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Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) Paternity Testing and Incorporated Fatherhood in Nvosi Communities: Negotiating Lineage Ritual and Identity

Umezuruike Onyeokeriga Uchegbue[1]
Department of Religious Studies
Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State.
Nigeria

Abstract

The increasing recourse to DNA paternity testing in contemporary African societies introduces a significant epistemological challenge to established systems of kinship and social fatherhood. In Igbo society, particularly within Nvosi communities, fatherhood is historically constructed through marriage legitimacy, lineage incorporation, and ritual validation rather than biological determinism. This study critically examines the tension between genetic verification and the indigenous principle of incorporated fatherhood, with particular attention to the Ili Alo ritual as a mechanism of lineage inscription. Drawing on anthropological, legal, and religious scholarship, the paper argues that the burial of the umbilical cord within the paternal compound constitutes a cosmological act embedding the child within ancestral continuity and social identity. Using qualitative and interpretive methodologies, the study engages ritual theory, African ontology, and legal pluralism to interrogate how DNA testing reconfigures traditional notions of paternity. The findings indicate that while DNA evidence introduces new frameworks of empirical truth, it simultaneously destabilises communal cohesion, inheritance systems, and ritual belonging. The study concludes that incorporated fatherhood remains a resilient cultural institution, though increasingly negotiated within plural epistemic and legal frameworks. It recommends a dialogical approach that accommodates scientific advancement while preserving the social and ritual foundations of identity in contemporary Igbo society.

Keywords: Nvosi, DNA, Fatherhood, Identity

Introduction

Paternity in Igbo society has historically been understood within a framework that privileges social legitimacy and lineage continuity over biological certainty. The cultural logic of fatherhood is grounded in marriage, where the husband assumes paternal authority over children born within the union, irrespective of genetic origin. Uchendu explains that paternal identity in Igbo society is not contingent upon biological verification but is instead embedded within lineage systems that prioritise social belonging.[2] Mbiti similarly argues that African conceptions of personhood are fundamentally communal, locating identity within relational networks rather than biological individuality.[3] Fortes further

[1] Email: umezo4u@gmail.com, pastorumez2025@gmail.com
[2]Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 67.
[3]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1990), 106.

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observes that kinship institutions are structured to maintain continuity even in situations where biological certainty is absent or contested.[4] Goody reinforces this position by noting that social reproduction in African societies is sustained through institutional arrangements that transcend genetic determinism.[5] These perspectives collectively establish that fatherhood in Igbo society operates as a socially constructed institution grounded in marriage and lineage incorporation

The emergence of DNA paternity testing introduces a competing epistemology that privileges genetic verification over socially recognised fatherhood, often generating concern within Igbo families due to its disruptive implications.[6] This shift reflects how new systems of knowledge destabilise established norms by introducing alternative sources of authority.[7] It further intensifies tensions between inherited cultural frameworks and modern scientific practices in African societies.[8] As a result, modernity produces competing regimes of truth that reshape indigenous understandings of identity and legitimacy.[9]

Within Nvosi communities, this tension is mediated through Ili Alo, a ritual that incorporates the child into lineage by embedding identity within ancestral continuity beyond biological contingencies. African ontology situates identity within the interconnected realms of the living and the ancestors,[10] while ritual practices actively construct social legitimacy.[11] Such incorporation rites establish enduring identities within the social order[12] and stabilise society during cultural change,[13] thereby complicating DNA-based paternity claims.

The coexistence of customary and statutory frameworks intensifies this complexity, as biological evidence increasingly shapes legal paternity while customary law prioritises social legitimacy rooted in marriage. Bride price vests paternal rights in the husband irrespective of biology,[14] and customary law grounds family and inheritance in social recognition.[15] Such legal pluralism produces overlapping authorities that require negotiation rather than definitive resolution,[16] creating a contested space where competing definitions of fatherhood coexist.

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[4]Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order* (London: Routledge, 1969), 256.
[5]Jack Goody, *The Character of Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 23.
[6]Nnanwuba Allen Adum and Chioma Claribel Efoby, "Knowledge and Response to DNA Paternity Test Information Among Married Igbo People," *Social Science Research* 11, no. 1 (2025): 4.
[7]Sally Falk Moore, *Law as Process* (London: Routledge, 1978), 32.
[8]AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo, *Gender Issues in Nigeria* (Lagos: Vista Books, 2012), 58.
[9]Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 15.
[10]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 108.
[11]Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 81.
[12]Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969), 94.
[13]J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 112.
[14]Patrick UchennaUhuo, "Child Ownership Under Igbo Customary Law," *Abakaliki Bar Journal* 3, no. 1 (2025): 11.
[15]Akinola Emiola, *African Customary Law*, 3rd ed. (Ibadan: Emiola Publishers, 2011), 45.
[16]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.

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This study examines how DNA paternity testing challenges incorporated fatherhood in Nvosi communities, focusing on Ili Alo as a mediating mechanism of lineage inscription and identity. It interrogates the interaction between scientific and indigenous epistemologies in shaping belonging and legitimacy. Kinship systems endure by absorbing social tensions,[17] while ritual systems adapt without losing their core functions.[18] African worldviews similarly accommodate new realities without abandoning communal foundations,[19] situating the study within broader debates on the coexistence of scientific and indigenous knowledge systems.

Conceptual Clarifications and Theoretical Framework

The discourse on paternity in Nvosi communities requires distinguishing biological from social fatherhood, the former grounded in genetic contribution verifiable by DNA, and the latter in culturally sanctioned recognition through marriage and lineage. Parenthood is a juridical and social status within kinship systems rather than merely biological,[20] as kinship itself is structured through social roles and obligations.[21] In the Igbo context, paternal identity is assigned through lineage systems that prioritise social legitimacy,[22] while kinship remains a cultural construct shaped by specific meanings rather than universal biology.[23]

Closely related is incorporated fatherhood, the culturally regulated process through which a child becomes a recognised lineage member irrespective of biology, achieved through marriage, communal acknowledgement, and ritual validation. Incorporation rites confer new social status and transform identity,[24] producing stable and enduring identities within the social order.[25] Ritual practices actively construct legitimacy,[26] grounding identity in relational and communal ontology[27] while integrating social and cosmological belonging.[28] In Nvosi, Ili Alo exemplifies this by embedding the child within the paternal lineage beyond biological contingencies.

Liminality offers an analytical lens for understanding identity formation in Igbo ritual systems as a transitional state between social positions before full

[17]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, 272.
[18]Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 90.
[19]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 110.
[20]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, 256.
[21]A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), 63.
[22]Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 65.
[23]David M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984), 49.
[24]Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 121.
[25]Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[26]Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 81.
[27]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 107.
[28]Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science," *Africa* 37, no. 1 (1971): 101.

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incorporation. It is a phase of ambiguity preceding reintegration into structured order,[29] marking movement between identities within rites of passage.[30] Ritualisation confers recognised status and authority,[31] and in birth contexts, the child remains liminal until incorporated through practices such as Ili Alo. This shows that identity is culturally constituted through ritual validation rather than automatically assigned at birth.

Ritual theory explains how cultural practices sustain social order and authority within a community. Ritualisation establishes meaning and authority within specific contexts,[32] while African religious practices structure identity and social organisation.[33] Ritual acts reinforce kinship by making relationships enduring,[34] and social practices reproduce continuity over time.[35] These perspectives show that ritual stabilises fatherhood as a social institution and cannot be easily displaced by scientific verification.

African ontology provides a philosophical basis for understanding the communal nature of identity and fatherhood in Igbo society, where personhood is defined through relational interconnectedness.[36] Identity is inseparable from lineage, ancestry, and communal participation,[37] while kinship roles are socially constructed through institutional practices.[38]Belonging is further tied to locality and social recognition,[39] reinforcing incorporated fatherhood and showing that DNA testing reconfigures, rather than simply informs, identity and legitimacy.

Review of Related Literature

Scholarly discourse on African kinship systems consistently affirms that fatherhood is socially constituted rather than biologically determined, with lineage continuity serving as the central organising principle. Fortes argues that descent systems in African societies are structured to preserve continuity by assigning individuals to socially recognised units irrespective of biological ambiguity.[40] Radcliffe-Brown similarly maintains that kinship is a system of social relations defined by roles and obligations rather than physiological connections.[41] Mbiti further explains that African societies construct identity

[29]Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.
[30]van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, 11.
[31]Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 74.
[32]Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 88.
[33]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 110.
[34]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, 270.
[35]Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 78.
[36]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 106.
[37]Uchendu, *Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 71.
[38] Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 104.
[39]Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 45.
[40]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, 267.
[41]Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, 62.

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through communal belonging, thereby subordinating biological individuality to collective integration.[42]

Goody extends this perspective by noting that kinship institutions function as mechanisms for organising reproduction, inheritance, and social stability beyond genetic considerations.[43] Schneider critiques biologically determinist interpretations of kinship by arguing that kinship systems are culturally specific constructions rather than universal biological facts.[44] This body of literature establishes that social fatherhood is not incidental but foundational within African cultural systems, providing a critical backdrop for understanding contemporary challenges introduced by DNA testing.

Within Igbo-specific scholarship, the principle of legitimacy through marriage has been widely examined as the primary determinant of paternal identity. Uchendu explains that legitimacy derives from the marital bond, assigning children to the husband's lineage regardless of biological origin.[45] Amadiume supports this position by demonstrating that kinship roles within Igbo society are constructed through institutional arrangements that regulate authority, gender, and belonging.[46]

Emiola further argues that customary law recognises children born within marriage as legitimate members of the husband's lineage, irrespective of genetic considerations.[47]Nwoga adds that Igbo social organisation is fundamentally structured around lineage continuity, where belonging is determined by social integration rather than biological verification.[48] Okafor similarly observes that the legitimacy of children in Igbo society is anchored in marital recognition and communal acceptance.[49] These studies collectively highlight the robustness of the marital framework in legitimising children and sustaining lineage continuity, while also revealing the cultural resistance to redefining paternity through scientific means alone.

Ritual practices associated with birth and incorporation have also received extensive scholarly attention as mechanisms through which identity is constructed and stabilised within African societies. Bell argues that ritual practices actively produce social realities by conferring legitimacy and authority on participants.[50] Van Gennep explains that rites of passage culminate in incorporation, marking the transition into a recognised social status within

[42]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1990), 107.
[43]Goody, *The Character of Kinship*, 28.
[44]Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 49.
[45]Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 1965), 69.
[46]Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (London: Zed Books, 1987), 104.
[47]Emiola, *African Customary Law*, 45.
[48]Donatus IbeNwoga, *The Igbo World of Achebe's Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 77.
[49]F. U. Okafor, *Igbo Philosophy of Law* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1992), 93.

[50]Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 82.

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the community.[51] Turner further elaborates that such incorporation produces enduring identities that are resistant to reversal within the social order.[52]

Horton emphasises that African religious practices integrate individuals into both social and cosmological systems, thereby reinforcing communal cohesion.[53] Peel adds that ritual continuity serves as a stabilising force in African societies, particularly in contexts of cultural transformation.[54] These theoretical contributions provide a strong foundation for understanding the role of Ili Alo as a mechanism of lineage inscription and identity formation within Nvosi communities.

Recent empirical studies have shifted attention to the implications of DNA paternity testing within African contexts, revealing significant tensions between scientific and cultural frameworks of fatherhood. Adum and Efoby report that DNA testing has generated anxiety among Igbo families due to its potential to disrupt established identities, marital stability, and lineage continuity.[55] Adimora-Ezeigbo observes that contemporary African societies are increasingly confronted with tensions between inherited cultural frameworks and modern scientific practices, particularly in matters of family and identity.[56] Geschiere further notes that modern transformations often produce uncertainty around belonging, leading to heightened concern over issues of identity and legitimacy.[57]

Comaroff and Comaroff argue that the introduction of scientific rationality often disrupts indigenous epistemologies by redefining the basis of truth and authority.[58] Moore emphasizes that such disruptions require processes of negotiation rather than outright replacement of existing systems.[59] This body of literature highlights the disruptive potential of DNA testing while also pointing to the adaptive capacity of cultural systems in responding to such challenges.

Legal scholarship further enriches this discourse by examining how paternity is contested within plural legal systems that incorporate both customary and statutory frameworks. Emiola argues that African customary law prioritises social legitimacy derived from marriage over biological evidence in determining family relationships and inheritance rights.[60] Uhuo similarly notes that the payment of bride price establishes paternal rights in the husband irrespective of biological origin within Igbo customary law.[61] Moore explains that legal

[51]van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Vizedom and Caffee, 121.
[52]Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[53]Horton, "African Traditional Thought,"103.
[54]Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 112.
[55]Adum and Efoby, "DNA Paternity Test," 6.
[56]Adimora-Ezeigbo, *Gender Issues*, 58.
[57]Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 45.
[58]Comaroff andComaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, 20.
[59]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.
[60]Emiola, *African Customary Law*, 47.
[61]Patrick UchennaUhuo, "Child Ownership Under Igbo Customary Law," *Abakaliki Bar Journal* 3, no. 1 (2025): 11.

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pluralism creates overlapping systems of authority that often produce conflicting outcomes, requiring negotiation and reconciliation.[62]

Nwabueze adds that African legal systems are characterised by the coexistence of multiple normative orders, each with its own principles of legitimacy and authority.[63] Okeke further observes that the interaction between customary and statutory law often generates complex challenges in determining issues of family and identity.[64] These studies demonstrate that the coexistence of legal frameworks complicates the resolution of paternity disputes while also providing avenues for integrating scientific and cultural perspectives.

DNA Paternity Testing and Epistemological Disruption

The introduction of DNA paternity testing fundamentally transforms kinship by privileging genetic verification as the dominant criterion of truth, thereby challenging socially constructed legitimacy. It is increasingly regarded as authoritative even when it contradicts established familial narratives,[65] reflecting how new knowledge systems destabilise existing norms.[66] Kinship structures become vulnerable when external criteria redefine relationships,[67] as scientific rationality reshapes indigenous epistemologies of truth and legitimacy.[68]

DNA testing reconfigures fatherhood by privileging biological connection over social responsibility and communal belonging, thereby challenging kinship structures in Igbo society. Paternal identity is traditionally assigned through lineage rather than physiological proof,[6970]within a relational and communal understanding of personhood. Kinship remains culturally constructed rather than biologically determined,[71] as social realities are produced through sanctioned practices rather than empirical verification alone,[72] introducing a competing logic that destabilises established fatherhood systems.

The social consequences of DNA paternity testing are pronounced in contexts where lineage continuity and communal cohesion are central, as revelations of non-biological paternity generate conflict and disrupt family stability. DNA testing can destabilise marriages and create divisions within communities,[73]

[62]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.
[63]B. O. Nwabueze, *The Machinery of Justice in Nigeria* (London: Butterworths, 1972), 141.
[64]G. S. M. Okeke, "Customary Law and Modern Legal Systems," *Nigerian Law Journal* 14, no. 2 (2010): 62.
[65]Nnanwuba Allen Adum and Chioma Claribel Efoby, "Knowledge and Response to DNA Paternity Test Information," *Social Science Research* 11, no. 1 (2025): 3.
[66]Moore, *Law as Process*, 32.
[67]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order,* 268.
[68]Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, 20.
[69]Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 1965), 65.
[70]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1990), 107.
[71]Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship*, 49.
[72]Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 81.
[73]Adum and Efoby, "DNA Paternity Test," 6.

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reflecting broader tensions between tradition and modern science.[74] It also produces anxiety around belonging and identity,[75] requiring negotiation between competing systems of authority rather than simple replacement,[76] thereby introducing both clarity and instability into kinship relations.

The epistemological challenge of DNA testing intensifies alongside ritual systems such as Ili Alo, which establish identity through lineage incorporation and ancestral continuity. Incorporation rites create enduring identities resistant to challenge,[77] while ritual practices generate authoritative social realities.[78] African ontology situates identity within interconnected realms of the living and the ancestors,[79] with ritual integrating both social and cosmological belonging.[80] Thus, DNA evidence challenges not only social arrangements but an existing ontological order.

The coexistence of DNA testing and customary fatherhood reflects legal and epistemic pluralism in Nigeria, where customary law recognises social fatherhood through marriage while statutory systems privilege biological evidence. Customary law assigns parental rights based on social legitimacy,[81] with bride price establishing paternal authority irrespective of biology.[82] Multiple normative orders operate simultaneously,[83] creating overlapping authorities that generate conflict and require negotiation.[84]

Despite these tensions, DNA paternity testing does not entirely displace the cultural logic of incorporated fatherhood but instead initiates processes of negotiation and adaptation. Kinship systems endure because they are designed to maintain continuity in the face of social change,[85] while ritual systems adapt without losing their core functions.[86] African worldviews similarly integrate new knowledge without abandoning communal foundations,[87] as social structures are reproduced through adaptive practices that sustain continuity.[88] This indicates that the relationship between DNA testing and social fatherhood is not one of replacement but of ongoing negotiation.

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[74]AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo, *Gender Issues in Nigeria*, 58.
[75]Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 45.
[76]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.
[77]Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[78]Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 88.
[79]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 109.
[80]Robin Horton, "African Traditional Thought," *Africa* 37, no. 1 (1971): 103.
[81]Emiola, *African Customary Law*, 47.
[82]Patrick UchennaUhuo, "Child Ownership Under Igbo Customary Law," *Abakaliki Bar Journal* 3, no. 1 (2025): 11.
[83]B. O. Nwabueze, *The Machinery of Justice in Nigeria* (London: Butterworths, 1972), 141.
[84]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.
[85]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, 272.
[86]Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 90.
[87]Mbiti, *African Religions*, 110.
[88] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

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Within this negotiated space, Ili Alo continues to function as a critical mechanism for affirming lineage identity and social belonging. The ritual act of burying the umbilical cord within the paternal compound symbolically anchors the child within ancestral continuity, thereby establishing a form of identity that transcends biological contingencies. Turner argues that rituals of incorporation produce identities that are socially enduring and resistant to reversal.[89] Horton further explains that African ritual systems integrate individuals into both social and cosmological orders, reinforcing their place within a broader network of relationships.[90] Peel observes that ritual continuity serves as a stabilising force in African societies, particularly in contexts of cultural transformation.[91] Mbiti similarly emphasises that identity in African thought is grounded in interconnectedness between the living, the ancestors, and future generations.[92] Within this framework, Ili Alo operates not merely as a symbolic practice but as a culturally authoritative act that legitimises belonging irrespective of biological uncertainty.

The biological father, in most cases, does not acquire paternal rights over children identified through DNA testing unless he formally initiates a process of claim that is recognised within the customary framework. Such a process requires negotiation with the husband's lineage and often involves compensation, ritual validation, and communal acknowledgement. Uhuo argues that customary law prioritises the rights of the husband as the recognised father, with biological claims remaining secondary unless formally integrated into the lineage system.[93]Emiola similarly maintains that the transfer of paternal rights within customary law is contingent upon social recognition and not merely biological evidence.[94]

Moore explains that such processes reflect the adaptive capacity of legal systems operating within plural contexts, where competing claims must be reconciled through negotiation.[95]Nwabueze further observes that African legal systems accommodate such complexities by allowing multiple normative frameworks to coexist.[96] These insights demonstrate that the recognition of biological paternity within Nvosi communities is mediated through cultural processes rather than determined solely by scientific evidence.

The implications of this negotiation extend beyond individual cases to broader questions of identity, inheritance, and social cohesion within the community. DNA testing introduces new possibilities for determining biological truth, but it also raises questions about the stability of lineage systems and the continuity of

[89]Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[90]Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science,"103.
[91]Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 112.
[92]John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1990), 109.
[93]Patrick UchennaUhuo, "Child Ownership Under Igbo Customary Law," *Abakaliki Bar Journal* 3, no. 1 (2025): 12.
[94]Emiola, *African Customary Law*, 48.
[95]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.
[96]B. O. Nwabueze, *The Machinery of Justice in Nigeria* (London: Butterworths, 1972), 141.

communal identity. Geschiere notes that modern transformations often generate anxiety around belonging, particularly when established systems of identity are challenged.[97]

Adimora-Ezeigbo similarly highlights the tension between tradition and modernity in contemporary African societies, particularly in relation to family and gender relations.[98] Comaroff and Comaroff argue that modernity introduces competing regimes of truth that reshape indigenous systems of meaning and authority.[99] Fortes further observes that the durability of kinship systems depends on their ability to maintain continuity despite such challenges.[100] These perspectives indicate that the negotiation between DNA-based and socially constructed fatherhood has far-reaching implications for the organisation of social life within Nvosi communities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study establishes that Ili Alo plays a central role in sustaining the principle of incorporated fatherhood by embedding individuals within lineage and ancestral continuity through ritual practice. This ritual framework provides a culturally authoritative basis for identity that cannot be easily overridden by biological evidence alone. Turner argues that rituals of incorporation produce enduring social identities that are resistant to reversal.[101] Horton emphasises that such rituals integrate individuals into both social and cosmological systems, thereby reinforcing communal cohesion.[102] Peel adds that ritual continuity serves as a stabilising force in African societies, particularly in contexts of cultural change.[103] These perspectives highlight the enduring relevance of ritual practices in shaping identity and belonging within Nvosi communities.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the development of culturally responsive frameworks that integrate scientific knowledge with indigenous systems of meaning and authority. Emiola argues that customary law remains a vital component of African legal systems and should be preserved alongside modern legal developments.[104]Uhuo similarly emphasises the need for legal frameworks that recognise the complexity of paternity within customary contexts.[105] Moore suggests that effective legal systems in plural contexts must facilitate negotiation between competing normative orders rather than privileging one exclusively.[106] Bourdieu adds that sustainable social change requires the integration of new practices into existing structures in ways that

[97]Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 45.
[98]Adimora-Ezeigbo, *Gender Issues in Nigeria*, 58.
[99]Comaroff and Comaroff, *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, 20.
[100]Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, 272.
[101]Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.
[102]Horton, "African Traditional Thought," 103.
[103]Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 112.
[104]Emiola, *African Customary Law*, 47.
[105]Uhuo, "Child Ownership," 11.
[106]Moore, *Law as Process*, 54.

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preserve continuity.[107] These recommendations underscore the importance of adopting an integrative approach that respects both scientific advancement and cultural heritage.

In conclusion, the challenge posed by DNA paternity testing in Nvosi communities is not simply a question of determining biological truth but a broader issue of negotiating identity, belonging, and legitimacy within a pluralistic cultural framework. The principle of incorporated fatherhood, reinforced through rituals such as Ili Alo, continues to provide a meaningful and enduring basis for social organisation. While DNA testing introduces new dimensions of certainty, it does not nullify the cultural processes through which identity is constructed and sustained. Instead, it compels a re-examination of the relationship between biological and social definitions of fatherhood, highlighting the need for dialogue, adaptation, and coexistence within contemporary African societies.

[107]Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 78.

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