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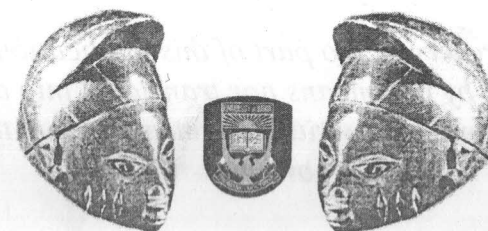
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**ANALYSING THE TABOO IN IGBO WORLDVIEW: A STUDY
OF OWERRI MUNICIPALITY**

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the taboo phenomenon in Igboland, and the various methods atonement could be effected whenever offences are committed. There have been persistent doubts amongst scholars of sociolinguistics, anthropology and sociology as to what constitutes a taboo in Igboland. The paper offers ample insight to address this sceptism. The research adopted Owerri Municipality (otherwise known as Owerre Nchi Ise) Imo State, as its study sample. Owerri Municipality therefore, served as sample frame and a micro yard stick through which the taboo phenomenon in the macro Igbo society was evaluated. The data collection method relied on both written literary works on taboo, as well as oral interviews with two prominent traditional leaders in Owerri Municipality. In analyzing these data, the stratified mode which identified related literatures and the interviews conducted, were methodically knitted to buttress the argument in this paper, that in Igbo worldview, taboos truly exist and that certain factors give rise to, or constitute what could be classified as taboo. This paper also gave hints that the concept of taboo exists with some variations among some Igbo communities. However, it was also clarified in this paper that these variations in most cases, are insignificant, and therefore, do not affect the efficacy of taboo whether in its sociolinguistic or cultural forms or its indispensability in Igbo culture worldwide.

Keywords: Taboo, Igbo, Owerri municipality, Atonement, Sociolinguistics

Introduction

This work revolves around the Igbo society, as well as its norms, values and culture. It is from the totality of the respect or sacredness accorded the Igbo culture or value system that the concept of taboo evolves. The desecration of any of these norms, values or aspect of Igbo culture is what constitutes a taboo, and the punishment or atonement varies depending on certain considerations.

It is imperative, however, to understand that taboos in Igbo worldview are of two forms-sociolinguistic and cultural taboo forms. This work is, therefore, a conscious endeavour to identify the two distinct concepts surrounding the taboo phenomenon in Igbo worldview, using Owerri municipality as a platform for the research. While the cultural aspect deals with actions or behaviour considered sacrilegious to a community, the socio-linguistic form centres on the usage of certain words or expressions regarded as forbidden, with their usage prohibited. Such forbidden expressions are regarded as linguistic or verbal taboos.

Fakuade et al (2013) examines linguistic taboos in Igbo society and regards them to be words which many people consider offensive or shocking. Such words were classified into five; morality-related linguistic taboo, veneration, decorum, religion related and fear-related linguistic taboos. Corroborating this view, Njemanze (2016) avers that linguistic taboos consist of obscene language, blasphemy, profanity and vulgarism which are distasteful in Igbo society.

Conversely, the cultural form of taboo reflects unacceptable acts or conducts which are prohibited. Beyond the sociolinguistic study of taboo, it attracts more severe punishment against offenders, just as the method of atonement is relatively harsh.

The research methodology used in this work included secondary materials in addition to oral interviews on both sociolinguistic and cultural taboo forms. Oral interview was used to collect views on various perceptions held by different classes of individuals in Owerri municipality on the research topic.

This work recommends that equal awareness should be made to the Owerri municipality, because of its cosmopolitan nature, to educate the readers, that linguistic taboo, just as the cultural taboos, are

inalienable aspects of the culture and values of the Igbo society; and that their relegation or neglect could equally erode the sanctity and integrity of Igbo cosmology.

Who are the Igbo?

According to Okeke (2010, p.1), it is more expressive to define "the Igbo people and their homeland, Igboland". He posits that, "the Igbos are an ethnic group in Nigeria who claim exclusive ownership to a part of the territory of Nigeria, and whose claim to a separate ethnic identity is recognized by the Nigerian State and non-Igbo Nigerians" Okeke then asks: What is Igboland? Again, he argues that "Igboland is a part of the territory of the Nigerian State, which Nigerian citizens belonging to Igbo ethnic group claim to be their homeland, and whose claim is recognized by the Nigerian State and non-Igbo Nigerians"

Onwuejiogwu (1972, p.15) in turn opines that "the Igbos are those group of people living with the cultural area enclosed by an imaginary line that runs from Onitsha of Agbor, Kwale (West Higher Igbo), Ahoada, Diobu Umuagba (Port Harcourt) Arochukwu, Afikpo, Isiagu (Abakiliki areas) Enugu Ezike (Nsukka area) and Ebu (West Niger Igbo).

Though this definition of Igbos seem ambiguous, Afigbo (1981, Pg. 7 -9) attempts smoothening the ambiguity when-he avers that the term Igbo people "defines a territorial and geographical boundary, the indigenous habitants of that area as well as their language. Language is the most obvious criterion or parameter for defining or identifying who the Igbos are, hence one language is spoken in most part of Igboland". Afigbo continues his argument that "although there is considerable number of dialects in Igboland that result in dialect differentiation among Igbos of Abakiliki, Oguta, etc, who live in the peripheral border areas, the early anthropologists and colonial administration who wrote about the Igbos, broke down Igboland into North, South, West and differentiated between the groups and their neighbours on the basis of certain linguistic features"

Amplifying Afigbo's assertion, Okeke (2010, pp.2-3) opines that:
The Igbo are often divided into the following sub-cultural groups: the Owerri Igbo (comprising the clans of present

day Imo State), the Onitsha Igbo (the clans of present day Anambra State), the Wawa Igbo (the clans of present day Enugu State), the Ogu Ukwu or Abakiliki Igbo (the clans of the present day Ebonyi State), the Cross River Igbo (the clans in Ohafia and Arochukwu areas of Abia State), other groups include the Anioma Igbo (the Igbo clans of Delta State), the Ngwa Igbo (Abia State) and the AsaNdoki Igbo (Abia State)"

Okeke however, clarifies that, "it is pertinent to note that many Igbo communities would reject these classifications. His reason is that most Igbo communities prefer to be identified with the name of their clans, local government areas or senatorial zones as the differences in customs, traditions or culture among the Igbo sub-cultural zones are sometimes quite significant" (p.3).

Chukwu (2012, Pg.12) argues that "the Igbos of Nigeria are the indigenous inhabitants of the present day Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi States. They are also influential groups in Delta, Rivers, Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa States"

To Ujah (2006, pp.3-5), the Igbo are "the 3rd largest homogenous group in Nigeria. They are formidable, gregarious, daring and focused by all standards and in all facets of life". Linguistically and etymologically, Ujah argues that the Igbo and the ancient Hebrews share the same biological lineage. According to him, "the word 'lbo' is the corruption of the word 'Hebrew', which was given to the Igbo upon arrival to the present place called Nigeria. When they arrived, they met some natives who mistakenly twisted their name to 'Hebuo', 'Ibu' and 'lbo'", adding that "the links between the two are more than sheer linguistics as both recorded history in the Bible, and the oral traditional available in Igboland, passed down from generations immemorial support the links"

Toeing Ujah's line, Njemanze (2016, p.44) asserts that "the Igbo people are the only people in the world who are ancient Israelites as has been scientifically confirmed. The ancient Israelites are exclusively Igbo people by genetics. Jews was originally used term for Igbo from Judah

taken from "Ya ode oha" meaning "God resounds among the people". Judea covered the area of the old Owerri province".

Nkemakolam (2005, pp.18-19) insists that Igbo are perceived as the Jews of Nigeria who are adventurous with the gift of survival in their blood". Humorously, Nkemakolam avers that "anywhere you go and you do not find an Igbo-Nigerian, that place is not fit for human habitation"

The Owerre Nchi Ise People

There have been different accounts of the origin of Owerre Nchi Ise people from different scholars of history. Suffice it however, to posit that despite these series of accounts, all of them agree that the Owerre Nchi Ise people migrated from Uratta, a neighbouring town. It is the Owerre Nchi Ise people that are the original indigenes of Owerri Municipality which also serves as the present capital of Imo State because of its cosmopolitan nature (Chukwu, 2012, p.32).

Genealogically, the people of Owerri municipality (i.e. Owerre Nchi Ise) have their lineage traced to a wealthy Chief, named Arugo, in Umuorii Village in Uratta Community of the present day Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State. In other words, Arugo is the progenitor of the modern day Owerri municipal indigenes.

In the world view of the people of Owerri municipality, the traditional set-up of Owerri was based on a few concepts. Usually, the people have a strong belief that there is a Supreme Being, God (Chineke), who created all things including man and deities. This has been and is still the belief of Owerre Nchi Ise people.

Another important aspect of their worldview is the great influence which the oracles have on their psychological and social life. The people of Owerri municipality pay heavy allegiance to some deities such as Chi Ala Owerri, Nworie, Otammiri and Amadioha. These deities are believed to be created by God to perform specific functions, for instance, Chi Ala Owerri is the earth goddess and takes, charge of fertility and morality. The other deities are subordinates to Chi Ala Owerri.

These deities are appeased in form of sacrifices or offerings whenever their rules are violated. The appeasement is done by the "Dibia Afa" (Diviner), who acts as a mediator between the people and gods

(deities). The diviner recommends the kind of ritual that will be performed based on the kind of rule violated.

Furthermore, the people of Owerri municipality (or Owerre Nchi Ise) cherish greatly, the belief in ancestors. In Owerri traditional society, the ancestors are worshipped, and their shrines are located in key positions in each kindred (Ashimole, 2016)

What constitutes a Taboo among the Igbo?

Different scholars have attempted defining the concept of taboo from varying perspectives. However, one thing remains unchanged despite the various approaches different schools of thought have adopted in x-raying the concept of taboo, and this unchanged fact is that taboo whether socio-linguistic or cultural, manifests in various cultures of different people of the world, the Igbo people inclusive.

Njemanze (2016) opines that, "taboos refer to certain acts, behaviour or languages that are strictly prohibited by the society. Though in varied expressions, taboos are really acts forbidden by people". He goes on to say that taboos are of various kinds namely; food taboos, word taboos, taboos relating to animals, slaves and sacred people, as well as incest taboos. Njemanze concludes by pointing out that "what constitutes a taboo in one context or community may not be so in another community. For instance, to the people of Ikeduru area in Imo State, eating of "ona" (three leaf yam) is cherished, while among the people of Owerri municipality, it is a taboo."

Buttressing Njemanze's position, Murdock (1999, p.17) defines taboo as a term of relationship that occurs only, in particular, culturally stipulated situations, and that it is part of complex symbolic system that determines boundaries and limits. He noted that recent theories have challenged these interpretations by emphasizing that taboo is primarily a term of both social and religious custody.

Murdock indicated that taboos are contextually determined as what constitutes a taboo in one community might not be accepted in another community, just as a method of atonement also varies.

Taboo is an action, object, person or place forbidden by law or culture (Alan: 1998, p.109). He argues that "taboo" came from the

Polynesian word "Tabu" or "tapu" which means something very sacred, special, dangerous or unclean. He maintains that it is believed by the society that when people get involved in taboos, they are likely to face the wrath of the gods. Such offenders, he indicates, are punished unless cleansed by way of atonement as specified by the culture or norms of the people.

Obviously, there is no gain over-emphasizing the fact that taboo, no matter the society wherein it is observed, remains a taboo; it is something or an action abhorred by the society. Different literatures on the taboo phenomenon point to identical definitions or explanations.

Taboos in Owerri Municipality

It is the belief in Owerri municipality that words have a long, lasting effect on hearers and can therefore, edify or corrupt minds depending on whether the expressions are vulgar or otherwise.

Durkhiem (1976, p.106) explains the term "taboo" as something forbidden by social values customs and religions to be touched or spoken of within a locality. One thing very certain about taboo is that "taboo" must be generally accepted by the community. A single person cannot impose an idea on a people.

Continuing, Durkheim contends that "a sojourner in a place is bound by the rules of the community. This means that as far as one is within the confines of a community, one is bound by rules and stipulations of the people and their culture or beliefs. The rule of a particular community binds everybody in the vicinity - freeborn and strangers inclusive".

In agreement with Durkhiem's assertions above, the Owerri people have laid down rules guiding them. It is imperative to state here that like the people of Owerri municipality, everywhere else, societies have socio-cultural and religious rules controlling the behaviour or utterances of its inhabitants.

In Owerri municipality, these rules are accepted, and when one defaults, a taboo has been committed. Among the Owerri people, taboos exist independent of each other. The nature of the punishments for violation of taboos depends on the taboos violated (Ashimole, 2016).

In this paper, taboo in Owerri municipality will be classified under religious taboos, non-religious taboos and linguistic taboos.

The idea of a taboo is of great importance from a socio-religious point of view. In the phases of culture, and also partly now, taboo provided protection for graves, cult centres, certain trees, rivers etc. (Collin, 1984, p.16). For example, women in Igbo land (Owerri Municipal inclusive) are not allowed to climb a kola-nut tree neither are they allowed to present it to strangers nor even dip their hand into the bowl containing kola-nuts in any gathering especially in the presence of men. They are equally barred from uttering or using certain words or language considered as offensive or forbidden or obscene.

Religious Taboo

Some taboos are religious in nature because they are connected with one supernatural power or the other. In Owerri Municipality, the people as earlier stated, believe in the Supreme Being they call "Chineke," the Creator or Chukwu (the great God). They also believe that the Supreme Being has smaller gods who act as intermediaries between Him and the people. These smaller gods are in charge of some natural phenomena like rivers, thunder, lightening, forest etc. The names of these gods depend on the river or place of their abode. Therefore, in Owerri Municipality, there are four major deities that represent the natural phenomena (Chukwu, 2012, p.43), they are: Ala Owerri (The earth goddess), "Nworie", "Otammiri", "Amadioha".

These gods and spirits have rules for the people to obey and when violated, taboos (Aru) are committed. They are called taboos based on the danger emanating from violations on these rules. A purification ritual is performed by any offender in order to avert the wrath of these spirits.

Technically, taboos in Owerri municipality include the following: incest taboo, Ala Owerri taboo, Amadioha taboo, Nwaorie taboo, Osu taboo, Oru Owerri taboo, Eke taboo, Paying dowry of a pregnant woman, and sweeping one's compound in the afternoon or night.

Ala Owerri Taboo: Owerri people regard Ala Owerri as the queen mother from whom all blessings come. She is highly respected and regarded as second to the Supreme Being, and has the ability to proffer

solutions to their problems; hence a shrine called "Ihu Ala Owerri" was dedicated to her.

However, it is an offence to enter her shrine in anger, play or roll on the floor of the shrine. Such offences are seen as taboos because they constitute a disrespect to the earth goddess, and the offender will be required to perform purification ritual.

Incest Taboo: Incest is sexual relationship between members of the same family. Anyone who does this commits a taboo. It is also a taboo for two persons to be caught making love in the bush. Offenders are made to perform appropriate rituals otherwise, they will be ostracised. In Owerri municipality, incest is an offence against the earth goddess. Failure to perform the prescribed rituals, sometimes leads to madness or other misfortunes on the part of the people involved.

Amadioha Taboo: Amadioha is the god of thunder. It is also the god of justice and war and protects the innocent members of the society. It also has power to excavate or exhume evil from the surface of the earth and has a shrine created in his name.

It is an offence to fight in Amadioha's shrine or even touch anything belonging to it. Amadioha operates with lightening (Amuma Igwe) and thunder (Egbe igwe). Any person, animal or tree struck by Amadioha cannot be touched or used for anything, just as a house destroyed by Amadioha cannot be repaired without the diviner, first prescribing the right sacrifices to be performed as condition precedent thereto.

Market Day Taboo: In Igboland, there are four market days viz; "Eke", "Orie", "Afor" and "Nkwo". In Owerri municipality, it is a taboo to go to farm on Afor day because it is Amadioha's day and must be kept sacred (Njemanze, 2016).

Nworie Taboo: Nworie is a river goddess in charge of Nworie river in Owerri municipality. It is a taboo to kill any of Nworie's most valued two children namely "Eke" (Python) and "Oba" (a crocodile-like creature). The Owerri people see these two as sub-deities that should be worshipped and respected. These two are also harmless, especially to the indigenous people of Owerri. If anybody kills any of these two creatures, some rituals are done to cleanse the land. The burial rites must be

performed as if the creature were human being or else there will be disaster on the offender and his family (Chukwu, 2012, p.44).

The indigenous people of Owerri do not also farm on "Orie" day as a mark of respect for Nworie goddess. Violators are often struck with paralysis, mental or physical diseases.

Osu Taboo: There is an existence of caste system in the Igbo society and Owerri people are ardent crusaders of such belief, known as "Osu Caste System". The Osu caste system originated from the dedication of men and women to gods, either by individuals and communities or voluntary act of free-born citizens who willingly dedicate themselves to gods for protection of their lives. When the people willingly dedicate themselves to gods, they establish covenant with the gods. This dedication is a covenant done with blood (Ashimole, 2016).

It is a taboo for an Osu to marry or have sexual intercourse with somebody who is not an Osu in Owerri municipality (Owerre Nchi Ise). This is because such contacts automatically makes the free born an outcast (Osu). If this happens, a purification ritual will be needed to be performed by the offender to appease the defiled land in case of just sexual intercourse. But if it is marriage, the freeborn (Diala) automatically becomes an outcast.

Similarly, an Osu cannot be a traditional ruler in Igboland, or head of any village in any Igbo Community, including Owerri Municipality. The stigma is hereditary and affects his generations unending.

Oru Owerri Taboo: The Oru Owerri festival is meant to usher in harvest every year. No indigene of Owerri is expected to harvest any farm produce before then. The Oru Owerri festival starts by second week of June, and lasts till the third week of July every year. It is a period of peace and as such, peace should be maintained. Therefore, anybody who fights, quarrels or gets involved in a dispute involving police intervention has committed a taboo. The offender pays a stipulated fine in addition to providing some sacrificial items to appease the gods. Failure to atone for the taboo committed, brings the wrath of the gods on the person. The law is binding even on strangers who reside in Owerri municipality (Njemanze, 2016).

The Eke Taboo: In Owerri municipality and even generally in Igbo society, marriages are forbidden to be contracted on Eke market day. Anything that has to do with marriage, ranging from introductory visit, paying of dowry, traditional wedding ceremony to church wedding is forbidden to take place on the day because it is considered a sacred day in Owerre Nchi Ise.

Any marriage contracted on Eke day hardly stands the test of time. It is bound to crash land and end in divorce or separation. At times, such taboo leads to death of the couple involved, or any other member of their family who willingly indulged in the act. Unfortunately, the Eke taboo has no room for atonement or appeasement. No sacrifice made can make the marriage survive.

Paying Dowry of a Pregnant Woman: In Igbo cultural worldview, whenever a woman gets pregnant after the introductory visit (before the payment of dowry), the payment of the dowry should be postponed until the woman has been delivered of the baby. This also applies to a man who impregnates a woman and decides to marry her.

If the dowry is paid while the woman is pregnant, it attracts the wrath of the gods. Such marriages hardly stand, as it is assumed that the man is marrying two people (the woman and her unborn child). Sometimes, the woman in question either has miscarriage or loses the child in the course of delivery. In severe cases, the woman even loses her life because of complication during delivery (Chukwu: 2012, Pg.43).

Sweeping One's Compound in the Night

In Owerri municipality, sweeping or compound cleaning is usually done in the morning. It is believed that sweeping the compound at night implies chasing away blessings. Once the compound has been cleaned in the morning, the ancestors take over the protection of the place. Thus, sweeping compounds at night drives away ancestors, and makes the place vulnerable to attacks by evil spirits or forces. This is a common belief among Owerri people.

Non-religious Taboo

Non-religious taboos are taboos that have sociological or psychological implications. They are mainly community held taboos. If anybody commits any of the taboos, he has not offended any god or goddess but the community, because the culture of the people abhors them. The person will face the wrath of the people. In other words, non-religious taboos are mainly intended to get rid of intentional excesses in Owerri municipality and Igbo Society (Chukwu 2012, pp.43-44).

In Owerri municipality, these taboos are relatively two, namely - the theft taboo and the Ona taboo.

Theft taboo: It is a taboo for an indigene of Owerri municipality to steal. If caught, the person is stripped naked. The stolen materials are hung on the person's neck; the body will be painted with local white chalk (nzu) and charcoal. The person is dragged round the entire community amidst contemptuous laughter, booing and shouting. The maltreatment is intended to serve as deterrent to the offender and others, who may be nursing, such despicable idea.

A situation where a person steals farm produce is considered an offence against the earth goddess, Ala Owerri. Such a person can be ostracised or even struck dead by Ala Owerri. Such a chant as shown below is used to boo a thief:

Lee onye oshi o
A ga-egbu ya egbu o
O mere nini?
Omere aru o
O ruru ala o
A furu eze elu o
A ga-egbu ya egbu
A ga-abo ya abo
Lee onye oshi O

TRANSLATION

See a thief
He will be killed
He will be dissected

What did he do?

He committed abomination

He committed abomination

He committed abomination

He will be dissected

See a thief (Chukwu 2012, p.44)

The Ona (Three-leaved yam) Taboo: Owerri Municipality is a unique community where life is valued and must be preserved. The Owerri man is afraid to taste "Ona" because in the past century, some members of a family in Uratta (where Owerri people trace their genealogy) ate it and developed diarrhea, which led to their death. A diviner was consulted to investigate what led to their sudden death. He discovered that it was as a result of the "three-leaved yam" (Ona) that they ate.

Based on the above fact, no Uratta (or Owerri Municipal man) till date, eats (Ona) (Njemanze, 2016).

Sociolinguistic Taboos in Owerre Nchi Ise

According to Fakuade et al (2013), "a linguistic taboo in Igbo society refers to words many people consider offensive or shocking". According to him, one of the obvious reasons for avoiding taboo words and expressions in language is that "using them directly in public is seen as violation of certain moral codes. This means that linguistic taboos have their usage controlled by certain circumstances or reasons such as religion, culture and norms" It also further observed that in addition to Fakuade's postulation "linguistic taboos are not only words referring to obscenity alone. Language used for sacred activities could also be avoided outside the contact of sacred rituals" (Adeniran, 2016, p.5).

Lending weight to the discourse on linguistic taboo, Trudgil (1974) averres that linguistic taboos are expressions associated with things that are better left unsaid, particularly words and expressions given in a society. He states further that "such unspoken words are usually avoided as a result of their indecency, shocking characteristics and immorality and in order not to offend the other members of the society".

Njemanze (2016) agrees that in Owerre Nchi Ise (Owerri municipality), the people abhor the usage of certain words because of their socio-religious and cultural implications. He points out that the influence that the Owerri people's culture and religious backgrounds exert on their diction or choice of language are enormous.

He insists that as a result of culture, there exists in Owerre Nchi Ise certain linguistic norms which regulate the use of words and expressions at different occasions and with respect to people of different sexes, ages and classes, for example, the traditional ruler, Ohas (King makers) chiefs, elders and so on. It is the strict observance of these forbidden expressions in Owerre Nchi Ise that are referred as linguistic taboo among the people.

Njemanze also agrees with Fakuade in his analysis of what constitutes linguistic taboos in Igbo society, pointing out that the same applies to Owerre Nchi Ise. These expressions are classified into five namely;

1. Morality-related linguistic taboos: words that have permissible alternative to neutralize their unpleasantness. The stigmatised status is instilled from early childhood for example, penis, vagina and related things.
2. Veneration-related taboo: words meant to give respect to a certain class of people. For example, kings, title holders, married and unmarried grown-ups, relations and elderly people.
3. Decorum linguistic taboos: words that hurt people's feelings because they devalue the thing referred to, sometimes such words are used to condemn people, for example, flirts, monster, mother fucker and so on.
4. Religion-related linguistic taboos: that is, expressions that bring evil consequences which are expressly forbidden or unmentionable, for example. "May death strike you", May you drown in water, May your generation never exist, etc.
5. Fear-related linguistic taboos: words that are hardly or freely uttered in the society. For example, it is a taboo to call the name of the dead, and also the person inside the mask (Fakuade et al, 2013).

The placement of restrictions on certain aspects of our people's way of life, be it, in their daily conducts, or whatever they utter, has helped immensely in ensuring discipline, decorum and orderliness within the municipality. Taboo, is an indispensable phenomenon in Igbo culture worldwide, though there may be minor differences here and there, but by and large, its uniformity is central in most Igbo societies (Njemanze (2016).

Offering further classification on the issue of linguistic taboos in Igbo society, Ashimole (2016) argues that there is no clear distinction between what constitutes linguistic or verbal taboos between one Igbo community and another; everything boils down to choice of words in expression and the semantics associated with it. He stresses that in Owerre Nchi Ise, what is considered profane, blasphemous, vulgar or obscene is almost the same with what you observe in neighbouring communities like Mbaise, Ngor Okpala and Ikeduru. This underscores the universality of Igbo culture and value system.

Distinctive Perspectives of Cultural and Linguistic Taboos

Unarguably, both cultural taboos and linguistic taboos are traceable to the sacred nature of the norms and values of society. They are both-forbidden. In Igbo worldview, both can be likened to the Siamese twins, who though make use of the same organs, but yet have different limbs (Ebong, 1996).

Ebong's assertion points to the fact that although both emanate from a similar source (society), there is still a clear line of distinction between the two phenomena. Even the punishment or atonement attached to them also differs.

Cultural taboos are acts or conducts which the society abhors. These acts or conducts are declared forbidden either because of their nature, or protect the people of a given community from the wrath of the gods and the leaders (Ikem, 2016).

Linguistic taboos, on the other hand, according to Fakuade et al (2013, p.30):

are words or expressions to be avoided because using them directly in public is seen as violation of certain

moral codes. In other words, linguistic taboos have their usage controlled by certain circumstances or reasons such as religion, culture and norms. In an attempt not to violate Igbo culture, linguistic taboos are expressed in the forms of euphemism: proverbs, idioms, metaphors, paraphrases etc.

In agreement with Fakuade et al, (2013), Apte (1994) opines that linguistic taboos are words that are avoided because they are deemed unfit for normal linguistic usage, and by a community consensus, banned in everyday language in public domain.

Elucidating further on what constitutes cultural taboo, Grossi (2017) lists the following: eke market day, Osu and Ume caste system, adultery, suicide, incest, woman blessing kola-nut, woman climbing trees, amongst others.

Suffice it to point out that some of these constituents of cultural taboo as highlighted by Grossi, had earlier been treated in this paper except for issues such as adultery, suicide, woman blessing kola-nut and woman climbing trees. It should however, be noted that there may be various other elements of cultural taboo that are abound in Igboland aside those enumerated in this paper.

Adultery: It is a taboo for a married woman to sleep with her husband's brother or indulge in extra-marital sex. Both the gods and elders forbid it. It is believed that a woman can become mad for indulging in adultery, and the husband must never taste the food prepared by the woman, if he has reasons to believe that she engaged in adultery or he might be a partaker of her punishment from the gods.

Suicide: Killing oneself is a taboo in Igboland. Such a person must never be buried within the community. His body is cursed and must be buried in the forbidden forest or outside the community to prevent such evils from befalling others in the community.

A woman blessing kola-nut: Kola nut is considered a sacred nut in Igboland, and must never be broken or shared by a woman. Kolanut must only be broken, blessed and shared by a man, because the giving of Kola is regarded by the Igbo as the giving of life; but never by a woman because it is a life-giving nut of the gods.

Women climbing palm tree: It is forbidden in Igbo land for a woman to climb palm tree for any reason whatsoever. Such an act is not tolerable and is seriously viewed with concern by the community.

In attempting to distinctively situate linguistic taboo, Apte (1994) groups linguistic taboos into four: (i) swear or curse words ie words which when uttered involve damnation, misfortune or disrespect of the targeted object or person; (ii) obscene words, that is, words referring to sexual organs and acts; (iii) four-lettered words which are only acceptable in English, with example of acceptable English obscenities being words such as "cunt" "fuck", "shit", and "cock" - such words only have four letters in spelling; (iv) dirty words, that is, words that refer to sexual organs, acts and scatological substances (menstruation, urine, faeces, spittle).

It is instructive to also bear in mind that other categorization of linguistic taboos by other sociolinguistic scholars abound and may also suffice for further studies.

Other minor taboos in Owerri Municipal

Apart from major taboos in Owerri municipality, there are other taboos which can be categorised as being minor taboos. This is so because they (minor taboos) do not carry severe consequences like the major taboos earlier elucidated upon herein. The attached atonement or appeasement attached thereto, are also of a lesser magnitude.

Below are some of the taboos classified as minor taboos:

1. A wife throwing her husband on the ground in a fight
2. Someone altering land boundary in secret
3. Cutting the tendrils of young growing yams in farm
4. A woman presenting or breaking Kola-nut in the presence of a man
5. A baby coming out with legs during delivery
6. Revealing the community's secret to another community regarded as an enemy (Igba amaagbata)
7. Maltreating a child in his maternal home
8. A woman fighting in the market place or square
9. A man throwing away his wife's belongings especially cooking utensils.

10. Willful abortion on the part of unmarried ladies.

Conclusion

In Igbo traditional worldview, every society has rules and regulations guiding it. Taboos are part of the rules that govern society even outside Igboland. This is because there is no society without culture, norms and value system. The Owerre Nchi Ise people (Owerri municipality) are not left out in the control of taboos and atonement.

It is pertinent to stress here that there are problems both individuals and communities may encounter as a result of displaying apathy or contempt towards taboos. The most striking punishment in Owerri municipality is the "Egbunde Syndrome".

Egbunde is an undiagnosable and incurable disease; whoever violates the above listed taboos and refused to perform the appropriate ritual is struck with Egbunde by the gods (Njemanze, 2016). It comes in a swollen form from head to toe, and in many different forms. It is inflicted by the gods and kills the victim after a long time of torture.

Another way in which an offender can receive punishment for neglecting atonement or appeasement, is undergoing series of misfortunes ranging from unemployment, loss of job, stagnation in business to total frustration. One can also give birth to deformed children (imbeciles at times) as a form of punishment. One can be barren or even be made to crazy. At times, these misfortunes are traceable to the past generations, who refused to atone for the offences they committed. This is what is called ancestral or generational curse.

It is advisable, therefore, for an offender to expeditiously appease the gods, because procrastination may create problems without solution, depending on the nature of the taboo violated, and also the temperament of the deity involved. Often times, the sins of the forefathers are the sorrows of their children.

However and notwithstanding the intentions of the taboo phenomenon, society like any other thing is susceptible to change. Man as a social creature is subject to change. The society today has been influenced by Christianity and civilization and Owerri municipality is not a difference.

This influence has tended to play down the essence of the taboo phenomenon, and of course, its atonement essence. This, in turn, has resulted in a lot of ills which were hitherto prohibited through placement of taboos and avoidance, but are now in vogue again. Instances of incurable and strange ailments abound in Owerre Nchi Ise today, whose source or origin has remained as strange as the ailments themselves.

Chukwu (2012, p.64), quoting the Chief Priest of Ala Owerri, averred that

the presence of gods and deities is still felt in all ramifications. Despite the poor recognition of taboos and rituals nowadays, caused by Christianity and Civilization, the society is still being controlled by the influence of taboos and rituals. It might sound as fiction, but they are real. Taboos are still functioning and are not extinct".

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