

Inculturating Zia-Wereloo: Exploring the Intersection of Traditional Ogoni Practice and Acts 4:32-37

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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*This article is part of a special issue titled *Sustainability, innovation, and development: A Festschrift in honour of Rt. Rev. Prof. Obeka Samuel Sunday*.*



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ABSTRACT

Zia-Wereloo is a vital communal seasonal tradition among the Ogoni people of Rivers State, Nigeria, emphasising unity, shared resources, and collective well-being once a year. This study explored the connection between Zia-Wereloo and the biblical passage Acts 4:32-36, which describes the early Christian community's practice of sharing possessions and ensuring that no member lacked necessities. The research examined how these two traditions align and how Zia-Wereloo can be integrated into a Christian framework without losing its cultural authenticity. This paper utilised exegetical analysis and a qualitative research approach, including ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews with Ogoni elders and Christian leaders, and textual analysis of Acts 4:32-36. The researcher employed a systematic sampling technique, administering a structured questionnaire to 300 Ogoni residents in Khana Local Government Area. The study reveals the complementary relationship between Zia-Wereloo and Acts 4:32-36 in promoting communal harmony. The findings highlight the potential to combine indigenous communal practices with Christian teachings to enrich faith expressions within Ogoni Christianity. The implications suggest a model for cultural integration that respects indigenous traditions while embracing biblical principles. This paper examines how Zia-Wereloo can be aligned with Christian principles while preserving its cultural value and considers its wider application across Ogoni communities and denominations. Studies have documented the integration of traditional practices; however, the concept of Zia-Wereloo in Ogoni land, when examined within the exegetical framework of Acts 4:32-36, remains largely unexplored in existing scholarship. This study seeks to fill this gap with significant contributions to the discourse.

Research Focus

Intersection of traditional Ogoni practice (Zia-Wereloo) and biblical communal sharing principles (Acts 4:32-37)

Methodology

Mixed methods: exegetical analysis, ethnographic fieldwork, and survey of 300 Ogoni residents

Key Findings

Complementary relationship exists between indigenous communal practices and Christian teachings on sharing

Keywords: Acts 4:32-37, Inculturating, Intersection, Zia-Wereloo

INTRODUCTION

Inculturation has been described as a theological and anthropological process in which Christian teachings are articulated in forms that meaningfully engage local cultural expressions. This process seeks to ensure that the gospel message is authentically communicated and received within specific cultural contexts without compromising its core truths. In the African Christian experience, inculturation is particularly significant, as indigenous traditions and symbols frequently intersect with biblical principles, creating opportunities for mutual enrichment and contextual theological reflection (Shorter, 1988; Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021; Bujo, 2021).

Inculturation is particularly relevant in African Christianity, where indigenous traditions often intersect with biblical principles. The term "Zia" means "Food" or "Meal," while "Wereloo" means "love." This implies a "love feast." Therefore, the term "Zia-Wereloo" in the Ogoni cultural context connotes communal living, unity, and shared responsibility, values that align with the communal practices described in Acts 4:32-36. Zia-Wereloo is a traditional Ogoni practice that promotes communal living, where individuals contribute resources to support the well-being of the entire community. This practice aligns with the biblical description in Acts 4:32-36, where the early Christian community shared their possessions to ensure collective welfare. Understanding the intersection of these traditions raises important questions regarding the possibilities of cultural and religious integration.



Inculturation Process

Theological integration of local cultural expressions with Christian teachings while preserving core gospel truths (Orobator, 2008, 2021; Bediako, 1995)



Zia-Wereloo Practice

Traditional Ogoni "love feast" emphasising communal sharing, unity, and collective responsibility



Biblical Foundation

Acts 4:32-36 describes early Christian community sharing possessions to ensure collective welfare

The communal practice of Zia-Wereloo is deeply ingrained in Ogoni tradition, emphasising collective responsibility, shared resources, and social harmony. This resonates with the broader African philosophy of Ubuntu, which prioritises communal living and interdependence (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003). As scholars such as Kalu (2008), Mbiti (1969), Gyekye (1997), and Nwauwa (2013) have documented, traditional African communities operate on a collective ethos: wealth, food, and land are considered communal assets rather than individual possessions. Within the Ogoni context, Zia-Wereloo embodies these values, functioning as a mechanism for societal cohesion, economic sustainability, and moral responsibility (Naanen, 1995). Furthermore, Ogoni scholars (Ekpo & Ibim, 2013) note that Zia-Wereloo has historically served as a social safety net, ensuring the weak and

vulnerable are cared for by the community. This tradition is rooted in ancestral veneration and indigenous religious beliefs, where collective well-being is seen as a divine mandate.

By examining both biblical and anthropological perspectives, the study underscores the broader implications of inculcation for contemporary Ogoni Christianity (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024). There have been various points of discourse on the practice of Zia-Wereloo, which is often performed orally. Some view it as a traditional practice that was inculcated into the Christian fold, particularly by the Methodist Church Nigeria, in the Okwale Community, which was later adopted by the Methodist Church in Luebe and Soghor Communities, respectively. According to this perspective, Zia-Wereloo was a traditional religious practice dedicated to Akue-Kwa, the deity of fertility and protection (Monday Ngah, 2000). Practitioners believed Akue-Kwa was responsible for bountiful harvests and safeguarding farmers' lives. This practice typically occurred during the new-yam season, with sacrifices offered to Akue-Kwa the night before celebrating life and harvest. A key component of the celebration was Kurukpa, a traditional Ogoni dish also known as Ekpang-nkwukwo in Akwa Ibom. Naanwi Neebara notes that Kurukpa holds ceremonial significance in Ogoni tradition (Naanwi Neebara, 2023).

This assertion posits that the Zia-Wereloo celebration, though initiated by the Methodist brethren, has transcended denominational boundaries to become an event embraced by all churches within the three aforementioned communities (Naanen, 1995). However, another view is that Zia-Wereloo came as a result of the Church's emergence within the locality. This view asserts that for the brethren to be united in the Church, they organised love-feasts that could bind them both physically and spiritually. However, later, Zia-Wereloo, which was done in the Church, became a community celebration wherein different types of displays, both traditional and cultural, were introduced into it.

Knowledge Gaps and Future Research Directions

This paper, therefore, seeks to explore whether and how Zia-Wereloo can be harmonised with Christian principles without undermining its cultural significance and to extend it to other communities and denominations within Ogoni land and beyond. Furthermore, several studies have documented the incorporation of traditional practices (Niedz'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023). Nevertheless, the phenomenon of Zia-Wereloo in Ogoni land, when examined through the lens of Acts 4:32-37, remains largely unexplored in academic discourse.

Despite the insights gained, there are notable gaps in the literature regarding the direct implications of Zia-Wereloo within contemporary Christian practices among the Ogoni. Future research could focus on qualitative studies that explore the lived experiences of Ogoni Christians as they navigate the intersection of their cultural practices and religious beliefs (Henderson et al., 2017). Comparative studies examining similar intersections in other Nigerian ethnic groups or within broader African contexts could enrich the discourse surrounding inculcation and communal practices.

Research Question

How can the communal sharing and generosity described in Acts 4:32-37, and practised by the Okwale, Luebe, and Soghor Communities, be contextualised within traditional Ogoni practices (Naanen, 1995) and inculcated within the Churches (Niedz'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023)?

Objectives

The research objectives are to: 1. explore the traditional Ogoni practice of Zia-Wereloo and its significance in Ogoni culture (Naanen, 1995); 2. examine the principles of communal sharing and generosity outlined in Acts 4:32-37; and 3. investigate how the intersection of Zia-Wereloo and Acts 4:32-37 can inform strategies for community development and social justice within Ogoni communities (Henderson et al., 2017).

01

Cultural Exploration

Explore traditional Ogoni practice of Zia-Wereloo and its significance in Ogoni culture (Naanen, 1995)

02

Biblical Analysis

Examine principles of communal sharing and generosity outlined in Acts 4:32-37

03

Practical Application

Investigate intersection for community development and social justice strategies (Henderson et al., 2017)

The major contributions of this research paper are: (i) The paper provides valuable insights into Ogoni culture and tradition, highlighting the significance of Zia-Wereloo in promoting communal living, unity, and shared responsibility (Naanen, 1995). (ii) The research explores the concept of inculcation, its relevance, and application in African Christianity, particularly in the context of Ogoni communities (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021; Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021). (iii) The paper offers a nuanced understanding of Acts 4:32-36, highlighting the principles of communal sharing and generosity in early Christian communities. (iv) The research investigates how the intersection of Zia-Wereloo and Christian principles can inform strategies for community development and social justice within Ogoni communities (Henderson et al., 2017). (v) The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from theology, anthropology, and sociology to provide a comprehensive understanding of Zia-Wereloo and its significance.

This research paper will be significant in the following areas: (i) Cultural Preservation: Documenting and preserving Ogoni cultural heritage (Naanen, 1995), (ii) Christian Mission: Informing Christian mission and practice in African contexts (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021), and (iii) Community Development: Providing insights for community development and social justice initiatives. Section 2 discusses the related work of this paper; Section 3 discusses the Ogoni Cultural Context (Naanen, 1995); Section 4 highlights the research Methodology and Theological themes; Section 5 highlights the Theological Implications and Practical Application for Contemporary Society; and Section 6 discusses the findings and results, while the remaining sections discuss the recommendations and conclusion.

REVIEW OF RELATED WORKS

Existing literature on Zia-Wereloo highlights its role in maintaining social cohesion, promoting economic stability, and reinforcing cultural identity among the Ogoni people (Naanen, 1995). Scholars of biblical studies have analysed Acts 4:32-36 as a model for Christian communal living, emphasising economic equality and shared responsibility. Additionally, inculturation theories (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) provide insights into how religious practices can be adapted to indigenous cultures. This review synthesises scholarly perspectives on Zia-Wereloo, Christian communal ethics (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013), and inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) as both a theological and sociocultural process.

Inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021), defined as the process through which the Christian message is expressed in ways that resonate with local cultural symbols and practices, is central to African Christianity (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021). The convergence of traditional practices and Christian teachings is particularly evident in the Ogoni people's (Naanen, 1995) adaptation of Zia-Wereloo in light of Acts 4:32-36, which emphasises communal unity and resource sharing (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013). From a sociological perspective, cultural practices such as Zia-Wereloo can be examined through the theory of practice, which illuminates how habitus and symbolic capital shape the continuity of community traditions.

In theological discourse, it is often stressed that inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) is not mere adaptation but a mutual transformation between faith and culture. Furthermore, it is argued that translating the Christian message into indigenous idioms affirms the theological worth of local traditions. The communal ethos of Acts 4:32-36 also resonates with principles found in community-based participatory research (Henderson et al., 2017), which emphasises collective ownership, resource sharing, and mutual support. This suggests that both biblical communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) and traditional Ogoni practices (Naanen, 1995) share an embedded ethic of solidarity. Integrating these perspectives, the literature indicates that inculturation of Zia-Wereloo could serve as a model for cultural-religious synthesis in African Christianity (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021), though further empirical research is required to understand its theological and social implications in the Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) context.

Inculturation Theory

The process of expressing the Christian message through local cultural symbols and practices (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021).

Community-Based Research

Emphasises collective ownership, resource sharing, and mutual support (Henderson et al., 2017).

Cultural-Religious Synthesis

Literature indicates Zia-Wereloo could serve as a model for cultural-religious synthesis in African Christianity (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021).

This review examines scholarly perspectives on inculturation in African Christianity (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021), the integration of traditional Ogoni practice (Naanen, 1995) with Christian teachings, and biblical interpretations of Acts 4:32-36. The question of how Christian faith takes root in Africa remains a pressing theological and social concern. Scholars debate whether communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) and inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) are historical vestiges or dynamic future resources for African Christianity.

Recent debate highlights communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) as a living anthropology, re-evaluating ubuntu (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003) as a philosophical and theological nexus of identity. This perspective argues that ubuntu's insistence on relational being counteracts globalisation's atomising pressures. A 2024 Kenyan study, for instance, reimagines theological anthropology through ubuntu (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003) to address election-related violence, demonstrating how communal values (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) can foster peace and justice. These views suggest communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) is evolving from a cultural description into an active theological principle (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021) with ethical and political relevance.

Theology of inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) faces the complex challenge of affirming cultural rootedness without diluting Christian identity. Gariba and Assenyoh (2023) illustrate this in Ghana, where Christian communities navigate syncretism and inculturation. They suggest syncretism can bridge encounters between Christianity and indigenous religions. Niedz 'wiedz' (2023) further notes the Africanisation of Catholicism in Ghana, where liturgy incorporates traditional elements and Pentecostal rhythms. These studies confirm that inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) is a dynamic negotiation that continually reshapes Christian practice.

Other scholars link ubuntu (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003) directly with ecclesiology, arguing that African church structures must embody communal life to remain credible. This calls for a methodological reorientation, imagining the church as a community of belonging over a bureaucratic institution. Mzondi (2023) uses the Magadi method, intersecting ubuntu (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003) and Pentecostalism, showing that Pentecostal spirituality, often seen as individualistic, can promote communal flourishing when viewed through ubuntu (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003).

Liturgical studies offer fertile ground for inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021), showing how Nigerian Anglicans used indigenous cultural resources for creative liturgical adaptations during COVID-19. Scholars (Niedz'wiedz', 2023) suggest that African ritual imagination can renew Anglican liturgy by re-appropriating tradition contextually. Liturgical inculturation may also serve as a crucial ecumenical meeting point for African churches fragmented by denominational lines.

The wider theological conversation reveals growing confidence in inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) as a continental project. The Concilium issue on African theology (Oduyoye, 2001; Bujo, 2021, 2023) highlights womanist theology and the inculturation of Igbo marriage rites, showcasing cultural practice as a site of theological meaning. The HTS collection on liberative Africanist liturgies (2025) emphasises inculturation's shift from cultural accommodation towards liberation, addressing socio-economic and political realities.

Major figures add depth: Getui's (2022, 2024) work explores the tension between tradition and innovation in spirituality, land, and culture. Examining women's religious movements and megachurches points to new communal forms stretching inculturation categories. These scholars remind us that African theology (Oduyoye, 2001; Bujo, 2021) must engage with the lived experiences of African Christians, not just liturgical or doctrinal discussions.

Communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) is migrating into new ethical terrains. Mahmoud and colleagues (2024) apply ubuntu (Kanu, 2019; Bujo, 2001, 2003) to healthcare AI ethics in Africa, arguing for communal responsibility to temper Western individualistic data ethics. Such interdisciplinary applications suggest ubuntu is both a theological category and a lens for African engagement in global technological debates.

These studies reveal a vibrant conversation, not a tidy consensus. African communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) provides theology with resources for identity, peace, and justice, while inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) offers the methodological bridge for embedding Christianity within cultural life worlds. The challenge, as recent scholarship shows, is to hold both together, ensuring theology remains rooted in communal belonging without cultural romanticism, and that inculturation stays faithful to the gospel while transformative in its African context.

Inculturating Christian theology in African contexts requires critical engagement with indigenous practices embodying communal values. Among the Ogoni people (Naanen, 1995) of the Niger Delta, the Zia-Wereloo practice—an age-old tradition of food sharing and collective participation—offers an important entry point into the dialogue between African communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) and the biblical witness in Acts 4:32-37. This biblical text describes a Christian community sharing all things, distributing resources so "there was not a needy person among them," deeply resonating with Zia-Wereloo's communal ethos.

Recent scholarship re-examines African communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) not as nostalgia, but as a living ethic for contemporary crises of inequality, exclusion, and social fragmentation. Orobator (2021) argues that African theology (Oduyoye, 2001; Bujo, 2021) must recover a communal vision as a foundation for authentic Christian witness in contexts of poverty and instability. Communal ethics (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) foster solidarity and participatory belonging, correcting the hyper-individualism often imported by globalisation. When compared with the communal spirituality of Acts 4:32-37, Zia-Wereloo emerges as a theological resource embodying a sacramental vision of life shared with God and neighbour.

Inculturation theology (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) requires more than simply integrating cultural practices into liturgy (Niedz 'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023); it involves discerning their liberative dimensions for shaping Christian discipleship. Zia-Wereloo can be interpreted as an African expression of koinonia (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013), where unity is nurtured through shared meals. This dynamic addresses contemporary challenges in fractured societies where ethnic rivalries and economic disparities erode community. For the Ogoni church, inculcating Zia-Wereloo offers a pastoral strategy for embodying biblical communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) tangibly and contextually. This model invites African Christianity to ground its mission in practices that reflect its people's lived realities, demonstrating how African communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) and inculturation theology (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) show that cultural practices like Zia-Wereloo are vital instruments for the gospel to take root in African soil.

OGONI CULTURAL CONTEXT

The Ogoni people of Rivers State, Nigeria, are known for their communal ethos (Naanen, 1995), attachment to land and water, and traditions that preserve harmony among kin, even amidst environmental degradation and marginalisation. While not fully documented online, their emphasis on communal solidarity, land respect, and inclusive customs remains evident (Naanen, 1995). Significant collective sharing rituals, such as communal meals and yam harvest festivals, dissolve hierarchical barriers and reinforce identity through the proverb "I am because we are," resonant with core African communal philosophies (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013).

God in Ogoni Land

The Ogoni people of the Niger Delta have a rich traditional religion centred on "Waa Bari" or "Bari Gokana" (Naanen, 1995), a supreme, unseen, feminine deity believed to be the mother of all creation and the controller of natural forces.

The Significance of Waa Bari

Waa Bari's feminine deity status likely stems from women's ability to bring new life. In Ogoni culture (Naanen, 1995), women are revered for childbearing and are associated with nature's cycles.



Waa Bari

Supreme feminine deity - mother of creation, controlling natural forces in Ogoni traditional religion



Communal Ethos

Emphasis on collective solidarity, shared resources, and harmony among extended kin networks



Land Connection

Deep attachment to land and water, with traditions preserving environmental stewardship

Ogoni Traditional Practice and Christian Ethics

The Ogoni people of Nigeria (Naanen, 1995) have a strong tradition of communal living, which is central to their socio-cultural identity. Scholars like Nwauwa (2013) discuss how African communalism (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997) differs from Western individualism, aligning more closely with early Christian communalism (Alexander, 1993). Similarly, Kanu (2019) explores the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Bujo, 2001, 2003), which shares similarities with the ideals of communal sharing seen in Acts 4:32-36. The concept of Zia-Wereloo, which emphasises collective well-being, is thus compatible with Christian values of generosity and social justice. This traditional practice highlights communal support and resource sharing, echoing the principles outlined in Acts 4:32-36. Research has highlighted the significance of community-based approaches in understanding cultural practices (Henderson et al., 2017).

Zia-Wereloo: A Traditional Ogoni Practice

Zia-Wereloo is a traditional Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) practice that involves the worship of the gods and ancestors through music, dance, and offerings. This practice is typically observed every September during the harvest season of the new water yam. The celebration features the preparation of traditional foods such as Akurukpa. Further ethnographic inquiry could ascertain whether the timing of this festival corresponds with specific agricultural cycles or is regulated by lunar calendrical events, thereby enhancing its cultural and anthropological contextualisation and the community's coming together to share in a meal of unity and oneness. Zia-Wereloo is a symbol of communal unity and celebration, embodying the love of brotherhood! In other words, "we exist because you exist."

Inculturation and the Evolution of Zia-Wereloo

With the advent of Christianity, some Ogoni Christians (Naanen, 1995) have incorporated elements of their traditional practice into their Christian worship (Niedz'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023). This inculturation has helped to preserve Ogoni cultural heritage while also promoting Christian values. Today, Zia-Wereloo continues to be an essential aspect of Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) culture and spirituality, serving as a means of communication between the living and the dead, as well as with the gods and ancestors.

Practices and Rituals

Zia-Wereloo typically involves a series of rituals and performances, including: 1. Music and dance: Traditional Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) music and dance are integral parts of Zia-Wereloo. 2. Offerings: The Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) people make offerings to the gods and ancestors, which may include food, drinks, and other items. 3. Prayers and invocations: The community comes together to pray and invoke the gods and ancestors, seeking their guidance and protection and for blessings in terms of a bountiful harvest.

01

Music and Dance

Traditional Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) music and dance are integral parts of Zia-Wereloo celebrations and rituals

02

Offerings

Community makes offerings to gods and ancestors, including food, drinks, and ceremonial items

03

Prayers and Invocations

Collective prayers seeking guidance, protection, and blessings for bountiful harvest

Inculturating Zia-Wereloo

Zia-Wereloo has been influenced by Christianity, and some Ogoni Christians have incorporated elements of their traditional practice into their Christian worship. This inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) has helped to preserve Ogoni cultural heritage while also promoting Christian values. Within this period, a holy week is declared for all the villagers. They do not engage in farming or business within this one week. Everybody stays at home to cook varieties of foods and dine with their loved ones.

Biblical and Theological Perspective on Acts 4:32-36

Acts 4:32-36 describes the early Christian community as a society where believers shared everything in common, eliminating economic disparity among them. Biblical scholars such as Wright (2006) and Schnabel (2012) emphasise that this passage reflects the *koinonia* (fellowship) principle, a foundational Christian ethic promoting economic and spiritual unity. The communal lifestyle in Acts is often viewed through two theological lenses: Idealistic and Pragmatic (Witherington, 2007). The idealistic view suggests that the passage reflects a divine model for Christian communal living, whereas the pragmatic approach argues that this was a situational necessity to support the fledgling Christian community facing economic hardships (Barrett, 1994). Scholars like N.T. Wright (2013) argue that the passage should not be interpreted as an endorsement of socialism but as a radical call to voluntary generosity, where possessions are held loosely in service to the faith community. When viewed through the lens of African communal traditions (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Naanen, 1995) like Zia-Wereloo, there is an evident convergence between early Christian communal living and indigenous African practices of shared wealth (Nwauwa, 2013).

Theological Implications of Inculturating Zia-Wereloo: In an increasingly globalised world, the quest for cultural relevance and sensitivity has become a pressing concern for Christian theologians and practitioners. This paper aims to explore the theological implications of inculturating Zia-Wereloo, examining how this cultural tradition intersects with Christian faith and practice. Theological scholars such as Bujo (2003, 2021) advocate for an African Christology that integrates traditional values with Christian teachings (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024). In this context, inculturating Zia-Wereloo (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) would mean reinterpreting Christian communal ethics in a way that resonates with the Ogoni worldview. This approach aligns with the broader African Christian movement, which seeks to decolonise theology and develop locally relevant expressions of faith. The inculturation of Zia-Wereloo (Niedz'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023) within the framework of Acts 4:32-36 provides a vivid illustration of the way Christianity can engage African traditions in a contextually authentic manner. It reflects how scriptural values, such as communal solidarity, mutual responsibility, and the equitable sharing of resources, can be embodied through indigenous cultural expressions without diminishing their biblical significance. Interpreting Zia-Wereloo through the lens of the early Christian ideal of *koinonia* transforms the celebration from a purely cultural observance into an expression of Christian fellowship, thereby creating a harmonious link between faith and tradition that nurtures both spiritual vitality and cultural identity.

Scholarly reviews affirm the compatibility of Ogoni communal values and early Christian communalism, suggesting that incultured Christianity strengthens faith practices. Future research should examine its influence on Ogoni social structures and economic ethics. Key implications of integrating Zia-Wereloo into Christian theology include its challenge to Western individualism. Zia-Wereloo's relational emphasis, foregrounding communal personhood and interconnectedness (Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013), aligns with Mbiti's (1969) "I am because we are," Bujo's (2001) African ethic of community solidarity, and Tutu's (1999) Ubuntu theology (Kanu, 2019). These insights encourage a re-imagining of theological anthropology through African communitarian perspectives, especially concerning personhood, salvation, and the natural environment. This prompts questions about salvation's individualistic or communal nature and its potential broadening to include the natural world.

Secondly, Zia-Wereloo's focus on ancestral veneration and the land raises important questions about sacred space and the role of ancestors in Christian theology. While traditional Christian theology views sacred space as a designated physical location, Zia-Wereloo suggests it can also encompass land with ancestral significance. This encourages reflection on how ancestral memory contributes to communal identity and creation stewardship (Mzondi, 2023). For theological consistency, this view must affirm that the land's sanctity derives from God's presence, and ancestral honouring functions as cultural remembrance, not worship. This distinction ensures the expanded view of sacred space enriches Christian practice without compromising theological foundations (Niedz'wiedz', 2023).

Thirdly, Zia-Wereloo's emphasis on ceremonial practices and rituals challenges traditional Christian understandings of worship and liturgy. In Zia-Wereloo, ceremonies are integral to maintaining natural balance and harmony. This raises questions about ritual's role in Christian worship and whether our understanding can broaden to include a greater emphasis on the natural environment.

Inculturation Theories and Their Relevance

Inculturation, the theological integration of Christian teachings with indigenous cultures, is a key missiological debate (Orobator, 2008, 2021). Shorter (1988) defines it as "the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture in which neither is negated but rather enriched." African theologians like Bediako (1995), Pobee (1979), and Orobator (2008, 2021) advocate for harmonizing Christianity with African traditions rather than replacing them. For Zia-Wereloo, inculturation means identifying theological commonalities between indigenous Ogoni communalism and Christian teachings on shared living (Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013). Scholars such as Bujo (2001) stress that this engagement strengthens Christian witness in African contexts by affirming local traditions instead of dismissing them as pagan or incompatible with the Gospel (Odugoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Exegetical Component

This study performs an exegetical analysis of Acts 4:32-36, focussing on theological themes of unity, communal sharing, and stewardship. It employs historical-critical and literary methods, drawing on biblical commentaries and scholarly works (Alexander, 1993). Special attention is given to the early Christian community's socio-religious context as a framework for reflecting on Ogoni communal practices.

Qualitative Component

Research Design

The qualitative dimension employs ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and participant observation to explore the cultural and theological significance of Zia-Wereloo ceremonies among the Ogoni people (Henderson et al., 2017).

Data Collection Methods

Data collection included: i. In-depth interviews with Ogoni elders and Christian leaders for lived experiences, oral histories, and theological perspectives. ii. Participant observation of Zia-Wereloo ceremonies, documenting rituals, symbols, and communal interactions. iii. Textual analysis of primary ethnographic notes, secondary literature on Ogoni traditions (Naanen, 1995), and theological writings on sacred space and community. iv. A structured questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 300 Ogoni indigenes in Khana Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling ensured participants represented diverse demographic categories: age, gender, religious affiliation, and community role.

Mixed-Methods Approach

Combines exegetical analysis with ethnographic fieldwork and survey research.

Sample Size

300 Ogoni indigenes from Khana Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria (Naanen, 1995).

Data Collection

In-depth interviews, participant observation, textual analysis, and structured questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, simple percentage calculations, and the Chi-square (χ^2) test to identify patterns and correlations. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were analysed thematically and through content analysis to extract recurring patterns, cultural themes, and theological insights.

Hypotheses Formulation

Null Hypothesis 1 (Ho1): There is no significant cultural alignment between the traditional practice of Zia-Wereloo and the biblical model of communal sharing described in Acts 4:32-37. **Alternative Hypothesis (Ha1):** There is a significant cultural alignment. This first hypothesis tests how Ogoni communal values (unity, collective well-being, resource sharing) resonate with early Christian community principles (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013).

Null Hypothesis 2 (Ho2): The inculcation of Zia-Wereloo into Christian worship practices does not enhance communal harmony and spiritual identity among Ogoni Christians. **Alternative Hypothesis (Ha2):** The inculcation of Zia-Wereloo enhances communal harmony and spiritual identity. This second hypothesis explores the perceived social and spiritual benefits of blending Zia-Wereloo with Christian doctrine among indigenous believers (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021; Niedz'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023).

Null Hypothesis 3 (Ho3): Christian leaders and Ogoni elders do not hold differing perspectives on the appropriateness of integrating Zia-Wereloo into Christian practices. **Alternative Hypothesis (Ha3):** Christian leaders and Ogoni elders hold differing perspectives on the appropriateness of integrating Zia-Wereloo into Christian practices. This hypothesis evaluates intergenerational and interreligious tensions or consensus regarding cultural integration in faith-based practices.

Null Hypothesis 4 (Ho4): Awareness and practice of Zia-Wereloo are not significantly influenced by one's level of education, religious affiliation, and mode of cultural inheritance (birth or marriage). **Alternative Hypothesis (Ha4):** Awareness and practice of Zia-Wereloo are significantly influenced by one's level of education, religious affiliation, and mode of cultural inheritance (birth or marriage). This last hypothesis investigates the extent to which demographic variables, such as age, gender, educational attainment, and geographical location, mediate the perception, interpretation, and acceptance of Zia-Wereloo, particularly in relation to its potential reinterpretation within a Christian theological framework. In doing so, it engages with African ethnographic and theological discourses on ancestor-veneration as a mode of communal identity (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013), African communitarian ethics and the sacrality of land (Bujo, 2001, 2003), and African women's theological perspectives on cultural continuity and transformation (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024). Such an approach situates the study within broader debates on inculcation, religious adaptation, and the socio-cultural determinants of belief systems in sub-Saharan Africa.

Test Statistics

The test statistic is the Chi-Square, where each Chi-squared value indicates the extent of association, and the p-values are used to determine the statistical significance. The conclusion on whether to reject or not reject each null hypothesis was based on the p-value (typically with a significance level of 0.05).

Analysis Demographics

The demographic distribution of respondents provides essential context for understanding the interpretations of Zia-Wereloo and its inculcation into Christian practices. The respondents represent a broad range of age groups, with notable concentrations in the 34-41 and 42-50 age brackets, as seen in Figure 1. This middle-aged dominance suggests that opinions about Zia-Wereloo are shaped by individuals with both cultural memory and current church participation, making them influential voices in cultural-theological discussions. In Figure 2, the sample is predominantly male, indicating a possible gender imbalance in participation. This might reflect cultural norms where leadership roles or religious-cultural discourse are male-dominated (Naanen, 1995).

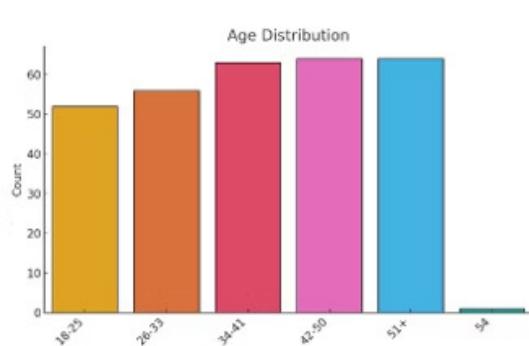


Figure 1: Age Distribution

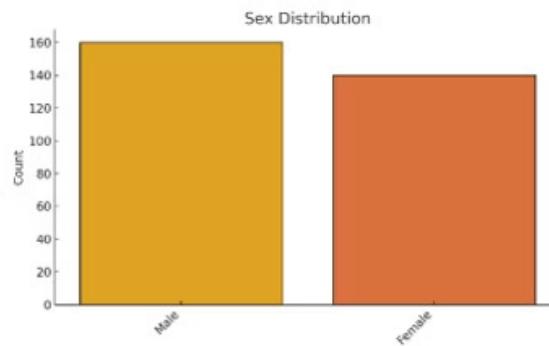


Figure 2: Sex Distribution

The majority of respondents possess a postgraduate-level education, with some presence of secondary, primary, and graduate respondents (see Figure 3). This high literacy level implies that respondents are capable of critical engagement with theological and cultural questions, supporting reliable assessments of inculcation and alignment. The sample, as seen in Figure 4, includes members from various denominations: Methodist, Anglican, Catholic, Pentecostal, and Others. This variety demonstrates ecumenical relevance, reinforcing that Zia-Wereloo's implications are not restricted to one church tradition. The positive or critical responses toward Zia-Wereloo's integration into Christian worship come from diverse Christian expressions.

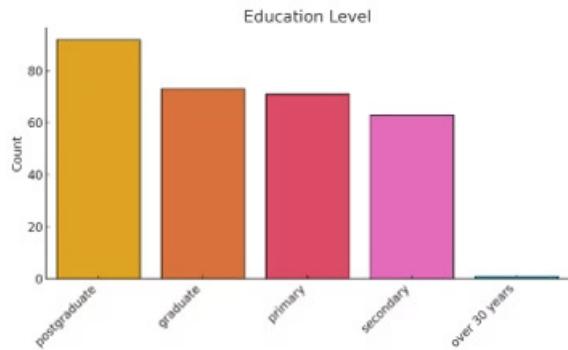


Figure 3: Education Level Distribution Distribution

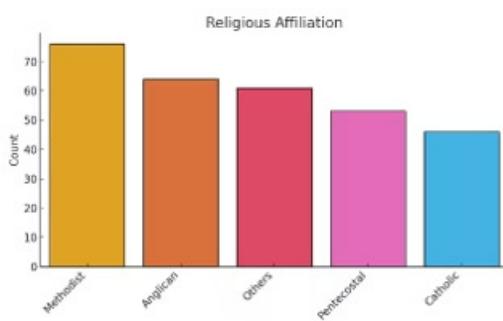


Figure 4: Religious Affiliation

In Figure 5, most respondents identify as Ogoni by birth, with a few indicating cultural connection via marriage or both. This shows that Zia-Wereloo is deeply embedded in indigenous heritage, but is also accessible and practised by non-indigenous people through relational inclusion. The universality of practice (confirmed in Ho4) is reflected in how Zia-Wereloo transcends strict lineage.

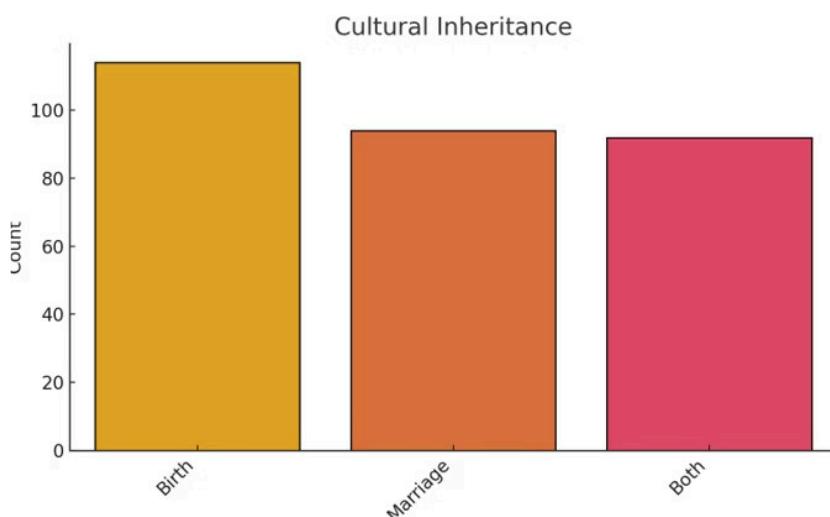


Figure 5: Cultural Inheritance Distribution

Analysis of Hypotheses

The summary of the results of the hypotheses testing is presented in Table 1. Rejecting Ho1: Cultural Alignment is Significant. The Chi-square result ($\chi^2 = 124.94$, $p < 0.001$) provides strong evidence of a statistically significant alignment between the communal values of Zia-Wereloo and the biblical model described in Acts 4:32-37. This supports the premise that Ogoni cultural practices, centred on unity, generosity, and resource-sharing, mirror early Christian communal ethics. The findings affirm the theological viability of interpreting Zia-Wereloo as a contextual expression of Christian community life.

Rejecting H₀₂: Inculturation Enhances Harmony and Spiritual Identity With a significant Chi-square value ($\chi^2 = 93.23$, $p < 0.001$), this result indicates that the inculturation of Zia-Wereloo into Christian worship is positively associated with enhanced communal harmony and spiritual identity among Ogoni Christians. Respondents recognise the social and spiritual value in blending traditional love feasts with church practices.

Accepting H₀₃: Unity Between Christian Leaders and Elders The test for differing perspectives between Christian leaders and Ogoni elders yielded $\chi^2 = 0.00$ ($p = 1.000$), indicating complete agreement. Both groups support the integration of Zia-Wereloo into Christian practice.

Accepting H₀₄: Demographic Variables Do Not Influence Awareness The association between demographic factors (education, religion, cultural inheritance) and Zia-Wereloo awareness was statistically insignificant ($\chi^2 = 36.16$, $p = 0.644$). This confirms that Zia-Wereloo is universally recognised and practiced across different social categories.

Hypothesis	Description	χ^2 Value	p-Value	Decision
H₀₁	There is no significant cultural alignment between Zia-Wereloo and Acts 4:32-37	124.94	< 0.001	Rejected
H₀₂	Inculturation of Zia-Wereloo does not enhance communal harmony or identity	93.23	< 0.001	Rejected
H₀₃	Christian leaders and Ogoni elders do not hold differing views	0.00	1.000	Accepted
H₀₄	Awareness and practice of Zia-Wereloo not influenced by education, religion, or inheritance	36.16	0.644	Accepted

Table 1: Hypotheses Testing Results

Synthesising the Insights

Integrating insights from traditional Ogoni practices (Naanen, 1995) and Acts 4:32-36 reveals a significant overlap in values related to community and resource sharing. African cultural studies (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013) highlight culture's role in social interactions, suggesting that understanding Zia-Wereloo through shared community values provides deeper insight. This aligns with the adaptation of Christian theology to African contexts (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021), supporting Zia-Wereloo's framing within a broader narrative of inculturation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021), consistent with the communal principles of Acts 4:32-36.

Exegetical Analysis of Acts 4:32-36

Original Text

Acts 4:32 Τοῦ δε γιπληθους τῶν πιστευσαντων ἦν καρδιά και ψυχη μια, και ιούδε ζεῖς τι τῶν ὑπαρχοντων αύτῷ ἔλεγεν ἵδιον εἶναι ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτοῖς ἄπαντα κοιναί.

Acts 4:33 και θυναμει μεγαλη ἀπεδιδουν το γαρτυριον οι ἀποστολοι τῆς ἀναστασεως τοῦ κυριου Ιησοῦ, χαρις τε μεγαλη ἦν ἐπι παντας αύτους.

Acts 4:34 ούδε γαρ ἐνδεης τις ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς· ὅσοι γαρ κτητορες χωριών ἦσαν οἰκιῶν ὑπῆρχον, πωλοῦντες ἔφερον τας τιμας τῶν πιπρασκομενών.

Acts 4:35 και ἔτιθουν παρα τους ποδας τῶν ἀποστολων, διεδιδετο δε ἔκαστω καθοτι ἄν τις χρειάν εἶχεν.

Acts 4:36 Ιωσηφ δε ὃ ἐπικληθεις Βαρναβᾶς ἀπο τῶν ἀποστολων, ὃ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευομενον υἱος παρακλησεως, Λευιτης, Κυπριος τῷ γενει,

Acts 4:37 ὑπαρχοντος αύτῷ ἀγροῦ πωλησας ἦνεγκεν το χρῆμα και ἔθηκεν προς τους ποδας τῶν ἀποστολων.
(BibleWorks 8. (n.d.))

Transliteration of Original Text

Acts 4:32 Tou de plēthous tōn pisteusantōn ēn kardia kai psychē mia, kai oude heis ti tōn hyparchontōn autō elegen idion einai all' ēn autois hapanta koina.

Acts 4:33 kai dynamēi megalē apedidoun to martyrion hoi apostoloi tēs anastaseōs tou kyriou Iēsou, charis te megalē ēn epi pantas autous.

Acts 4:34 oude gar endeēs tis ēn en autois; hosoi gar ktētores chōriōn ē oikōn hypērchon, pōlountes epheron tas timas tōn pipraskomenōn.

Acts 4:35 kai etithoun para tous podas tōn apostolōn, diedideto de hekastō kathoti an tis chreian eichen.

Acts 4:36 Iōsēph de ho epiklētheis Barnabas apo tōn apostolōn, ho estin methermēneuomenos huios paraklēseōs, Leuitēs, Kyprios tō genei,

Acts 4:37 hyparchontos autō agrou pōlēsas ēnēnken to chrēma kai ethēken pros tous podas tōn apostolōn.

Translation of Text (Acts 4:32-37)

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. **33** And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. **34** Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, **35** And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. **36** And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, **37** Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Exegetical Analysis of Acts 4:32-36 and Its Contemporary Implications

Acts 4:32-36 depicts an early Christian community characterised by shared possessions and mutual support, ensuring no one lacked. Scholars view this as an ethical model for Christian communalism (Esler, 1987) and a radical form of economic justice (O'Toole, 2004). This commitment to resource sharing highlights communal living dynamics, emphasizing unity and mutual support-values that resonate deeply with traditional African communal practices (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997). The passage's central themes of common ownership and giving have been analysed across various religious and sociocultural contexts (Kane et al., 2015), reinforcing the Ogoni emphasis on communal responsibility and resource-sharing (Naanen, 1995).

In the Ogoni culture, traditional practices mirror these communal values. The seasonal Kurukpa delicacy, served on a canoe-shaped platter, is communally shared by families, fostering unity among cultivators of water yam (Neebara, 2023; Naanen, 1995). Historically, it was common for individuals to freely visit any household for meals, particularly during festivals. Widows, orphans, and those without immediate family were embraced and provided for collectively, often eating from the same plate as kin (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997). A cherished custom involved singing from house to house to collect food, which was then prepared and shared at church premises (Niedz'wiedz', 2023). Sadly, this tradition of communal unity and mutual care has gradually diminished over time (Nwauwa, 2013).

Kurukpa Tradition

Traditional Ogoni delicacy served in canoe-shaped wooden platter, symbolizing communal unity and shared identity (Naanen, 1995)

Collective Provision

Widows, orphans, and vulnerable community members cared for through communal sharing and support (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997)

Community Solidarity

Historical practice of moving house to house collecting food items for communal church meals (Niedz'wiedz', 2023)

Historical and Literary Context

Acts 4:32-36 is a literary and theological continuation of the Pentecost narrative. It mirrors Acts 2:42-47 in style and function, providing a summary of the communal life of believers after the reception of the Holy Spirit (Witherington, 1998). Luke employs idealised language to contrast the spiritual integrity of the early church with the hypocrisy found in the story of Ananias and Sapphira that follows (Keener, 2012). Luke's idealising language, which highlights the early community's spiritual integrity and therefore heightens the moral rupture in the Ananias-Sapphira episode (Keener, 2012), functions on more than a purely ethical register. Classic studies that draw attention to Luke's prologues argue that these openings perform a historiographical work, signalling claims to orderly inquiry and attested reliability, rather than merely supplying devotional framing. Loveday Alexander's influential study argued that Luke's short prefaces should be read in light of ancient literary conventions (notably technical or "scientific" prooimia), a move that recasts Luke's moral contrasts as integrated into a deliberate mode of historiographical presentation (Alexander, 1993).

Recent scholarship has extended and diversified this insight in different directions: some have redescribed Luke-Acts as a form of apologetic historiography that shapes the past to define the present (Sterling, 2023), others have compared Luke's tactics with broader ancient historiographical practices and with biblical chronicling models (Peters, 2022; Giacobbe, 2023), while work on Lukan genre and "generic conversation partners" emphasises Luke's fluid use of multiple ancient genres to achieve rhetorical and theological ends (Crabbe, 2024). Read together, these studies suggest that the Ananias-Sapphira contrast is best interpreted not simply as a moral exemplum appended to an idealised portrait, but as part of Luke's crafted historiographical strategy, one that claims investigatory authority while simultaneously forming and policing communal identity. The passage showcases a community reorientated around the resurrected Christ, whose unity, generosity, and power-bearing witness were central to its identity.

Lexical and Theological Analysis

Verse 32 - "One heart and soul" (μιά καρδιά καὶ ψυχὴ μιά) This idiom, drawn from Septuagintal and Hellenistic usage, denotes profound solidarity (Marshall, 1980). The dual reference to heart (καρδιά) and soul (ψυχὴ) suggests a depth of unity that transcends external uniformity and reflects shared spiritual identity. It aligns with Old Testament imagery of a covenantal community (Deut. 6:5). The statement that "no one claimed private ownership" draws attention to the voluntary spirit of sharing that characterised the early Christian community. It was not an enforced system of collectivism but a response to the transforming work of the Spirit. Peter's words to Ananias in Acts 5:4 make this clear: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, were not the proceeds at your disposal?" This exchange shows that believers retained full rights over their property, and the giving described in Acts 4:32-35 arose from free choice, not external compulsion. The picture Luke paints is one of generosity rooted in faith, where stewardship flowed from love rather than obligation. This is a voluntary disposition toward shared possession (Peterson, 2009). This is applicable to the type of sharing and giving during the Zia-Wereloo festival. The giving is not by compulsion but voluntarily. This should not be confused with

compulsory collectivism, as the later narrative in Acts 5 confirms that property remained under individual discretion (Bruce, 1988). During Zia-Wereloo, everyone gives according to their abilities and not by compulsion.

Verse 33 - "With great power" (δυναμίᾳ μεγαλῇ) The Greek δυναμις here conveys divine enablement. Apostolic witness to the resurrection is the theological axis of the community's life, and this proclamation was attended by supernatural confirmation and communal transformation (Stott, 1990).

Verses 34-35 - "There was not a needy person among them" The statement recalls Deuteronomy 15:4, where God's covenant blessing envisages a society without poverty. This continuity with Jewish ethical tradition is now fulfilled in the Spirit-led church (González, 1984). The use of the term ἐνδεῆς (needy) underscores Luke's concern for the economically vulnerable (Green, 1997). The structured and equitable redistribution of resources reveals not random charity but intentional diakonia (service).

Verse 36 - Barnabas as Exemplar Barnabas ("son of encouragement") is set forth as a narrative archetype of self-giving discipleship. His Levite identity is significant because Levites traditionally held no land inheritance (Num. 18:20). His renunciation of property signals a redefinition of identity through Christ, a major Lukan theme (Talbert, 2005).

Theological Themes

- i. Koinonia (Fellowship): Acts 4 presents fellowship not only as relational but also economic. Genuine Christian community involves mutual care that impacts material realities (Hellerman, 2001).
- ii. Resurrection Ethics: The passage links resurrection testimony with economic transformation. The resurrection is not merely a theological claim but the engine of social reordering (Wright, 2003).
- iii. Grace and Responsibility: Luke notes, "great grace was upon them all," indicating that divine grace led to tangible acts of compassion. Grace, in this context, is not abstract but ethical and social (Johnson, 1992).

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Rethinking Possessions and Stewardship

In an age dominated by individualism and consumer capitalism, Acts 4 calls the church to practice radical stewardship. The early Christians did not abolish property, but they redefined it as a tool for

mutual upliftment (Barclay, 2006). This critique is especially vital in societies with vast disparities between the wealthy and the impoverished.

Unity Beyond Uniformity

The vision of "one heart and soul" applies to multi-ethnic, pluralistic communities. Spirit-rooted unity accommodates diversity while fostering shared mission (Yoder, 1994).

Witness Through Action

The church's witness must include economic and social responsibility. Verbal proclamation of the resurrection needs to be matched by embodied justice and mercy (Bosch, 1991).

Ecclesial Leadership and Accountability

This passage has significant institutional implications. The apostles' financial distribution models spiritual leadership grounded in trust, simplicity, and transparency.

Okoye (2006) presents this text as a timely challenge to the excesses of the prosperity gospel and moral decay in certain church structures. It acts as a theological counterweight to teachings equating faith with material gain and leadership patterns exploiting resources for personal enrichment.

By highlighting the early church's communal ethic and selfless stewardship, the passage calls for integrity, accountability, and a return to a gospel-shaped vision of wealth, directing resources toward the common good rather than individual accumulation.

S/N	Dimension	Theological Implication
1.	Inculturation	Embeds gospel in local cultural expressions, fulfilling rather than replacing (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021).
2.	Communal Identity	God's people flourish not in isolation but through solidarity, reflecting divine relationality (Trinity as community) (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013).
3.	Eucharistic Relevance	Ordinary sharing becomes sacred; this becomes an embodiment of Christ's table (Niedz' wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023).
4.	Economic Justice	Rejects accumulation, endorses resource redistribution, a biblical and indigenous vision of justice.
5.	Prophetic Role	Acts of sharing become resistance against structural injustice.

DISCUSSIONS

Rejecting the first null hypothesis (Ho1) provides stronger support for developing a contextual theology that blends indigenous cultural values without undermining biblical orthodoxy. It positions Zia-Wereloo as a culturally relevant and biblically meaningful practice within Ogoni Christianity. Rejecting null hypothesis two, Ho2, confirms the missiological approach of inculcation (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021). It shows that when the church affirms and incorporates meaningful cultural traditions, spiritual identity is reinforced rather than weakened. Agreeing with null hypothesis three, Ho3, offers a strong foundation for collaborative leadership in integrating faith and culture. It minimises the risk of intergenerational or doctrinal conflicts and promotes unified messaging across both spiritual and cultural spheres. Accepting null hypothesis four, Ho4, allows Zia-Wereloo to be effectively promoted as a common cultural marker, strengthening shared identity in both rural and urban Ogoni communities regardless of religious or educational background.

Findings indicate that Zia-Wereloo and the Christian communal practice described in Acts 4:32-36 share similar values of unity, mutual support, and economic interdependence (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013). However, distinctions exist in the motivations behind these practices; Zia-Wereloo is driven by cultural norms, while the Christian model is rooted in spiritual convictions. Participants expressed openness to integrating biblical principles into Zia-Wereloo while preserving its cultural identity. The study also highlights potential challenges, such as theological resistance to non-Christian traditions and concerns over syncretism. The results suggest that inculcating Zia-Wereloo within Christianity can reinforce both faith and cultural identity, provided that theological integrity is maintained.

The study's findings point to clear implications for Christian mission among the Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) and in African Christianity more broadly (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021). Effective mission work in these contexts will not ignore local culture but draw from it in ways that reflect the heart of the gospel. For example, traditional communal meals can be adapted into church life as symbols of fellowship and mutual care; leadership can be shared in ways that mirror the community's own decision-making patterns; and teaching on generosity can be framed through familiar practices of resource sharing. These approaches affirm people's cultural identity while shaping it in light of Scripture, creating a mission that is both faithful to Christ and deeply at home in its setting. Furthermore, the research underscores the need for a balanced approach that respects indigenous traditions while fostering spiritual growth. Limitations include the scope of interviews and regional variations in Zia-Wereloo practices, which future research could address.

Future studies should aim for greater gender inclusivity to capture women's perspectives, particularly because women occupy central roles in several dimensions of Zia-Wereloo. Women are often responsible for selecting and preparing the specific foods used in the ceremony, safeguarding the recipes and techniques passed down through generations. They lead the singing and dancing during the ceremony and act as cultural interpreters who explain the meaning of each stage to younger participants or outsiders. Senior women also serve as custodians of the ceremony, ensuring that the ceremony follows established norms.

Documenting women's contributions to Zia-Wereloo would highlight their agency and open new research into how gender dynamics shape its practice and transmission.

The consistent awareness of Zia-Wereloo across demographics (age, gender, education) underscores its deep communal reach throughout Ogoni society (Naanen, 1995). This finding is crucial for future church engagement: mission and theological education should be comprehensive community initiatives, not isolated activities. Churches seeking effective inculturation must develop worship, teaching, and outreach programs that connect with all segments of society—urban and rural, male and female, educated and uneducated.

By positioning Zia-Wereloo as both a cultural symbol and a potential bridge to biblical communalism, Christian mission among the Ogoni can foster an authentically African, inclusive faith, firmly rooted in both Scripture and culture (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021).

Biblical Framework: Acts 4:32-37

Acts 4:32-37 describes the early Jerusalem church as a unified community "of one heart and soul," where possessions were shared to ensure "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:32-34, NIV). Barnabas exemplifies this through sacrificial stewardship, selling property for communal support (Acts 4:36-37). Theologically, this reflects mutual identity in Christ and economic solidarity, challenging wealth as a divider. As Willie James Jennings notes, here "money... will be used to destroy what money is usually used to create: distance and boundaries between people" (Alexander, 1993).

Intersecting Zia-Wereloo and Acts: A Contextual Theology

a) Shared Symbolism of Table and Unity

Zia-Wereloo's communal meal, like Eucharistic sharing in Acts, symbolises unity, sacrificial love, and the redefinition of individuality within community, making food an act of belonging (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013).

b) Cultural Translation of *Koinōnia*

Zia-Wereloo offers Ogoni Christians a culturally resonant way to embody *koinōnia* (fellowship). By sharing resources as in Acts, they align with an indigenous worldview that values collective welfare and shared identity, rather than adopting a foreign concept (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008).

c) Communal Stewardship vs. Global Capitalism

Both Zia-Wereloo and the Acts model ground an anti-individualistic theology, confronting greed and social fragmentation. By re-centring communal ownership and responsibility, they offer a contextual critique of exploitative systems, mirroring Barnabas' act of reorienting status towards solidarity (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013).

d) Inculcation in African Theology

African theologians, like Bolaji Idowu, emphasising integrating Christianity with local culture rather than supplanting it (Idowu, 1965/1994; Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022). A Zia-Wereloo-rooted theology integrates tradition into Christian life, preserving authenticity and meeting this call (Idowu, 1994; Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2021; Bujo, 2021).

e) Prophetic Witness in Oppressed Contexts

Given Ogoniland's history of environmental destruction, political marginalisation, and livelihood loss (UNEP, 2011; Naanen, 1995), communal sharing rituals, grounded in both Ogoni tradition and early Christian practice, become a prophetic act against alienating and impoverishing systems.

Table Unity

Zia-Wereloo's communal meal mirrors Eucharistic sharing, symbolising unity and sacrificial love.

Cultural Koinōnia

Offers a culturally resonant way for Ogoni Christians to embody fellowship via indigenous worldview.

Prophetic Witness

Communal sharing rituals offer a prophetic stand against alienating and impoverishing systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we recommend the following:

01

Theological Training Enhancement

Theological programs should encourage comparative studies between Zia-Wereloo and similar African communal practices, enabling leaders to appreciate and apply shared values of solidarity in ministry (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013).

02

Socio-Economic Justice Focus

Church leaders should be equipped to engage Zia-Wereloo's socio-economic and justice dimensions, promoting its communal ethos to address poverty, inequality, and grassroots development.

03

Cultural Sensitivity Training

Theological curricula should integrate ethnographic methods and critical cultural analysis, training leaders for culturally sensitive and contextualised ministry (Orobator, 2008).

04

Policy Development

Church policies in Ogoniland should guide worship practices that incorporate non-contradictory Zia-Wereloo elements, ensuring Christian liturgy is both biblically grounded and culturally resonant (Niedz 'wiedz ', 2023; Mzondi, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Zia-Wereloo and the communal ethic of Acts 4:32-36 share fundamental principles of unity and resource-sharing (Mbiti, 1969; Gyekye, 1997; Nwauwa, 2013). By exploring their intersection, this research contributes to ongoing discussions on cultural adaptation in Christian theology. Future studies could explore how other indigenous practices align with biblical principles to foster culturally relevant expressions of faith. The inculturation of Zia-Wereloo (Bediako, 1995; Orobator, 2008, 2021) raises a complex array of theological implications that warrant critical exploration. By examining how this cultural tradition intersects with Christian faith and practice, we can better understand the nature of God, salvation, and the human person. Furthermore, Zia-Wereloo challenges traditional Christian understandings of sacred space, worship, and ritual (Niedz'wiedz', 2023; Mzondi, 2023), offering a rich and nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings. As Christian theologians and practitioners, we are called to engage with diverse cultural traditions, recognising how they shape our understanding of God and the world (Oduyoye, 2001; Getui, 2022, 2024; Bujo, 2021). Zia-Wereloo offers a unique opportunity for such engagement, challenging us to re-evaluate our assumptions and develop a more inclusive and contextualised understanding of Christian theology. By synthesising Zia-Wereloo with Acts 4:32-37, a theology emerges that is both authentically Ogoni (Naanen, 1995) and robustly Christian. This theology speaks hope, affirming that cultural heritage can be a vessel for the gospel; that true Christian fellowship is communal, and that even small acts of sharing are prophetic in worlds marred by inequity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Not Applicable

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

FUNDING

This research received no funding from any agency.

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Received: June 18, 2025

Accepted: August 15, 2025

Published: November 19, 2025

Citation:

John-Efiong, V. E., Anyanwu, P. C., Coker, K. P. O., & Atowoju, A. A. (2025). *Inculturating Zia-Wereloo: Exploring the intersection of traditional Ogoni practice and Acts 4:32-37*. *SustainE*, 3(2), 485-513. In A. A. Atowoju, E. O. Oyekanmi, A. A. Akinsemolu, & D. M. Duyile (Eds.), *Sustainability, innovation, and development: A Festschrift in honour of Rt. Rev. Prof. Obeka Samuel Sunday* [Special issue]. <https://doi.org/10.55366/suse.v3i2.23>

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