

TOWARDS BALANCING RELATIONSHIPS AND ENVIROMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: AN EVALUATION OF SACRIFICE IN TRADITIONAL AFRICA/ IGBO SOCIETY.

By

Chikaodili Clementina Nwachukwu(PhD)

Department of Religion & Human Relations

Faculty of Arts

Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

07036305934

ccl.nwachukwu@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

In Igbo tradition and culture, sacrifice serves as a means of expressing gratitude, seeking forgiveness, and connecting with the divine authorities. However, these practices often involve the use of natural resources, such as animals, plants, and water, which can have significant environmental implications for example, contribute to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Similarly, the use of natural resources and the place of traditional rituals can lead to environmental degradation. This study explores the intersection of traditional sacrifice and environmental sustainability through the lens of ritual ecology. Ritual ecology is a conceptual framework that examines the relationships between cultural rituals, environmental systems, and human well-being. This study adopted a qualitative approach which includes primary and secondary means of data collection in investigating the environmental impact of Traditional Sacrifice. The findings of this study highlight the complex relationships between traditional sacrifice, environmental sustainability, and spirituality. While traditional sacrifice can contribute to environmental degradation and resource depletion, it also plays a vital role in maintaining cultural identity, social cohesion, community resilience and good relationship with the divine. This study argues that a good understanding of the environmental implications of traditional sacrifice is essential for developing effective strategies that balance cultural heritage, spirituality with environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Traditional sacrifice, Environmental Sustainability, Spiritual Relationship

Introduction

The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, possess a rich cultural and spiritual heritage deeply rooted in a complex cosmological worldview. At the heart of Igbo traditional religion lies the practice of sacrifice, which Arinze describes as "the most ancient and essential part of every ceremony when worship is made to the gods, minor deities or the ancestors" (Arinze, 2008). Sacrifice in Igbo society transcends mere ritualistic observance; it represents a fundamental theological principle through which humans establish and maintain relationships with the divine, seek solutions to existential problems, and preserve social harmony.

The significance of sacrifice in Igbo traditional society cannot be overstated. As

Nwobodo (2024) notes, every magical ritual and spiritual practice is accompanied by a particular stipulated sacrifice suitable for the intentions of the performer. These sacrificial practices are deeply ingrained in the cultural and spiritual identities of communities, providing a sense of belonging, continuity, and meaning.

In recent years, however, sacrifices have come under scrutiny due to their potential environmental impact. The use of natural resources, such as wood, water, and animals, in traditional rituals can lead to environmental degradation, deforestation, and biodiversity loss. Furthermore, the increasing frequency and scale of traditional sacrifices have exacerbated these environmental concerns.

The tension between establishing and maintaining good relationship with the divine and addressing environmental concerns as it relates sacrifices presents a complex challenge. While these sacrificial practices are essential for the cordial spiritual relationship of persons and communities to the divine, their environmental consequences cannot be ignored. The lack of alternative approaches that balance sacrifice for harmonious relationship with the sacred and environmental sustainability has resulted in a stalemate, with some advocating for the abandonment of traditional sacrifices and others arguing for their preservation. This study explores the complex relationships between traditional sacrifices and environmental sustainability. It also examines the spiritual significance of traditional sacrifices and their role in establishing and preserving good relationship with the sacred while investigating the environmental impact of these traditional sacrifices.

Clarification of Terms

Sacrifice

The term sacrifice is derived from the Latin word *sacrificium*, which is a combination of the word *sacer*, meaning something set apart from the secular or profane for the use of supernatural powers and *facere* meaning to make. According to Faherty (2022), The original use of the term was peculiarly religious, referring to a cultic act in which objects were set apart or consecrated and offered to a god or some other supernatural power. For Faherty (2022), a sacrifice is a religious rite in which an object is offered to a divinity in order to establish, maintain, or restore a right relationship of a human being to the sacred order. It is the giving up of something important or valuable in order to obtain something else for oneself or other people. Sacrifice is seen as a practice aimed at honoring deities by offering them something as a sign of propitiation or worship. According to Hubert and Mauss (1964), sacrifice was originally a gift made by the primitive to supernatural beings with whom he needed to ingratiate himself. Sacrifice is primarily a means of contact or communion between the divine and man. It serves as the best way through which man maintains an established relationship between himself and his object of worship. It is also valued as the most effective means employed by man to influence divinities so as to be interested in human affairs. (Nwobodo, 2024.). For Anyiagor and Olekaibe (2022), sacrifice has many types. Some of them are:

Appreciation Offering: This is made in appreciation of blessings from the divinity, or in seeking his favour. It is accompanied with feasting. The worshippers and the divinity share common meal. The blessings that follow this practice are enormous, often requests

are granted. The beneficial relationship between man and the divinity is strengthened. The occasion calls for thanks and offerings are bumper harvests, successful expeditions and when victory is won over enemies among others.

Votive Offering: The worshipper supplicates to the divinity for favour. The worshiper promises to sacrifice either his/her properties if the requests are granted. Votive offerings are accompanied by dancing, music, eating, and drinking.

Expiation Offering: This is an atonement sacrifice. It is usually offered when there is crop failure, protracted illness and or sudden death, famine, plague and diseases. The worshipper undergoes self-abasement. The sacrifice is meant to ward off evils and restore divine blessings. After this sacrifice is made, the worshipper is transformed from defilement to purity.

Foundation Sacrifice: This is made at the beginning of a new venture. The sacrifice makes the business thrive. Hardly do people in the African society embark on anything unless they invoke the blessings of the divine

Preventive Sacrifice: It is offered to stop an impending disaster. The worshipper seeks protection through these sacrifices. The worshipper is allowed to replace his life by sacrificing some specific items. The victim or items are robbed against the body of the worshiper and then used for the sacrifice

Meal and Drink Offering: This type of sacrifice takes place daily but mostly it is offered with what the people eat at home. Libation is poured after the meal has been offered to the divinity and the rest is shared among the worshippers as a sacramental feast. Traditional sacrifice

Environmental Sustainability

Sustainability is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, encompassing environmental, social, and economic aspects. (UNESCO, 2009). There are key concepts of sustainability which includes: meeting needs, not depleting resources and intergenerational equity. Sustainability is often referred to as future viability or intergenerational equity because it emphasizes fairness and responsibility towards future generations. Sustainability is often described as having three core pillars: environmental; protecting and preserving natural resources and ecosystems, social; ensuring fair and equitable access to resources and opportunities for all, economic; creating sustainable economic systems that can support long-term growth and development. The United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability presumes that resources are finite, and should be used conservatively and wisely with a view to long-term priorities and consequences of the ways in which resources are used. Environmental sustainability is about maintaining a balance in our planet's natural environment and conserving resources to ensure a healthy planet for current and future generations, it is the ability to maintain an ecological balance in our planet's natural environment and conserve natural resources to support the wellbeing of current and future generations. According to Patterson (2024), environmental sustainability refers to the responsible management of natural resources to fulfill current needs without compromising the ability of future

generations to meet theirs. It aims to balance ecological, economic and social goals, such as reducing carbon emissions, promoting renewable energy and ensuring equitable resource access.

Spiritual Relationship

Spiritual relationships are connections to a higher power or being or to nature (Burkhardt, 1994). Ngele (2008), established that spiritual relationships are integral to understanding reality, Morality and human destiny, it is very important for life to be harmonious and purposeful. In Igbo cosmology, relationships with the spirits or divine are close, interactive, practical, they are also grounded in morality and are based on cooperation rather than fear alone, they are also sustained through everyday life not just worship moments

How Does Sacrifice Enhance Spiritual Relationship?

The study of African religious practices has long been fraught with misrepresentation and misinterpretation. Among the most contentious and misunderstood practices are those involving sacrifice. Western observers have frequently portrayed African sacrificial rituals through a lens of primitiveness, superstition, or violence, obscuring the profound and social meanings these practices embody. This sought to rectify such misconceptions by examining sacrifice not as an aberrant practice but as a coherent and meaningful system through which African communities in general and Igbo communities in particular established and maintained critical relationships with spiritual forces. Sacrifices are deeply intentional acts of communion between the human and the divine. Scholars across religious studies, anthropology, and theology have consistently observed that sacrifice functions as a dynamic bridge that maintains, deepens, and renews the relationship between worshippers and the spiritual powers they acknowledge. Understanding how sacrifice enhances spiritual relationships requires examining its theological logic, its communal dimensions, its role in ancestor veneration and other spheres of their life and its psychological effects on the believer.

Sacrifice in Igbo context operates within complex cosmological frameworks in which the boundary between the physical and spiritual realms remains permeable and dynamic. Through ritual action, practitioners engage in calculated exchanges with ancestors, deities, and other spiritual entities. These interactions are not arbitrary but follow precise protocols developed over generations, reflecting deep understandings of mythical relationships and social obligations. Igbo sacrifices function as multivalent instruments of spiritual communication and relationship-building. Rather than serving a single purpose, sacrificial practices address multiple needs simultaneously: they facilitate dialogue between human and spiritual realms, strengthen communal bonds, acknowledge cosmic debts, restore balance, and transmit cultural knowledge.

At its foundational level, sacrifice operates on the principle of reciprocal exchange the giving of something valuable in order to receive something of spiritual significance in return. Sacrifice is best understood as the exchange of concrete natural and human goods for abstract spiritual benefits, functioning as the very cost of religion. This exchange framework explains why sacrifice appears so universally: it embodies the logic that spiritual relationship, like any relationship, must be tended, nurtured, and maintained through tangible acts of dedication.

In African religious traditions, this exchange is especially vivid. Right relations with the divinities are maintained through prayers, offerings, and sacrifices, especially blood sacrifices and the shedding of blood in ritual sacrifice, which is believed to release the vital force that sustains life, precedes most ceremonies in which blessings are sought from the ancestors or divinities. The sacrifice is therefore not mere superstition but a cosmological statement: the practitioner acknowledges the spiritual world's sovereignty while simultaneously activating a channel of divine favor. Olupona (2014) has drawn a vivid analogy to explain this energy exchange. Olupona notes that the animal's life force works on the metaphysical plane even after its physical death comparing it to charging a phone with electricity, where energy, as Einstein observed, is neither created nor destroyed but simply transformed. Sacrifice as Atonement, Purification, and Restoration of Spiritual Relationship: when the spiritual relationship between a person and their divine powers becomes strained through moral failure, neglect of duty, or violation of sacred obligations sacrifice serves as the primary instrument of restoration. In Igbo land, key sacrifices such as burnt offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings were designed to maintain the covenantal relationship between the people, their Chi, deities and the Supreme being through the appropriate channels, with intricate laws governing the sacrificial rituals.

Functions of Igbo traditional Sacrifice

In order to understand the function of sacrifice in Igbo spirituality, one must first comprehend the cosmological assumptions that underpin these practices. Igbo worldviews typically envision reality as structured in concentric layers or dimensions, each inhabited by different categories of beings and forces. The physical world that humans perceive with ordinary senses represents only one dimension of a complex reality. Central to most Igbo cosmologies is the concept of a supreme creator divinity or force, often conceived as transcendent and removed from daily human affairs. Below or alongside this Supreme Being exist numerous spiritual entities: lesser deities or spirits associated with natural phenomena, ancestral spirits of the deceased, nature spirits inhabiting specific landscapes, and invisible forces that animate the cosmos. These beings possess agency, intelligence, and the capacity to influence human affairs. The human community, in this framework, does not exist in isolation but forms part of an interconnected web of relationships extending vertically from the spiritual realm to the human realm to the natural world, and often extending horizontally across time to encompass past ancestors and future generations. Humans occupy a mediating position, capable of communicating with both higher and lower orders of being. This worldview presupposes fundamental principles of reciprocity and exchange. Spiritual beings possess resources and powers that humans need: fertility, health, protection, wisdom, and prosperity to mention but a few. Conversely, humans possess certain capabilities and material resources that can serve spiritual beings. The principle of *do ut des*, or mutual exchange, operates as a foundational law in the cosmos. Just as humans expect reciprocal relationships in their social dealings, so too must relationships with spiritual beings be characterized by mutual obligation and gift-giving. Sacrifice emerges within this context as the primary mechanism through which humans can engage in such reciprocal exchanges. It is offering valued material substances through ritualized destruction or transformation, humans communicate respect, gratitude, and petition to spiritual entities.

The sacrifice represents a human investment in the spiritual relationship, a tangible demonstration of commitment and sincerity. Through sacrifice, humans acknowledge their dependence on spiritual forces and signal their willingness to maintain proper relationships.

In traditional Igbo religious contexts, sacrifice functions primarily as a language through which humans communicate with spiritual beings. Just as human speech conveys meaning through culturally agreed-upon symbols, so too does sacrifice communicate through conventionalized ritual actions and offerings. The specific nature of the sacrifice the type of animal, the ritual procedures, the accompanying words all constitute elements of this spiritual language. The communicative dimension of sacrifice addresses a fundamental challenge in Igbo religions: the apparent distance or hiddenness of the divine. While many African traditions acknowledge an all-powerful creator, this being is often conceived as too transcendent or too preoccupied with cosmic matters to attend to individual human concerns. Intermediate spiritual beings, deities, ancestors, and spirits serve as more accessible mediators. However, these beings do not automatically respond to human requests. They must be addressed properly, approached with appropriate humility, and offered incentives to attend to human matters. Sacrifice provides the ritual framework for such approach. When a practitioner performs a sacrifice, they are not attempting coercion but rather soliciting attention and favor. The offering demonstrates that the human community considers the matter sufficiently serious to warrant valuable sacrifice. The willingness to surrender valuable resources communicates sincerity in a manner that words alone might not achieve. The communication aspect extends beyond mere petition, sacrifice also functions as a vehicle for gratitude and acknowledgment. When crops flourish, when children are born healthy, when communities survive threats, sacrifices express appreciation for spiritual interventions. They recognize that success and wellbeing do not result solely from human effort but depend on favorable spiritual conditions and the benevolence of spiritual beings. Through offering sacrifice, communities acknowledge this dependence and maintain the reciprocal relationships that ensure continued favor. Furthermore, sacrifice communicates repentance and restoration. When violations occur, whether through ritual impropriety, social transgression, or moral failure sacrifice provides a mechanism for addressing the offense and reestablishing proper relationships. The destruction or transformation of the sacrificial offering symbolically removes the contaminant or violation, creating space for reconciliation with offended spiritual entities. Among the most significant relationships addressed through sacrifice in African communities is that with deceased ancestors. In most African as well as Igbo cosmologies, the boundary between the living and the dead is not absolute. Ancestors, having recently existed in the human realm and retaining knowledge of human affairs, occupy a position of particular influence. They serve as intermediaries between the living community and the ultimate sources of cosmic power, and they maintain ongoing interest in the wellbeing of their descendants.

The relationship between the living and the ancestors is typically understood as reciprocal obligation. Ancestors depend on the living community for sustenance through offerings and for continued remembrance. In turn, ancestors intercede on behalf of the living with higher spiritual powers and exert influence over the conditions affecting their descendants' lives. They ensure fertility, protect against misfortune, guide important decisions, and punish transgressions against the community or violations of ancestral

injunctions. Sacrifice functions as the primary vehicle for maintaining these ancestral relationships. Regular offerings whether daily libations, periodic feasts, or special ritual occasions constitute a form of feeding for the ancestors. The substance offered need not be consumed in a physical form through such offerings, the living community acknowledges ancestral presence and dependence.

Sacrifices directed toward ancestors serve multiple functions within the relationship. Periodic communal feasts at which animals are sacrificed and portions reserved for ancestors express continuity of kinship and maintain the social fabric connecting generations. Birth, marriage, and death rituals often involve sacrifice that acknowledges the ancestors' stake in these liminal transitions. When individuals or families face difficulties or seek blessings, sacrifice toward ancestors represents an appeal to these powerful intermediaries. The practice of ancestor veneration through sacrifice is not static but evolves across generational time. Recently deceased individuals gradually ascend in status within the ancestral hierarchy. The most recently deceased may require frequent attention and specific offerings, while more distant ancestors are honored through less frequent but more elaborate ceremonies.

Traditional Sacrifice and Environmental Sustainability

Religion is man's relation to that which he regards as sacred or holy. This relationship may be conceived in a variety of forms. Although moral conduct, right belief, and participation in religious institutions are commonly constituent elements of the religious life, worship is generally accepted as the most basic and universal element. Worship is man's reaction to his experience of the sacred power; it is a response in action, a giving of self, especially by devotion and service, to the transcendent reality upon which man feels himself dependent. Sacrifice and prayer are man's personal attempt to communicate with the transcendent reality in word or in thought and they are the fundamental acts of worship and in Igbo indigenous religion, sacrifice is a core aspect of their religion.

Sacrifice is a practice that has been rooted in many Igbo cultures for centuries, in traditional Igbo, sacrifice is often seen as a means of honouring deities, spirits, or ancestors, and seeking blessings for the community. Sacrifice involves giving up something, often for a good cause. It is also an offering that were given to a deity in a ritualized manner. Sacrifice evokes mystery and awe that is uncommon. it is also a subset of rituals. (Gane, 2022). And according Opoku(1997), there are special objects, designated places for the performance of ritual sacrifice often referred to as shrine to include: family compounds, village squares, groves, caves, rivers and the foot of sacred trees, hills and so on.

Traditionally, sacrifices take various forms, ranging from the offering of food, animals, and natural resources. These scarifies are carried out by burning, throwing into the rivers, streams, seas or oceans, by leaving the sacrifice by road sides and also by killing and spilling of the blood especially at T junctions, junctions where three or four roads meet, roads that lead to the streams, rivers, lakes, sacred groves, market squares and it is deeply connected to an understanding of nature as sacred and interdependent. These practices were often accompanied by rituals that demonstrated reverence for the environment and a commitment to its preservation. Traditionally, the sacrificial act was not seen as wasteful, but rather as a means of fostering harmony with the earth and its resources.

In traditional Igbo society, sacrifice has been linked to the natural world, with the environment serving as both a resource for offering and a recipient of symbolic acts. Sacrifice, in its traditional form, is often viewed as a ritual or a sacred act meant to appease deities or spirits and seek favors such as good harvests, successful hunts, or protection from natural disasters. In various Igbo societies, animals, crops, and natural resources have been used as sacrifices for instance, in most Igbo agricultural communities, offerings of the first fruits or harvested crops symbolized gratitude for the bounty of the land. In other cultures, animal sacrifices were conducted to demonstrate respect for life, ensuring that the natural balance between humans and spirits were maintained, sacrifice is deeply connected to an understanding of the relationship with the divine as sacred and interdependent. These practices in Igbo culture were often accompanied by rituals that demonstrated reverence for the Supreme Being and other spiritual beings but failed to understand the negative implications of these practices to the environment.

As the world has become increasingly industrialized and urbanized, traditional practices of sacrifice have often come into conflict with modern environmental concerns. Many traditional forms of sacrifices which are often burnt, thrown into the river or left to decay have been criticized for their negative environmental impacts and as the world are also facing unprecedented multiple crises of climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, zoonotic diseases amongst many others there is an urgent need to check mate these traditional sacrifices. In Igbo religion sacrifice is a core practice and it is believed that there are different types of sacrifice and methods of carrying out each particular sacrifice and for each method, the effects abounds. Sacrifices involving the disposal of animal remains or other materials in water can introduce pollutants, including blood, organic matter, and potential pathogens, that can contaminate the water source. The introduced pollutants and the physical presence of the sacrificed objects can negatively impact aquatic ecosystems, potentially harming fish and other wildlife and can also block water ways which can cause flooding. Rituals involving water permeate contemporary Igbo religion reflecting long held beliefs in the spiritual significance of water due to the belief that water is often seen as a sacred and purifying element, and sacrifices involving water can be interpreted as a way to communicate with deities or purify the water itself. It is a common belief also especially among those living in the riverine areas that the water spirits (mammy water, spirit husbands and wives), possess the power to bless or destroy humans so sacrifices are done to avert their wrought which in turn causes water pollution. The disposal of ritual waste, including animal remains and other materials, can also lead to water pollution. In many communities in Igbo land, these wastes are discarded in rivers, streams, and other water bodies, contaminating the water and posing health risks to people who rely on these sources for drinking, cooking, and other domestic purposes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), water pollution is responsible for an estimated 485,000 diarrheal deaths each year, highlighting the intensity of this issue.

Burning of sacrificial materials is common and one of the methods of sacrifice in Igbo land, it is believed that the smoke that is coming out of the burning sacrifice goes straight to the spirit world and the sacrifice is automatically accepted by spirits.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2018), greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are a significant contributor to climate change, with severe impacts on ecosystems and human societies (IPCC, 2018). They went further to say that certain traditional practices, such as burning large quantities of materials or using fossil fuels for ceremonies, sacrifices can contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and negative climate change (IPCC, 2013).

The climate crisis continues to be the greatest existential threat to humanity and will exacerbate challenges of poverty, food security, water supplies, natural disaster resilience and peace. This crisis transcends all barriers and will negatively impact everybody despite drastic developments over time, all civilisations remain firmly rooted in nature and cannot afford to destroy it. We must act quickly to reverse this trend before the negative impacts on human beings, and the planet, become irreversible. Unsustainable human activities which traditional sacrifices are part of continue to degrade vast areas of the planet and if left unchecked could result in widespread ecosystem collapse and further biodiversity loss.

Overhunting of a particular specie for sacrifice, habitat destruction, and the commoditization of animals for religious or ritualistic purposes have become pressing issues, as these practices disrupt fragile ecosystems. Human are destroying the air, land, and water quality through sacrifice and other means and without environmental sustainability, climate disasters and severe weather will be on the increase.

Deforestation is another significant environmental impact of traditional sacrifices. In most Communities, firewood which are got from cut down trees, plants leave, roots, shrubs and others are common items for sacrifice. Sacred forests and groves, often used for traditional rituals, are being destroyed at an alarming rate, leading to loss of biodiversity and ecosystem disruption. These forests provide essential ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, soil conservation, and habitat creation, which are critical for maintaining ecosystem health and resilience.

Additionally, as traditional cultures come into contact with global economic systems, the pressures to turn natural resources use for sacrifice for profit can lead to the depletion of forests, wildlife, and other environmental assets that were once viewed as sacred. In most Igbo societies today, there are markets for sacrificial objects, animals and plants both live and processed ones which can be moved to different places where they are needed once they are purchased and this has led to overexploitation.

Some of the most significant environmental concerns associated with traditional sacrifices today, is the consumption of resources in ways that no longer adhere to the principles of sustainability: overhunting, deforestation, agricultural practices that support ritual sacrifices, all these contribute to land degradation and loss of habitat for native species. Also some methods and manner of sacrificing like: burying, exposing sacrificial objects on road sides, all these acts, threaten, pollute or can cause direct or indirect harm to the environment.

The severity of the negative effects of traditional sacrifices on the environment

prompted Governor Charles Soludo of Anambra State (one of the states in Igbo land) to take significant steps to address the environmental impacts of traditional sacrifices. In 2023, he signed into law the Anambra State Environmental Protection and Waste Management Agency Bill, which aims to regulate environmental practices, including traditional sacrifices, and promote sustainable development. The law prohibits the disposal of waste, including ritual waste, in water bodies and mandates the use of eco-friendly practices in traditional ceremonies.

Balancing Spiritual relationship and Environmental Sustainability

Sacrifice is the most ancient and essential part of every ceremony when worship is made to the deities or the ancestors. The offering of sacrifice to the gods is a tradition well respected and maintained by the Igbo people and to meaningfully reconcile traditional sacrifice with environmental sustainability, we must first appreciate why these practices endure and what they represent to practicing communities. Sacrificial traditions are not mere customs but living expressions of worldview, ethics, and relationship with the divine. It is a cultural practice that has been passed down through generations in many Igbo societies, and it continues to play an important role in the spiritual, social, and cultural lives of many communities. Some of the important roles that sacrifice plays in Igbo culture includes:

- Communication and acknowledgment: Sacrifice serves as a tangible language of prayer. It transforms abstract devotion into physical action, making the invisible relationship visible and concrete.
- Gratitude and indebtedness: By offering something valuable (animals, food, libations), Igbo people acknowledge they are not self-sufficient. To maintain a harmonious relationship with the Divine Creator and other unseen forces, they felt the need to express submission, gratitude, and allegiance. Sacrifice, as a concept, provided a means to achieve this. It was seen as a way to demonstrate gratitude respect, and acknowledgment of the Supreme Being's authority over all things. (Onwuatuegwu and Osigwe, 2024.).
- Regular sacrifices renew and sustain the bond, similar to how relationships require ongoing investment. Neglecting sacrifice is seen as relationship neglect, potentially causing spiritual estrangement.
- Humility and positioning: The act of giving up something valuable establishes proper hierarchy, humans as recipients and the divine as provider while paradoxically creating intimacy through the exchange.
- Memory and continuity: The ritual act keeps ancestral memory alive. Each sacrifice is a remembrance ceremony that prevents ancestors from being forgotten.
- Reciprocal obligations: Ancestors protect, guide, and intercede for the living; sacrifices are the living's reciprocal duty. This creates an ongoing covenant across the veil of death.
- Mediation role: Ancestors often serve as intermediaries between humans and higher spiritual powers. Sacrifices strengthen their willingness and ability to advocate on behalf of the living.

- Conflict resolution: When misfortune strikes, sacrifice can appease offended spirits restoring harmony and reopening channels of blessing.
- Territorial respect: Spirits associated with rivers, forests, mountains, or specific locations receive sacrifices as acknowledgment of their sovereignty over those domains. It's asking permission, not just taking.
- Exchange and balance: Nature spirits provide resources (water, game, fertile soil); sacrifices maintain the cosmic balance, taking without giving disrupts this equilibrium, inviting consequences.
- Protection and favor: Sacrifices secure the goodwill of powerful natural forces. For an example: a river spirit appeased through sacrifice may prevent drowning; a forest spirit may ensure successful hunts.
- Personalization of nature: Sacrifice treats natural forms as persons with whom relationships are possible, rather than impersonal resources to exploit. This fundamentally changes human environmental behavior.

Despite the roles traditional sacrifices play in maintaining good relationships with the spirit forces, it is imperative to note that the environment and its sustainability is paramount for human existence so that humans through their activities will not totally destroy the environmental systems that support our very life and progress.

There are also a lot of risks involved in downplaying environmental sustainability: biodiversity loss, pollution, drought and water scarcity, resource depletion, deforestation. (Prymian 2025). Conservation of biodiversity is primarily important to today's critically vulnerable environment. Efficient conservation is possible only with the longterm participation and understanding of the communities. Ritual beliefs of the indigenous people are one of the important tools to understand the local communities ([Geng](#), [Hu](#), [Ranjitkar](#), [Shi](#), [Wang](#), 2017). However, integrating environmental sustainability into our daily routines from proper ways of sacrifice; reducing the amount of animal sacrifice, burnt offering water sacrifice, will help to combat this challenge. To ensure sustainable development should respect and preserve the environment while maintaining the culture of traditional sacrifice, it is essential therefore individuals should not be sanctioned or restricted from carrying out sacrifice rather, they should be encouraged to re-introduce a more thoughtful process into the types and methods of sacrifice. A good example is the initiatives launched in Anambra State by their governor who introduced the use of buckets and other forms of containers for rituals instead of polluting water bodies and littering the environment with dirt in the name of sacrifice, this is an eco-friendly alternative to traditional sacrifices, and more alternative sacrificial objects, methods should also be introduced as noted by Berkes (2012), some indigenous communities have started developing traditional practices that promote sustainability and conservation.

Wiredu's (1996) concept of cultural universals and particulars in African philosophy should be applied. He argues that African philosophers must balance the need to recognize cultural universals with the importance of respecting cultural particulars. Wiredu emphasizes the importance of balancing universal values with particular cultural expressions. In the context of traditional sacrifices, this means finding ways to balance the universal value of respecting ancestors and the divine with the particular need to protect the environment. Wiredu's work encourages the contextualizing traditional sacrifices within the broader cultural and environmental context. This means recognizing

that traditional sacrifices are not isolated practices, but are part of a larger web of cultural and environmental relationship, his emphasis on balancing universals and particulars suggests that alternative forms of sacrifice may be necessary to balance traditional practices with environmental sustainability. For example, instead of sacrificing animals, communities could explore alternative forms of sacrifice, such as:

- Plant-based offerings: Offering plants or other non-animal products as a form of sacrifice.
- Symbolic sacrifices: Using symbolic representations of animals or other offerings as a form of sacrifice.
- Community service: Engaging in community service or environmental conservation activities as a form of sacrifice.
- To mitigate the harm caused by traditional sacrifices, it is essential to raise awareness about the environmental consequences of these practices. Education and outreach programs can help communities understand the impacts of their actions and promote sustainable alternatives. Governments, NGOs, and community leaders must work together to develop and implement effective regulations and guidelines for traditional sacrifices, ensuring that these practices are carried out in a manner that minimizes harm to the environment.

Conclusion

Reevaluating traditional sacrifices in Igboland calls for a harmonious blend of spiritual legacy and environmental stewardship. While ancestral rituals nurture communal ties and identity, their ecological impact underscores the need for adaptation, so embracing eco-friendly alternatives, community led conservation, and intergenerational dialogue, Igboland can safeguard its traditions without sacrificing sustainability. The future lies in honoring ancestors through responsible innovation, ensuring sacred practices thrive alongside a thriving planet.

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