of religious transformation. From a cultural preservation perspective, comparative research could identify practical models for maintaining cultural continuity while accommodating legitimate contemporary social and religious realities.

In conclusion, further research in these areas would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for sustaining the *Ozo* title and similar indigenous institutions, supporting evidence-based cultural preservation and policy interventions. These areas of further research demonstrate that the significance of the present study extends beyond the documentation of changes in *Ozo* title taking. The study provides a foundation for re-conceptualising ritual removal as a process of institutional transformation in which religious meanings, moral authority, social relationships, identity, and mechanisms of cultural transmission are simultaneously renegotiated. This constitutes an important contribution to African Traditional Religion, because it demonstrates that indigenous religious institutions should be studied as dynamic systems capable of adaptation, contestation, and reconfiguration rather than as static survivals of a pre-modern past.

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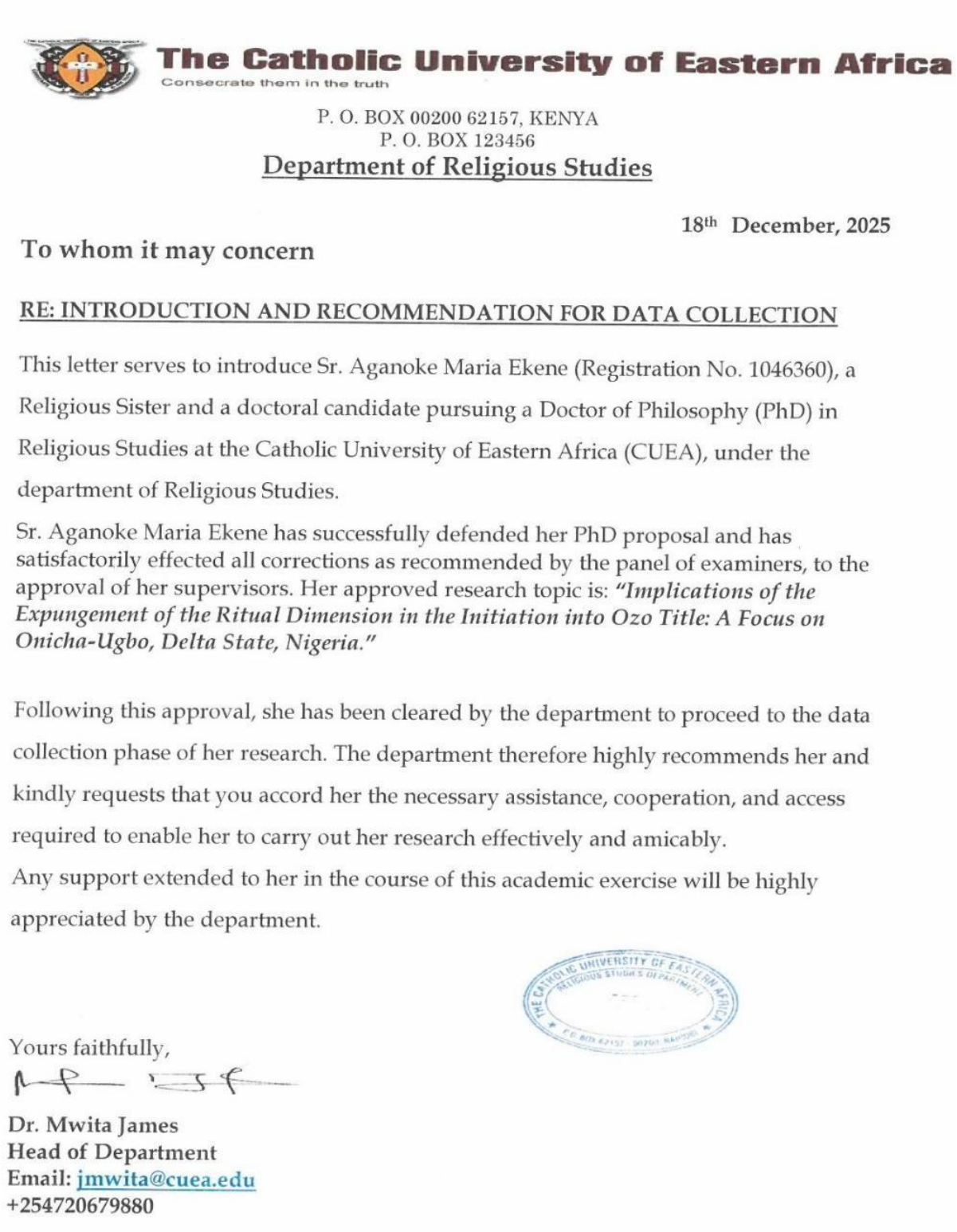
APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Research Letter for Data Collection



The Catholic University of Eastern Africa
Consecrate them in the truth

P. O. BOX 00200 62157, KENYA
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Department of Religious Studies

18th December, 2025

To whom it may concern

RE: INTRODUCTION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR DATA COLLECTION

This letter serves to introduce Sr. Aganoke Maria Ekene (Registration No. 1046360), a Religious Sister and a doctoral candidate pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), under the department of Religious Studies.

Sr. Aganoke Maria Ekene has successfully defended her PhD proposal and has satisfactorily effected all corrections as recommended by the panel of examiners, to the approval of her supervisors. Her approved research topic is: *"Implications of the Expungement of the Ritual Dimension in the Initiation into Ozo Title: A Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria."*

Following this approval, she has been cleared by the department to proceed to the data collection phase of her research. The department therefore highly recommends her and kindly requests that you accord her the necessary assistance, cooperation, and access required to enable her to carry out her research effectively and amicably.

Any support extended to her in the course of this academic exercise will be highly appreciated by the department.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Mwita James
Head of Department
Email: jmwita@cuea.edu
+254720679880

Appendix 2: Questionnaire for Christians

Dear Respondent,

1 am Maria Aganoke, a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya. I am carrying out a research on the "Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking: Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria". You and other respondents have been selected to contribute to this study. I kindly request you to assist me by objectively and freely answering the questions listed below, as best you can. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Section 1: Personal Data

Indicate your age bracket	40-60 [ ]	60-75 [ ]	75-90 [ ]
Your denomination:	Catholic	[ ]	Others [ ]
Are you an *Ozo* title holder	Yes [ ]	No [ ]	
Did you go through ritual ceremony?	Yes [ ]	No [ ]	
Did you bring your insignia to Church?	Yes [ ]	No [ ]	

Section 2: Questions on the Value of Ritual

1. Do you have an idea what *Ozo* title means?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

2. Does initiation ritual into *Ozo* institution promote moral and social order as well as preserve cultural values and heritage of Onicha-Ugbo people?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

3. The primary purpose of ritual in *Ozo* title taking is to ensure the survival of the community and this depends on the righteous way the community initiates and employs the ritual process. What can you say about this?
   ……
   ……
   ……
4. Ritual holds the society together because it is "emotional energy" that is produced by ritualized social interactions.

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

Section 3: Questions on the Factors that Brought the Expungement of Ritual in Ozo Title Taking

1. Do you think that the Missionary activities affected the entire social fabric of life in Onicha-Ugbo because its sacred traditions were degraded?

Very Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

2. Christians were given concession to take *Ozo* title without the ritual process. But they could take their insignia to Church for blessing and committing themselves publicly. Do they still take their insignia to Church for blessing? If no what happened?

.....

.....

…….....

3. Do you think the public blessing and presentation of insignia in the Church is ritual in disguise because in it the initiate commits himself publicly as a Christian who has taken *Ozo* title?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

4. Where a Christian does not engage in *Ozo* initiation but takes his insignia to Church for blessing. Is this a valid initiation? Give reason for your answer.

……

……

……...…….

Section 4: Questions on the Implications of the Removal of Ritual in *Ozo* Title Taking

1. Don't you think that removing the ritual process and accepting money as alternative without character screening could lead to breakdown in moral and social order? And why?

……

……

……

2. It is sometimes argued that *Ozo* title taking devoid of ritual is regarded as incomplete initiation. How do you now reconcile this statement with the present monetized initiation?

……

……

……..

Section 5: Questions on the Way Forward

1. If you remove ritual in *Ozo* title initiation what structure would you replace it with?

……

……

……

2. As a Christian, do you think there is need to bring the insignia to Church for blessing thereafter, committing yourself to abide by the laws of the Church and still be an *Ozo* title holder?

……

……

……

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for Home Based Young Adults *Ozo* Title Holder (20-40 years)

Dear Respondent,

1 am Maria Aganoke, a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya. I am carrying out a research on "Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking: Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria". You and other respondents have been selected to contribute to this study. I kindly request you to assist me by objectively and freely answering the questions listed below, as best you can. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Section 1: Personal Data

Indicate your age bracket 20-30 [ ] 30-40 [ ]Are you an *Ozo* title holder Yes [ ] No [ ]

Did you go through ritual ceremony? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Was your initiation by monitisation and by proxy? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Questions on the Value of ritual

1. Section 2: Do you have an idea what *Ozo* title means and have you taken the title?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

2. Does initiation ritual into *Ozo* institution help to promote moral and social order as well as preserve cultural values and heritage of Onicha-Ugbo people?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

3. Do you think there is need to preserve and maintain that which gives the people their identity rather than to settle for foreign cultures?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, would you rate the following statement according your conviction.

4. Ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title taking is necessary because ….

i. It binds the initiate to the community values [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

ii. It challenges him to be a man of integrity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

iii. It commits him to defend his family and community [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

iv. It equips the initiate for future adversity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

5. The primary purpose of ritual in *Ozo* title taking is to ensure the survival of the community and this depends on the right way the community initiates and employs the ritual process. What can you say about this?

……

……

……

6. Ritual holds the society together because it is "emotional energy" that is produced by ritualized social interactions.

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement by marking the appropriate box.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly disagree [5]

7. Ritual is one thing that is done to keep the people and community together and in ritual ceremony participation is the spirit that safeguards the community.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree nor Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly disagree [5]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, would you rate the following statement according your conviction.

8. Engaging in public initiation ritual offers the uninitiated an opportunity to:

witness in person,	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
provides one with a story to tell and retell,	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
ignites in others, the desire to do likewise.	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]

Section 3: Questions on The Implications of the removal of Ritual Dimension in Ozo Title Taking

1. Don't you think that continuous admission of underage boys into *Ozo* institution, without going through ritual process, could encourage disrespect for the elders and those who cannot afford to take the title? What are your thoughts?

……

……

2. A) What happens when a society no longer embraces a powerful ritual exercise?

   B) What legacy will they leave for the younger generation?

……

……

……

   C) *Ozo* title taking devoid of ritual is regarded as incomplete Ozo title. How do you now reconcile this statement with the present monetized Ozo title?

   ……

   ……

   ……

Section 4: Questions on the Way Forward

1. With the impact of modernity, urban and Church influence, do you think there is need to review the present practice of *Ozo* title taking?

   ……

   …….....

   .....

2. Culture and traditions are transmitted over time, through the generations and it is an ongoing process rather than a simple social fact. How would you ensure that this happens?

……

……

……

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for Home Based Adults without Ozo Title (45-65 years)

Dear Respondent,

1 am Maria Aganoke, a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya. I am carrying out a research on the "Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking: Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria". You and other respondents have been selected to contribute to this study. I kindly request you to assist me by objectively and freely answering the questions listed below, as best you can. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Section 1: Personal Data

Indicate your age bracket 45-50 [ ] 50-55 [ ] 55-65 [ ]]Are you an *Ozo* title holder Yes [ ] No [ ]

Where do you reside? village [ ] city [ ]

Section 2: Questions on the Value of ritual

1. Section 2: Do you have an idea what *Ozo* title means?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

2. Do you think that initiation ritual into Ozo institution helps preserve cultural values and heritage of Onicha-Ugbo people?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

3. The primary purpose of ritual in *Ozo* title taking is to ensure the survival of the community and this depends on the righteous way the community initiates and employs the ritual process. What can you say about this?
   ……..
   .....
   .....
4. Ritual holds the society together because it is "emotional energy" that is produced by ritualized social interactions.

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement by marking the appropriate box.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly disagree [5]

5. Ritual is one thing that is done to keep the people and community together and in ritual ceremony and participation is the spirit that safeguards the community.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly disagree [5]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, would you rate the following statement according your conviction.

6. Engaging in public initiation ritual offers the uninitiated an opportunity to:

witness in person,	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
provides one with a story to tell and retell,	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
ignites in others, the desire to do likewise.	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]

7. Do you think there is need to preserve and maintain that which gives the people their identity rather than to settle for foreign cultures? What are your thoughts?

……
……
……

8. Are ritual ceremonies necessary for *Ozo* title taking? Give reasons.

……
……
……

9. Rituals generate group emotions that are linked to symbols, forming the basis for beliefs, thinking, morality and culture. What is your take on this?

……
……
……

Section 3: Questions on the Implications of the Removal of Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

1. When a pre-modern society gives way to the modern era, the moral rules governing people's conduct undergo a corresponding change.

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

2. Long stay in the urban cities can lead to loss of community sentiments which equally affects the sacredness of the *Ozo* title institution.

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

3. Those who reject ritual ceremony in *Ozo* title taking as primitive, fail to realise that primitive cultures lay foundation to modern era and future generation. What is your take on this?

……
……
……

Section 4: Questions on the Way Forward

1. Would you suggest that ritual be retained but perhaps with some adjustments in order to strengthen the social structure of the community? If so, how?

……
……
……

2. One of the values in participating in ritual exercise is that it elevates those eligible to participate above those who do not qualify for this privilege. What type of ritual would you suggest that can take care of the needs of modern society?

……
……
……

3. As modern Onicha-Ugbo men drift more and more from the heritage that gives them identity, what other opportunities exist for them to still create meaningful lives for themselves in an age of moral uncertainty?

……
……
……

Appendix 5: Questionnaire for Urban Dweller: Young Adults and Elders With *Ozo* Title (30-70 years)

Dear Respondent,

1 am Maria Aganoke, a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya. I am carrying out a research on the "Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking: Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria". You and other respondents have been selected to contribute to this study. I kindly request you to assist me by objectively and freely answering the questions listed below, as best you can. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Section 1: Personal Data

Indicate your age bracket 30-40 [ ] 40-50 [ ] 50-60 [ ] 60-70 [ ]Are you an *Ozo* title holder Yes [ ] No [ ]
Where do you reside? village [ ] city [ ]

Section 2: Questions on the Value of Ritual

1. What does *Ozo* title mean?

……
……
……

2. Does initiation ritual into *Ozo* institution help preserve cultural values and heritage of Onicha-Ugbo people?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

3. The primary purpose of ritual in *Ozo* title taking is to ensure the survival of the community and this depends on the righteous way the community initiates and employs the ritual process. What is your take on this?

……
……
……

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement by marking the appropriate box.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly disagree [5]

4. Ritual is one thing that is done to keep the people and community together and in ritual ceremony and participation is the spirit that safeguards the community.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly disagree [5]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, would you rate the following statement according your conviction.

5. Engaging in public initiation ritual offers the uninitiated an opportunity to:

witness in person,	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
provides one with a story to tell and retell,	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
ignites in others, the desire to do likewise.	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]

6. Ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title taking is necessary because ….
   i. It binds the initiate to the community values [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
   ii. It challenges him to be a man of integrity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
   iii. It commits him to defend his family and community [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
   iv. It equips the initiate for future adversity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
7. Rituals are not aberrations. There are profound reasons for them in all social organisations because,

i. Ritual ceremonies sustain people's culture [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

ii. Ritual plays a role in social life and social solidarity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

iii. Ritual causes an awakening in the emotions of participants [1][2] [3] [4] [5]

8. Do you think there is need to preserve and maintain that which gives the people their identity rather than to settle for foreign cultures? State your reason.

……
……
……

9. Rituals generate group emotions that are linked to symbols, forming the basis for beliefs, thinking, morality and culture. What is your take on this?

……
……
……

Section 3: Questions on the Factors that Brought About the Removal of Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

1. Would you think modern civilization could be part of the reasons for the expungement of ritual in initiation into *Ozo* institution?

Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

2. Onicha-Ugbo is gradually becoming a multicultural community, could this have also contributed to the expungement of the ritual in *Ozo* title taking? What is you take on this?

……
……
……

3. Do you think the drift to urban cities could have contributed to declining interest in the ritual performance of *Ozo* title taking? Give reasons.

…….....
.....
.....

4. The modern pluralistic community orientation with different religions and social worldview seems to have devalued Onicha-Ugbo communal life and destabilized traditional beliefs and practices. Do you agree with this statement? State your reason.

……
……
……

5. Those who reject ritual ceremony in *Ozo* title taking as primitive, fail to realise that primitive cultures lay foundation to modern era and future generation and that one must be guided by the past to avoid a colossal cultural death.

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

6. Becoming a multicultural community through immigration and intermarriages has exposed Onicha-Ugbo to various cultures. As a result, the people are gradually losing their cultural identity. Do you agree with this statement? Give reasons.

Appendix 6: Questionnaire for Home Based Elders of 75-90 Years (*Ozo* Titled men)

Dear Respondent,

1 am Maria Aganoke, a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya. I am carrying out a research on the "Implications of the Removal of the Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking: Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria". You and other respondents have been selected to contribute to this study. I kindly request you to assist me by objectively and freely answering the questions listed below, as best you can. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Thank you in anticipation of your cooperation.

Section 1: Personal Data

1. Indicate your age bracket: 50-60 [ ] 60-70 [ ] 70-80 [ ] 80-90 [ ]
2. Indicate your religious affiliation :Christianity [ ] ATR [ ]
3. *Ozo* title holder: through ritual initiation [ ] through monitised process [ ]

Section 2: Questions on the Value of Rituals in *Ozo* Title Taking

1. Who is an *Ozo* title holder?

……
……
……

2. Does initiation ritual into *Ozo* institution help promote moral and social order as well as preserve cultural values and heritage of Onicha-Ugbo people?

   Yes [ ] No [ ] I don't know [ ]

3. Ritual purifications during initiations earn an *Ozo* initiate the voice of the gods, ancestors and the people at the end of the initiation. Can you validate this statement?

……
…….....
.....

4. Ritual is important in initiation rites because no community can exist without rituals. Is this statement correct?

   Very Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

5. Do you think rituals should remain an integral part of *Ozo* title taking? Give reasons.

……..

……

……

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement by marking the appropriate box.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Disagree [4] Strongly Agree [5]

6. The ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title prepare adult men to take up responsibilities in their families and in the community.

Agree [1] Disagree [2] Neither Agree or Disagree [3] Strongly Agree [4] Strongly Disagree [5]

On the scale of 1-5 where 5 is the best possible score, would you rate the following statement according your conviction.

7. Ritual ceremonies of *Ozo* title taking is necessary because ….
   v. It binds the initiate to the community values [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
   vi. It challenges him to be a man of integrity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
   vii. It commits him to defend his family and community [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
   viii. It equips the initiate for future adversity [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]
8. Rituals are not aberrations. There are profound reasons for them in all social oraganisations. Do you agree with this?

……

……

……

9. Rituals generate group emotions that are linked to symbols, forming the basis for beliefs, thinking, morality, and culture. What is your take on this?

……

……

……

10. The primary purpose of ritual in *Ozo* title taking is to ensure the harmonious survival of the community and this depends on the righteous and healthy way the community initiates and employs the ritual process. Do you agree with this statement?

……

……

……

12. Initiation rituals and ceremonies are aimed at helping the initiates become aware of who they are as role models in their community. Is this a valid statement and why?

……
……
……

13. *Ozo* title taking is indeed an occasion to showcase rich cultural heritage of Onicha-Ugbo tradition, because it involves extensive traditional ritual ceremonies

Correct [ ] Incorrect [ ] I don't know [ ]

Section 3: Questions on the Implications of the Removal of Ritual Dimension in *Ozo* Title Taking

1. Are there implications in removing cultural ritual dimensions and accepting money as alternative without character screening?

……..…
……..……..……
…….....

Oz*o* title taking devoid of ritual is regarded as incomplete initiation. How do you now reconcile this statement with the present monetized initiation?

……
……
..……..

Section 4: Questions on the Way Forward

1. If you remove ritual in *Ozo* initiation process what structure would you replace it with?
   .....
   .....
   .....
2. Would you advocate that candidates for *Ozo* title undergo proper initiation for the purpose of ensuring that the values, and behaviors expected of its members, are understood and passed on to the new members? Why do you think so?

……
……
……

3. Would you suggest to retain the ritual ceremonies with some adjustments in order to strengthen the social structure of the community?

……

……

……

Do you think that lack of clearly established ritual in *Ozo* title taking in Onicha-Ugbo could result in ambiguity about when and how one becomes an *Ozo* title holder in contemporary society? What is your opinion on this?

……

……

……..

Are you satisfied with admitting of underage persons, with compromised value system and monetized initiation? Are there implications?

……

……

……

What needs to change if any?

4. What would you suggest as a way forward regarding the need for ritual for the preservation of the cultural heritage and the needs of the modern age?

……

……

…….....

Appendix 7: Interview Guide for Home Based Young Adults with Ozo Title, 19th December, 2025.

The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Their identity will be protected and they will remain anonymous. Their contribution will be highly appreciated. Their responses will be treated as confidential and will only be used solely for this study. They will be free to ask questions when and where necessary.

Section A: Demographic Information

1. What is your age bracket? 20-45 [ ] 30-70 [ ] 45-65 [ ] 75-90 [ ]
2. Where do live? Home [ ] City [ ]
3. Are you an *Ozo* title holder? Yes [ ] No [ ]
4. Are you a Christian? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Section B: General Interview

1. The traditional awe and respect around the Ozo title has been ripped because many urban dwellers did not experience what it means to be ritually initiated and therefore, may not support its preservation. What can you say about this?
2. As modern Onicha-Ugbo men drift more and more from the tradition that gives them identity, what other opportunities do they have to still create meaningful lives for themselves in the modern age?
3. Culture and traditions are transmitted over time, through the generations and it is an ongoing process rather than a simple social fact. How would you ensure that this happens?
4. Lack of ritual ceremonies in Ozo title taking could have consequences for the future of Ozo institution. What do you think?
5. Rituals keep the society together, help preserve the common values of a people. In the light of what is happening in Onicha-Ugbo. What would you suggest as the way forward?
6. Moneytising of Ozo title is one of the reason for the breakdown in the social structure of Onicha-Ugbo. What have you to say about this?
7. Do you think O/U becoming a multicultural community with migrants and intermarriages could have affected the ritual celebration of Ozo title and why?
8. Can you explain why the ritual aspect of ozo title was stopped and without it do you consider the initiation valid?

Appendix 8: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Home Based Titled Elders, 15th December, 2025.

1. Would you rather regard ritual ceremony in Ozo title taking as outdated and something to be removed?
2. How does ritual action in *Ozo* title initiation help to promote moral and social order thereby help preserve and maintain the people's cultural heritage in the community?
3. How would the removal of rituals and ceremonies from *Ozo* initiation process contribute to the disregard of the fundamental aspect of Onicha-Ugbo tradition?
4. Do you think that admission of infants and underage into Ozo title institution is a good idea?
5. Are you satisfied with monetizing of Ozo title and admitting of underage males into Ozo institution? If not what can be done?
6. What would you suggest as the way forward regarding the need for ritual for the preservation of the cultural heritage and the need of the modern age?

Appendix 9: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Christians, Non-Ozo Members and Urban Dwellers, 17th December, 2025

For Christians

1. Would you think Christianity has contributed to the expungement of rituals practice in Ozo title taking?

2. When was the last time you experienced Christians bring their insignia to Church for blessing after taking *Ozo* title? Can you throw more light?

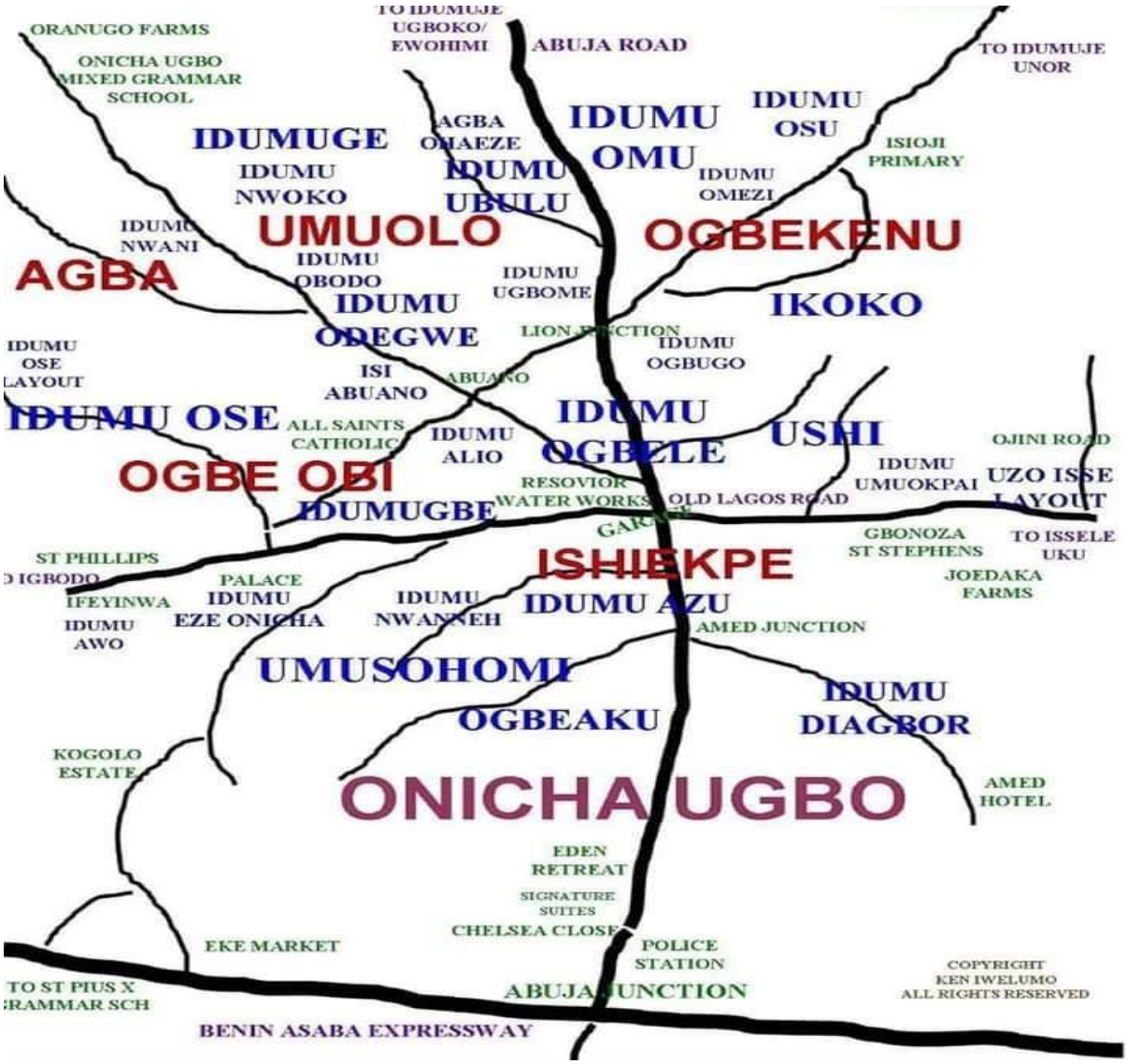
Appendix 10: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Home Based Adults without Title (45-65 years), 7th Jan, 2026

1. Are you satisfied with monetizing of Ozo title and admitting of underage males into Ozo institution? If not what can be done?

Appendix 11: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Urban Dwellers: Young Adults and Elders, 10th Jan, 2026

1. When a pre-modern society gives way to the modern era, the moral rules governing people's conduct undergo a corresponding change. Do you agree with this statement and why?.

Appendix 12: Map of Onicha-Ugbo



Appendix 13: Authorization Letter



Ogbuefi Olisenweokwu Alexander Aganoke

(Okpala Bu Isi Ikpala of Ushi)



Olisenweokwuaganoke@gmail.com

Ushi Oduna Quarters, Ishiekpe Village,
Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria

+234 802 345 2403

Our Ref: Ushi/15/06/26/001 Your Ref: _____ Date: June 15, 2026

Head of Department
Department of Religious Studies
The Catholic University of Eastern Africa
P. O. Box 00200 62157, KENYA

Dear Sir,

RE: PERMISSION FOR USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH – SR. AGANOKE MARIA EKENE

This letter serves to introduce Sr. Aganoke Maria Ekene (Registration No. 1046360), a Religious Sister and doctoral candidate pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Religious Studies at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Department of Religious Studies.

Her approved research topic is: *"Implications of the Expungement of the Ritual Dimension in the Initiation into Ozo Title: A Focus on Onicha-Ugbo, Delta State, Nigeria"*. Given the nature of her research, photographs of certain individuals will be required for data collection. I hereby affirm that she has permission to use photographs of Ozo title holders strictly for academic demonstration purposes related to this study.

We trust that all images will be handled with due respect, confidentiality, and used solely for the stated academic exercise.

Thank you for your recommendation and support of Sr. Aganoke's work.

Yours faithfully,

.....
Ogbuefi Celestine Nwanne Aganoke
(Representative of Ikpala of Ushi Oduna Quarters)

Appendix 14: *Ozo* Title Holders (MEN)



Appendix 15: *Ozo* Title Holders: Father and sons



Appendix 16: *Ozo* Title Holders: Father and son: The New Trend



Appendix 17: Plagiarism Report

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- Cited Text

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT **AGANOKE MARIA EKENE** REG NO: **1046360**, SUBMITTED A CHECK OF ANTIPLAGIARISM ON EVALUATION OF **IMPLICATIONS OF THE EXPUNGEMENT OF THE RITUAL DIMENSION IN INITIATION INTO OZO TITLE IN ONICHA-UGBO, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA. A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA.**

Verification by Systems Librarian:

Name: HARUN MAINA Signature: ..... Date: 2/7/2026

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