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Decolonizing Policy Frameworks: Embedding Indigenous Knowledge in Equitable Research Partnerships

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BACKGROUND

Policy-driven international research collaborations remain shaped by Western epistemic norms, privileging global metrics and donor priorities while marginalizing Indigenous knowledge systems. This imbalance sustains epistemic hierarchies and undermines equitable partnerships.

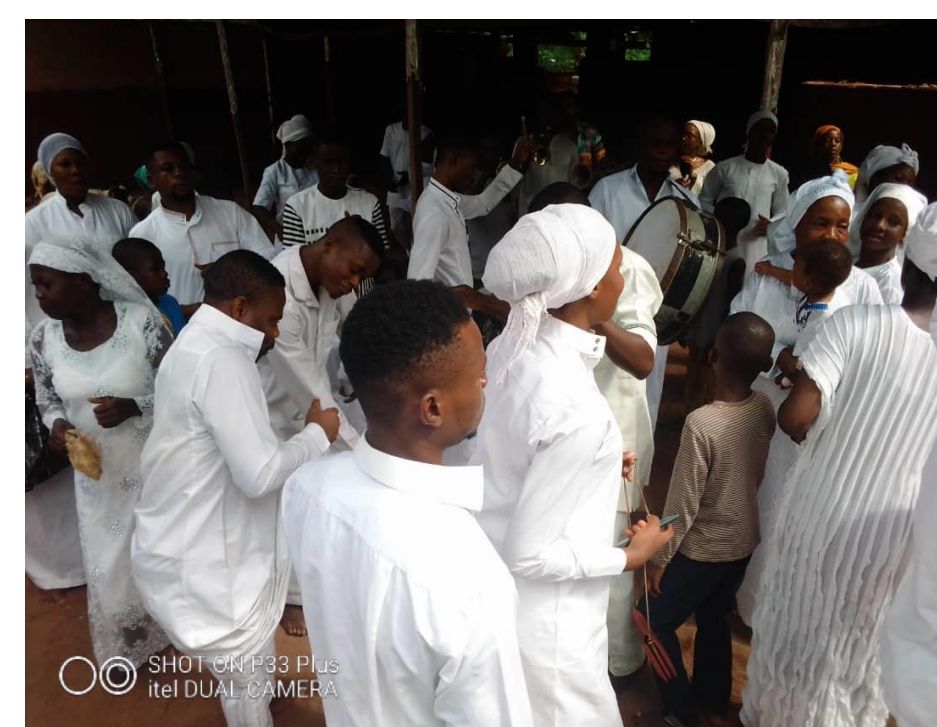
THE PROBLEM

Indigenous epistemologies are rarely recognized within funding criteria, authorship regimes, or policy design. Oral traditions and ritual knowledge remain excluded from legitimate knowledge production, reinforcing epistemic injustice and limiting equitable collaboration.

CASE EXAMPLES

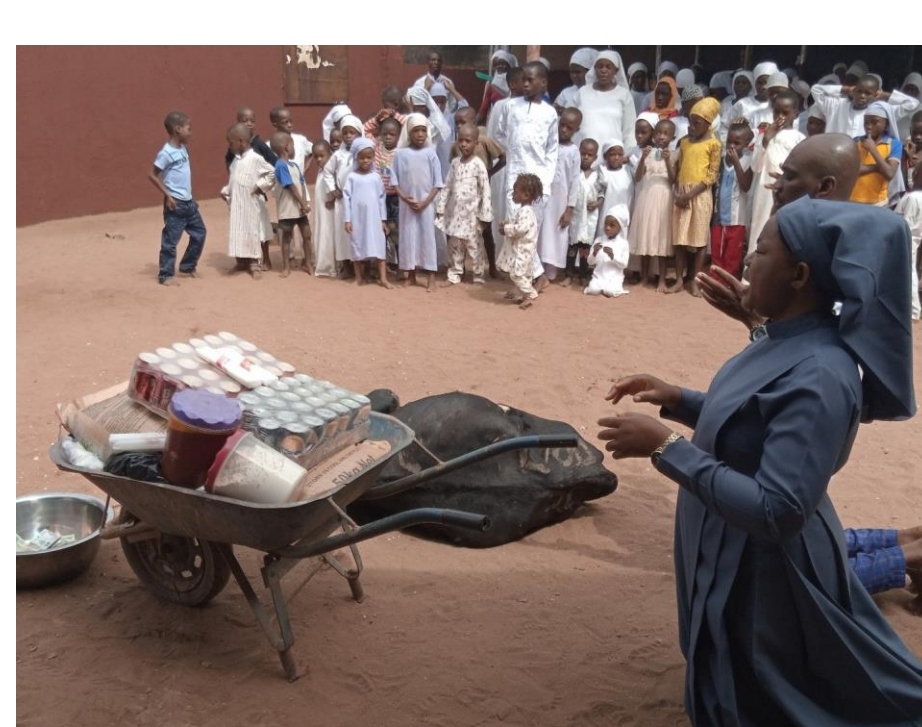
Nigerian Indigenous Sabbatharianism:

A Nigerian Christian movement that integrates indigenous religious logic, ritual, and healing systems into Sabbath-keeping traditions, challenging binary categories of Western vs. African Christian practice.

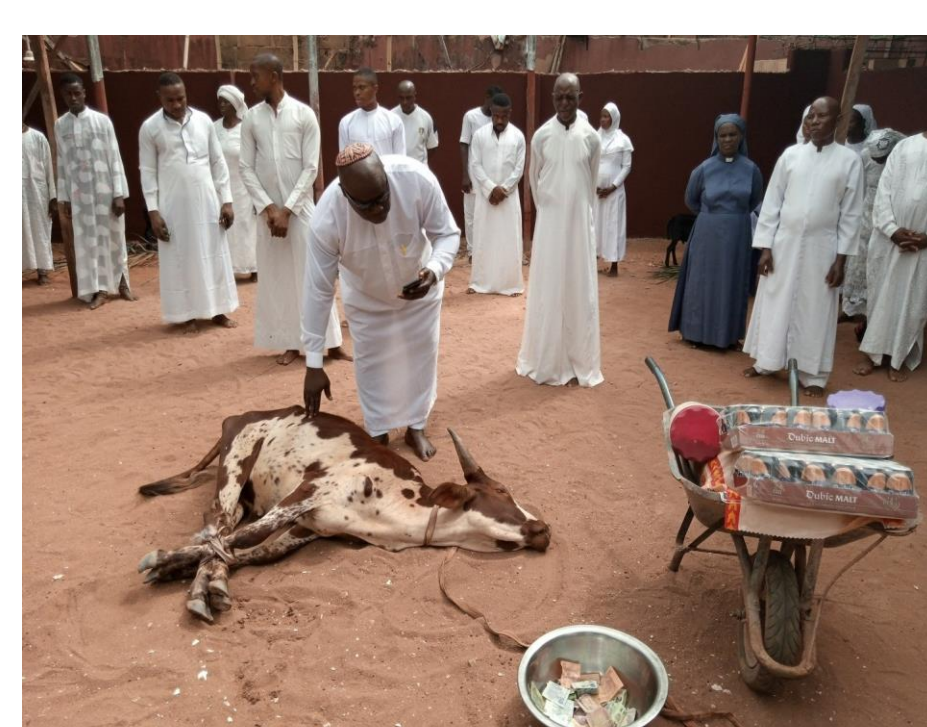


Processional performance with drumming

Source: Fieldwork photos at Our Lord's Sabbath Mission, Umunam-Atta (2021)



Animal sacrifice scenes: Congregational prayer with sacrifice



On Nigeria Indigenous Sabbatharianism, healing and animal sacrifice : ^{1 2}

Ndishi (Atta-Nwambiri):

An Igbo moral-sanctioning institution often misinterpreted as a male-dominant mechanism of female subjugation, yet embedded within a broader cosmology of leadership, accountability, and ethical restraint.



A woman under the consequences of Ndishi

Source: Fieldwork representations: Atta-Nwambiri (2025, AI-assisted visualizations)



A one-time wealthy man who lost everything as a result of Ndishi



Ndi Nze na Ozo performing Ndishi cleansing ritual

PATHWAYS TO REFORM

- Co-creation research methodologies
- Inclusive funding and authorship criteria
- Recognition of oral and ritual knowledge systems
- South–South collaboration frameworks
- Policy instruments for epistemic plurality

CONCLUSION

Embedding Indigenous knowledge as equal epistemic partners disrupts inherited colonial hierarchies and expands the foundations of equitable research collaboration. Policy frameworks that recognize ritual, oral, and community-based knowledge systems are essential for building partnerships that are not only inclusive, but intellectually transformative and socially accountable.

KEYWORDS

Indigenous Knowledge • Epistemic Justice • Decoloniality • Policy Frameworks • African Christianity • Ndishi • Sabbatharianism

ENDNOTES

- Gbule, N. J., & Nwaka, C. S. (2021). *The persistence of Igbo worldview in the Sabbath Church healing liturgy and praxis. Mission Studies, 38*, 234–253. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15733831-12341792>.
- Nwaka, C. S. (2021). *Animal sacrifice in Our Lord's Sabbath Mission in Igboland* (PhD dissertation). University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.