

Patriarchal Legitimization Strategies in Igbo Gender-Related Taboos: A Case for Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates gender-related Igbo taboos and their subtle recruitment in legitimising and sustaining patriarchy in Igbo culture. Thirty-eight taboos in the domains of inheritance, economic activities, family, leadership, marriage and widowhood were collected through participant observation and interviews. Applying ethnomethodological indexicality and reflexivity and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), strategies like dominant hegemonic masculinity and femininity, naturalisation, silencing, proximation, positive-self and negative-other presentation are identified as constructing men's superiority and women subordination. The paper calls for their deconstruction and delegitimation for maximum harnessing of optimum human potentials in view of the global benchmark for gender equality by 2030.

Keywords: legitimization, gender, taboos, patriarchy, critical discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION

Igbo refers to the language as well as the people of the South East Nigeria with a population estimate of 32million or 18% of Nigeria's 177million (CIA World Factbook, 2016) although this is still controversial as some sources put the figure at over 180 million). Core Igbo areas are Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Ebonyi and Abia states, with some speakers in Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom states. It is a classless society in that it has no sovereign royalty (*Igbo enwe eze*). Of particular interest in this paper is the fact that the language has a genderless grammatical system, that is, gender as a grammatical category is non-existent in the Igbo language (Emenanjo, 2015). This is buttressed by the non-gender-marked pronouns as in English *he/she*; only one pronominal reference (*O/ya*) apply for both sexes. The non-morphologically marked nominals like *oke* (male) and *nwunye* (female), *nwoke* (man) and *nwanyị* (woman) can hardly be categorised under grammatical gender. The language is also non-sexist as it lacks generic nouns (*man*) and pronouns (*he*) in reference to both sexes as in English, it does not also have to contend with morphologically-marked gender pairs as the English *host-hostess*, *hero-heroine* binaries. Also, whereas in English, word-order tend to place the male word first, in Igbo, the reverse is the case in many instances; the female comes first as in, for instance; *nne na nna* (*mother and father*). The Igbo culture is heteronormatively gendered; instances of transgender and other queer forms of sexuality are rare or almost non-existent as none was encountered in the course of this study. Leadership is vested on heads of families, mostly men, with women playing supportive roles. Thus, patriarchal social arrangement and patrilineage inheritance rights are the norm.

This work derives its impetus from observed systems of orality and folk expressions in the Igbo culture that tend to emphasize and normalize this patriarchal social arrangement, where men dominate, creating artificial limits that do not lend themselves to any explanation regarding individual capabilities or anatomical differences but only as socially-constructed gender practices, or as "part of our culture". It has been argued that these systems of orality include folk expressions such as proverbs (Ezeifeke 2017), idioms (Ezeifeke, 2016) and Igbo

women songs (Ezeifeka and Ogbazi, 2016). Atanga (2013:306) also argues that some “traditional practices are also arguably perpetuated and sustained by ideological brainwashing, through hegemonic patriarchal practices and discourses”. This assertion further justifies the need to study the systems of representation and social practices encoding strategies that legitimize patriarchy. The main argument here is that this patriarchal dominance evident in the identified taboos tends to emphasize and legitimate gender discrimination in the allocation of social privileges in the family, workplace/economic activities, inheritance rights, leadership, marriage institution and widowhood practices.

Buttressing the above assertion, in the statistics compiled by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) entitled “Social Institutions and Gender Index” (SIGI) synthesis report (2014: 11), Nigeria was rated “very high” in levels of gender discrimination in social institutions together with countries like Bangladesh, Chad, the Congo, Egypt, Gabon, Gambia and others (SIGI>0.35). This level of significance, when put side by side with such countries as Belgium, Argentina, France (SIGI<0.04), shows how far Nigeria is from attaining the global benchmark of gender equality by 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals, 2015). As quoted in the report, countries having very high levels of gender discrimination in social institutions “are characterized by very high level of discrimination in legal framework and customary practices across most sub-indices and by very poor implementation measures”. It continues:

The family code greatly discriminates against women... and women face severe discrimination in their parental authority and inheritance rights. Women rights to own and control land and other resources and to access public space are extremely limited. There are serious infringement on their physical integrity, matched by high levels of acceptance and prevalence of domestic violence. 44% of women have been victims of domestic violence and 59% accept that it is justified under certain circumstances. (SIGI Report 2014 p.11)

The above claim supports the view taken in this paper that the Nigerian society in general and the Igbo culture in particular is predominantly patriarchal, and, as this paper argues, contrives discursive legitimization strategies for dominant masculinity, the latter being more covertly pernicious. The questions this work has raised would include the following: What strategies are encoded in the identified taboos to legitimize patriarchy? How have these legitimization strategies positioned the sexes? How has this positioning played out in the family, inheritance, economic activities, leadership, marriage and widowhood practices? What changes or emerging trends are currently in existence in the enactment of these strategies? What are the implications for gender equality/equity?

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL BASES

Taboos

The word *taboo*, introduced into the English language by the British explorer, Captain James Cook, was originally a Polynesian (Tongan) word “tabu” (or “tapu”), meaning anything forbidden to be eaten or made use of (Wales, 1989 p.452). Taboos may be linguistic or social – that is, what one is not allowed to “say” or “do” respectively. Linguistic taboos refer to expressions which are simply not openly said but are substituted with “periphrastic phrases”, most commonly euphemisms, to make them sound inoffensive or pleasant (Wales, 1989, p.452). On the other hand, social taboos are used to refer to actions that a culture regards as anathema, the breaking of which is followed by supernatural or culturally-imposed penalty. They are often times hinged on ethical issues impinging on morality and cultural conscience. It is this second meaning of taboo that this paper is addressing. This latter is also related to what

is called *nso ala* (abomination) in the culture, which sanction requires drastic measures including ostracism, temporary exile or performing some rituals to cleanse the desecrated land.

By extrapolation then, gender-related taboos in the Igbo cultural milieu entails a vehement prohibition of an action based on the belief that such behaviour is either too sacred or too accursed for a particular gender category to undertake. The observed encodings of role delineation, delimitations and allocation in some taboo expressions and their link to particular gender groups are of particular interest to this research as well as how these taboos are structured with their attendant unwritten repercussions and prohibitions against particular gender categories. Those against males seem to be euphemized and rendered in ways that reinforce their powerful position and sustain patriarchy while female taboos are more stringent and emphasize their subordination. These taboos seem to present issues and sanctions in naturalized formats giving the impression of a legitimate and incontrovertible social order. This work is therefore aimed at identifying and documenting these taboo expressions that encode gender role delimitation with a view to confirming or debunking these claims, the baseline being to create awareness and raise consciousness to their influences on gender performance.

Sex and Gender

Many scholars in feminist linguistics are concerned about the distinction between these two concepts. Whereas the former is a biological characteristic, the latter is a social construct (Coates, 2004; Wareign, 2000; Mills and Mullany, 2011; and a host of others). Fixed before birth, sex refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define male and female species, be it human or animal. These include presence of XX chromosome for female and XY for male, presence of genitalia, the internal reproductive anatomy, external physical characteristics (breast, hairs, body structure, etc.) and hormonal differences. In this regard, male-female binary is a sex category, since one can talk about male-female rat the same way one can talk of male-female human.

Gender, on the other hand refers to the social category defining man-woman binary, including social and cultural constructions of masculinities and femininities. "One is not born a woman (or a man, a gender), but becomes one by social construction" (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949 in Lorber, 1998). Gender is thus socially-constructed and relates to culturally prescribed norms regarding what it means to be a man or a woman, or to be masculine or feminine, but predicated on sex. These may be evident in the mode of dress (as in, for instance, trousers for men and skirts for women), hairstyles, colour codes (pink for a baby girl and blue for a boy). Also, sexual division of labour is along gender lines. Men are meant to operate in the public sphere while women take care of the domestic sphere. Allocation of power – men as superior, women as subordinate, and socialization patterns – men socialized to be aggressive, independent; women as soft, dependant, intimate, are characteristics socially assigned to the sexes based on gender categorization of hegemonic masculinity and femininity.

These two concepts are the major pivot of this study as the taboos that constitute our textual data tend to construct gender roles and privileges not on the bases of constraints of individual sex characteristics but on that of culturally predetermined gender categories, thus denying members of a particular sex – women – optimal space of operation. It is on this premise that these taboos are brought up for critical discourse analysis and possible deconstruction and recontextualization.

Patriarchy – The Five Ds

Described as a social arrangement where men dominate women (Curry *et al*, 1997, p. 228), patriarchy has been at the centre of feminist debates since the early 1960s and 70s, as according to Curry *et al*, almost every society in the world may be described as a patriarchy. It is one of the so-called “dominant discourses” just like racism, capitalism, and the like, (Hartmann in Lorber 1998) which have been described as “value-laden” and emphasize certain meanings and values that diminish one group (women) and assert the superiority of the powerful group (men) (Coates, 2004, p. 216). Such dominant discourses are therefore not neutral or transparent but encode hidden asymmetries just as are seen in the taboos under study. Some taboos are therefore seen as dominant discourses encoding opaque legitimization strategies that privilege patriarchy and perpetuate women subordination and oppression.

Male dominance and female subordination have been ascribed to, and theorized on, what can best be described as the “five Ds” – divine, deficit, dominance, difference and dynamic. Whereas the first four reinforce essentialism; the view that men and women are basically different in both nature and nurture, the last is anti-essentialist, claiming that gender is a non-entity, and that the categories of man and woman are socially constructed and performed in different contexts as these contexts present themselves. Coates (2004, pp5-6) discussed all but the divine account. I have added the “divine”, because of the obvious patriarchal tendencies in the Holy Bible, beginning with the translation of the “standard version” of the Bible with the notion of “God as male” (Spender, 1980:166). Spender had argued that since the power of naming was assigned to the first man Adam, man thus appropriated the sex of God to be male, hence “man made God in his own image”, and also man “gave birth” to a woman by one of his ribs (a contradiction!). Spender claims that because man has the monopoly of naming the world, language is thus “man-made”, representing only the experiences of men and thus is “deficient” in representing the experiences of women. Women’s language has thus been described as “deficit” (Lakoff, 1975, Jespersen, 1922 in Cameron, 1998) as it is described as less rational and more emotional, subordinate to man’s superior language and this assertion has led to the different labels for men and women language on the superior-inferior axes.

The dominance approach sees women as “victims” of male oppression both in systems of representation and in social practice. It sees patriarchy as a prevailing social order across many cultures, both western and African. Androcentrism, phallocentrism, sexism and other isms have been used to describe men’s dominance over women. In her chapter 5 of *Man Made Language*, entitled “Language and Reality: Who made the World?” Spender (1980, pp. 143-143) implicates patriarchy as a dominant force in shaping both cognitive and social structure, systems of representation and social practice. She writes:

I would reiterate that it has been the dominant group – in this case, males – who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest..., males ... have produced language, thought and reality. Historically, it has been the structure, categories and the meanings which have been invented by males – though not of course by all males – and they have then been validated by reference to other males. In this process, women have played little or no part.

To vitiate the divine-deficit-dominance explanation, the difference theory came into prominence, championed by scholars like Tannen (1990), Coates (2004) and Holmes (2008) who believe that men and women belong to different subcultures and therefore perceive the world differently. Women’s roles and speech styles are therefore perceived not as subordinate to that of men but a variant that is equally powerful in its own right. This is also reinforced by

John Gray's (1995) ideas that "men are from Mars and women from Venus" as well as the various stereotypes essentialising men and women's behaviour, roles and speech styles: prestige/vernacular norms, status/solidarity, aggression/intimacy, independent/dependent, report/rapport talk and the like.

In further reaction to the asymmetrical connotations of the first divine-deficit-dominance-difference account, the dynamic view, also called the "social constructionist", "anti-essentialist" or "performative" approach, was proposed (see Butler, 1990 in Lorber, 1998). In this view, gender identity is seen as a social construct which can only come into being in action. It calls for the blurring of all gender binaries, the fluidity of gender performance and the recognition of different sexualities that transcend male-female, man-woman dichotomies. To this approach, gender is a non-entity, one "is not a gender", one is "doing gender" (West and Zimmermann, 1987)

From participant observation, the first three explanations of patriarchy seem to pervade the collective consciousness of the Igbo culture. This is evident in patrilineal inheritance culture, headship of families vested on the man, while the woman's identity is predicated on the man. For instance, at marriage, a woman's family name goes into extinction, constituting part of their "silencing" (Cameron, 1998). Furthermore, Igbo people usually say "forefathers" and rarely "foremothers", the first encounter with the word *foremothers* being in Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's *Africa Wo/man Palava* (1996). When the word *ancestors* is mentioned, women do not come to mind. On the other hand, from personal integration in the culture, some traces of matriarchal tendencies seem to exist in the realm of the deities, going by the strong matrifocality symbolized by the *Ani*, the earth goddess, which conjures a strong symbolic female presence and supremacy in the Igbo cosmic order. Also the name *Nneka*, "mother is supreme" seems to accord motherhood with great symbolic power thus seemingly negating the existence of absolute patriarchal social order and dominant masculinity in the traditional pre-colonial culture which seem to persist till date. There is thus a kind of contradiction between the symbolic and the actual on gender construction in the Igbo culture.

The above assertion is further buttressed by Okonjo's (1976) claim of the erosion of the traditional African dual-sex system by the colonialists, and Amadiume's (1987) claim that patriarchy is an alien culture in the precolonial African/Igbo society. In her study of traditional Nnobi culture, Amadiume described the phenomenon of "male daughters" and "female husbands", where women with outstanding qualities take on 'masculine' roles of marrying wives to propagate their patrilineage in the case of absence of male heir. In her narrative, the female deity *Idemili* wields more power and supremacy over her husband *Aho* who is a lesser deity, showing that gender differentiation is fluid and complementary. Kitetu and Kioko's (2013) study of *iweto* marriage in Kamba, Kenya, also illustrates how socially powerful women in African culture can take on masculine roles of marrying a wife and having children, through recruiting family men – who would eventually have no social right over the offspring – to provide siring services. But "...as Christianity introduced a male deity, religious beliefs and practices no longer focused on the female deity but on a male God, his son, his bishops and priests". The society henceforth began to think in terms of a masculinized new order with the advent of colonialism and its missionary bias, where males had a head start in western education and the subsequent "white collar jobs" (Amadiume, 1987, pp. 134-136). This same masculinization occurred in political representation as warrant chiefs, court clerks and court messengers, all men, received paychecks from colonial masters for implementing the colonial indirect rule while women were relegated to the private sphere as wives and mothers (Okonjo, 1976).

Though this study did not go into the origin of some of the taboos studied in this work, and when they came into the system of representation, it is surprising how these taboos came to be skewed more to the women's disadvantage and men's immunity. This is in spite of the complementary roles of the *umunna* (sons of the kindred) and the *umuada* (daughters of the kindred) as espoused in Okonjo (1976). As our data would show, it seems that the most affected by these prohibitions/taboo is the woman as "wife" (*inyomdi*), which seems to sustain the supremacy of the husband as the "head" of the family. Since even the *umuada* (daughters of the kindred) – who are assigned more authority in their natal communities than the *inyomdi* (wives of the kindred) – are potential housewives in their marital homes, these taboos thus affect all women equally more than they do men. This paper is thus creating awareness to the discriminatory potentials of these taboos with the aim of opening up new vistas of understandings that will help social actors approximate to the dynamic view of gender performance where complementarity of sex roles takes preeminence over discriminatory and oppressive patriarchal dominance.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Since patriarchy entails "doing power" (Coates 2004, p. 6) as a means of doing gender, the present study finds a locus in critical discourse analysis (CDA), a linguistic means of subverting power struggles, use and abuse in discourse, and through this means, to linguistically deconstruct taboos that legitimise patriarchy. In the words of van Dijk (2001, p. 96), CDA is neither a method, nor a theory but "a perspective of doing scholarship". It takes an ethical and political stance explicitly by assuming "solidarity with the oppressed" (Wodak, 2001) with an attitude of opposition and dissent against power abuse and dominant ideologies in texts and social practices. It takes a Marxist stance to deconstruct oppressive practices like capitalism, racism, classism and gender discrimination. Its judgemental attitude has ignited attacks from many scholars outside the field who see it as "advocacy"; biased scholarship, lacking objectivity, in response to which van Dijk claims that "CDA is biased – and proud of it" (2001, p. 96).

Key concepts in CDA are issues of power, ideology and history. Discourses and texts are seen as "sites of struggle" for power, entrenching dominant ideologies (Wodak, 2001, p. 6). Every discourse is also said to be historically embedded and Wodak (2001, pp. 63-94) talks about a "discourse-historical approach" to textual analysis in order to demystify naturalized historical myths. Since no discourse is neutral, Fairclough (1995, p. 44) argues that ideology involves the representation of the world from the perspective of a particular interest, so that "relationship between proposition and fact is not transparent, but mediated by representational activity". I have adopted this perspective in the study of gender-related taboos because most of the strategies identified here – hegemonic masculinity, naturalization, silencing and exclusion, proximization, positive self and negative other presentation – represent dominant ideological positions which have come under scrutiny in previous studies in CDA (see for instance, Cap, 2006, van Dijk, 2001, Fairclough, 1995, Ellece, 2013). I argue here that the taboos under study represent the ideological perspectives of men in instituting and exploiting these and other strategies to legitimize patriarchy.

Legitimization Strategies

Many scholars especially those working in the critical analytical tradition have used the term *legitimization* to describe a situation where political actors or the power elite enact a subtle but coercive right to be obeyed with an attendant justification for this obedience using the mediated power of discourse. Legitimization presupposes a rationale, justification or an alibi for a particular action or inaction especially by dominant discourses. The term has been given

different interpretations and terminologies by different authors especially those working in the area of critical or political discourse analysis and has been referred to here as legitimization strategies (Chilton and Schaffner, 2011). The power elite, in contesting and appropriating power, need not depend solely on physical force or coercion, but also deploy strategies that secure validation of policies and actions to make them appear reasonable and logical.

Watson and Hill (2006, pp. 151-152) note that legitimization is one of the main social functions of ideologies. They claim that:

It is the process whereby a group, society or nation give a status of acceptance – legitimize – ways of doing or saying things. By the same token, a process of delegitimization occurs in which “We” and “Us” of a situation seek overtly, or covertly to deny acceptance to “other” or what van Dijk refers to as the outgroup, ... creates antipathy, fear (of the object delegitimized) and rejection. (p. 151)

Chilton and Schaffner (2011, p. 312 and 318) listed these twin concepts of legitimization and delegitimization as one of the “multiplicity of acts that are performed through language (that is, discourse) ... that can serve strategic functions”. Legitimization serves as an alternative to coercion employed by the ideological state apparatuses to establish the right to be obeyed and is communicated linguistically whether by overt statement or by implication (Chilton & Schaffner, 2011, p. 312). Since discourse has the potential to produce and reproduce asymmetries as well as the power to subvert them, legitimization is always paired with its converse, delegitimization. In our case, gender taboos are legitimized linguistically and ingrained as cultural order of discourse that seems to defy deconstruction or delegitimization. That is why they have been focused on in this work. We have categorized the taboos under five identified patriarchal legitimization strategies: hegemonic masculinity (and femininity), silencing and exclusion, naturalization, proximization, positive self and negative other presentation, as well as how they refer to the sexes. We discuss them briefly in the following sub-sections.

Hegemonic Masculinity

A term coined by Raewyn Connell (1987) as a chapter in a work *Gender and Power*, hegemonic masculinity refers to a dominant form of masculinity within a particular culture that takes male dominance and female subordination for-granted. It is part of his gender order theory which recognizes multiple masculinities that vary across time, culture and the individual. It implies that out of the numerous masculinities (heterosexual, gay, effeminate, etc), there is a particular normative form that is the most honoured way of being a man which requires all other men (in a particular culture) to position themselves in relation to it. For instance, according to Connell, in the western society, the dominant form of masculinity or the cultural ideal of manhood is the “white, heterosexual, largely middle class males”, who are culturally expected to internalize a number of characteristics into their personal codes – violence and aggression, stoicism (emotional restraint), courage, toughness, risk-taking adventure and thrill-seeking – which form the bases for masculine scripts of behaviour.

The term *hegemony* is derived from the Italian political thinker, Antonio Gramsci in his Marxist theorization of cultural hegemony; a strategy of certain social groups with greater access to social power aimed at exerting “consensus that makes the power of the dominant group appear both natural and legitimate” (Watson & Hill, 2006, p. 121). For such to be achieved, there must be a “manufacture (or winning) of consent” (Jones and Wareing, 2000: 34) of the dominated, and this is considered the most effective ideological tool in the exercise of power and social control. Fairclough (1995, p. 91) is of the view that “control over the discursive

practices of institutions is one dimension of cultural hegemony". This issue of control raises the question of who constructs these discursive practices, and in the Igbo culture, who enacted these unwritten taboos? These are questions begging for answers but not within the scope of this work to unravel.

What then are the indices of hegemonic masculinity in the Igbo culture given the popular slogan among Igbo men: "To be a man is not a day's job"? When I posed this question to the interview informants, the following emerged as the masculine scripts of a "real Igbo man" in the traditional society: must be rich enough to pay bride price for a wife, a prosperous farmer with large family land and large barns of yams, must be married or an eligible bachelor, owns a house and should be virile enough to sire children. He must be seen to be able to be in charge and control of his wife and children as 'head' of the family, exhibit strength, vigour and at times violence, and must not be seen doing women's household chores. He must be an active member of his *umunna* (kindred) and belong to the cults exclusively reserved for men, such as *mmanwu* (masquerade cult) and *ozo* (traditional) title.

Thus the most highly valued identity is traditional heterosexual masculinity. Homosexuality is a taboo in the culture and very rare. In addition, Amadiume (1987) strongly cautions that *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* has no link whatsoever to lesbian sexuality, but is rather a social arrangement where women took on manly roles as head of families by marrying "wives" while recruiting men (who will eventually have no rights over the offspring) to provide siring services.

Naturalization

Among the most efficacious legitimization strategies is naturalization – presenting issues as "given", "normal", "taken-for-granted", "the way it has always been" "part of our culture". Naturalized discourses tend to foster hegemony and acceptance of dominant discourses as part of background knowledge and societal conventions. Fairclough (1995, p. 23) referred to what he termed "orders of discourse" which have become commonsense discourses – the feeling that "things are as they should be or as one would normally expect them to be". This orderliness of interaction, Fairclough (1995, p. 30) argues, should draw the attention of the critical discourse analyst to, firstly, separate these taken-for-granted discourses from knowledge – that is, mutually shared background knowledge and presuppositions of a culture – as taking them together is an "unacceptable reduction"; and secondly work towards denaturalizing them – by questioning their relevance as this work is currently doing.

The taboos identified in this work seem to have been naturalized as given, legitimizing particular relations and ideologies, essentializing gender roles and tending to prescribe certain positions for different genders. As mentioned earlier, a significant target of hegemonic struggle on the part of the dominated is what Fairclough (1995, p. 95) has called "denaturalization" of existing conventions and replacing them with others.

Silencing and Exclusion

Cameron (1998, p. 3) noted as part of feminist critique of language the absence of women's voices in society's most valued linguistic registers and genres of high culture. She argues that women are usually identified with non-prestigious and at times disparaging genres like gossip chatter, nag, parrot and others which are private use of language rarely associated with men. Women's silence does not mean, according to her, that women have chosen not to speak, but they have been silenced both covertly and overtly. This paper argues that the identified taboos

and other similar folk expressions in the Igbo culture constitute powerful media for achieving silencing of women.

Proximization

Another strategy of legitimization which we have tested on our data is what has been termed “proximization”. Originally developed by Chilton (2004 in Chilton & Schaffner, 2011) to account for situations in which a speaker, usually a political actor, seeks legitimization of actions by alerting the addressee to the proximity or imminence of phenomena which can be a threat to the addressee (and the speaker too) and thus require immediate reaction. The persuasive power of proximization is further explicated in the works of Piotr Cap (2006), which describe the concept as:

a pragmatic-cognitive strategy that legitimizes a speaker's perspective of a discourse event as directly affecting the addressee negatively or in a way that threatens his/her life. The addressee is thus convinced into conceiving the discourse stage as personally consequential and thus supports or endorses all actions to removing the consequences. It is a forced construal operation meant to evoke closeness of the external threat to solicit legitimization of preventive measures. (p.4)

The theoretical bases of Cap's work is in the power of deixis and indexicals to locate the discourse stage as either proximal or distal relative to the speaker (I) plus others (We) who are located at the deictic centre. According to Cap, the threat comes from the Discourse Space (DS) peripheral entities referred to as ODCs (Outside the Deictic Centre), which are conceptualized to be crossing the Space to invade the IDCs (Inside the Deictic Centre) entities – that is, the speaker and her addressee. Just as deixis comprise contextual dimensions of place, time and person, Cap identified three dimensions the contrived threat could take: spatial, temporal or axiological. It is spatial when the threat is perceived as peripheral entities of the ODCs encroaching on the discourse space of the IDCs central entities (speaker/addressee); temporal when the envisaged threat is perceived as imminent and momentous, historic with a time frame and thus needing immediate response and unique preventive measures; and axiological when the ideological clash between the “home values of the IDCs and the alien and antagonistic ODC values are construed as having the potential to materialize (that is, with a physical impact) within the IDC” to affect the speaker and the addressee home territory.

Positive Male and Negative Female Presentation

Van Dijk's (2011, p. 396) concept of the “ideological square” concerns what he termed the “Us” (ingroup) and “Them” (outgroup) dichotomies. In this framework, four positions are taken in the legitimization/delegitimization strategies: “emphasize Our good things, emphasize Their bad things; de-emphasize Our bad things, de-emphasize Their good things”. Summing up, van Dijk (2001, p. 103) writes that “we thus often witness an overall strategy of *positive-self and negative-other presentation* in which our good things and their bad things are emphasized and our bad things and their good things are de-emphasized” (italics mine). We have identified this strategy of positive self and negative other presentation in taboos relating to leadership capabilities of the sexes and have captioned it here “positive male and negative female presentation”.

METHODOLOGY

The major sources of data for the study were from personal experiences, being a member of the Igbo culture. These taboos have been in use since my growing up and have also been represented in books, texts and even the media. Some were also got from personal interviews with six elders, three men and three women. The men comprise one traditional ruler who retired as a university professor and a literary writer, one university professor who is a

specialist in Igbo culture and one rural dweller also versed in Igbo ways of life. These men tried to rationalize why some of the taboos have been entrenched in the culture in response to certain myths, which some of them especially the enlightened professors feel should be reassessed in the light of current trends of modernisation of cultures. The women include a senior lecturer in the Igbo culture, a leader of the *umuada* (daughters of the lineage) group and a leader of the *inyomdi* (wives of the lineage) group, who were instrumental to bringing out most of the taboos against women. A total of thirty-eight taboos were collected and translated to their nearest English interpretations.

Much of these analyses are done in the authors' intuition, using the two resources at the disposal of researchers in the ethnomethodological tradition, credited to Harold Garfinkel: indexicality and reflexivity. The methodological paradigm of indexicality was reported in the work of Ochs (1992, cited in Mills and Mullany, 2011) on gender indexicality. She claims that language indirectly indexes specific gender meanings. It involves identifying characteristics of an utterance or an entity relative to the situation, time and place and locating their meanings to the particular situations (Crystal, 2010). It involves information communicated, usually indirectly, about gender or sex categories

Reflexivity, on the other hand, assumes that researchers are individual members of a particular social world they are studying and this will inevitably influence their interpretation of the issue under study (Mills and Mullany, 2011, pp. 119-120). According to these authors, reflexivity permits a committed researcher to "openly and directly acknowledge that their orientation will be shaped by their socio-historical location including the values and interests that location confers upon them ... A reflexive approach to gender study means that the researcher acknowledges their subjective orientation, bringing to an end claims that "objective knowledge has been produced with the researcher not influencing the research process in any way" (p.119). Given this scenario, this work has been interpreted based on my personal experiences as a wife, mother and an educated career woman in the Igbo culture who is completely aware of the ideologies and gender politics of the culture.

Data analysis

As mentioned earlier, the data was organised based on the five identified patriarchal legitimization strategies: hegemonic masculinity (and femininity), silencing and exclusion, naturalization, proximization, positive self and negative other presentation, as well as how they refer to the sexes. The taboos exemplifying each strategy are listed and discussed.

Hegemonic masculinity

The following taboos exemplify some of the attributes of hegemonic masculinity identity.

- (1) *Nwoke anaghi ekwe nwanyi n'aka*. A man does not shake hands with a woman.
- (2) *Nwoke anaghi ejekwu nwanyi no na nso* – A man does not mate with a woman in her menstrual period (it will despoil his virility)
- (3) *Nwanyi no na nso anaghi esiri di ya nri* – A woman in her monthly cycle does not cook for her husband.

Though (2) and (3) may have lost their effectiveness in the contemporary Igbo society, my informants claim that they were very strong taboos in the traditional society. These taboos are usually either meant to emphasize their powerful position, to prevent acts that may defy their virility, or are targeted at behaviour or attitudes that seem to make men "effeminate". This is more evident in the "cooking" sphere which is regarded as the female domain and any man meddling in that sphere is seen as less masculine.

- (4) *Nwoke anaghi aga n'ite ofe nwunye ya* – A husband does not go to his wife's soup pot to take soup.
- (5) *Nwoke anaghi anoghari n'ekwu mgbe nwunye ya na-esi nri* – A husband does not stay around the kitchen when his wife is cooking.

Examples (4) and (5) may not be taboos in the real sense, they are frowned at. It is a given that men do not cook in the Igbo culture and so any man who attempts to trespass into a culturally prescribed female sphere is seen as less man or effeminate.

Conversely, hegemonic femininity would refer to a woman who submits herself to the husband, performs her wifely roles of child bearing and nurturing, assume submissive and subordinate position to the husband, and performs reconciliatory functions in the nuclear and extended family. Thus the following taboos reinforce this submissiveness.

- (6) *Nwanyi anaghi achigbaba ukwu ka nwoke ma o nodu ala* – A woman does not sit cross-legged.
- (7) *Nwanyi anaghi akwu oto anara ma obu anu mmanya di ya ma o bu umunna di ya nyere ya, o ga-esekpu ala* – A woman must kneel down to accept and drink palm wine from her husband or any adult male from the husband's kindred
- (8) *Nwanyi anaghi akwu oto ekele ndi di ya n'ogbo* – A woman does not stand to greet her husband's kinsmen. She must kneel to greet them.
- (9) *Nwanyi anaghi akwu ugwo n'isi nwoke ga-alu ya* – A woman does not pay a price on the man who will marry her.
- (10) *Nwanyi anaghi alu di abuo otu ugboro* – A woman cannot marry more than one husband at a time. (If she must remarry, her bride price must be returned to the first husband, in a ceremony called *ikwu ngo*).

However a man can marry as many wives as possible at the same time provided he can pay the required bride price on all of them and be able to provide for their sustenance. Nevertheless, nowadays, some ladies who are desperate to be hooked up pay their own bride price by privately giving the man money to pay on their head. It is an abomination in Igbo culture for women to pay their own bride-price.

In the same vein, certain economic activities are reserved for men especially harvesting palm produce and kolanuts regarded as major source of income for the head and provider of the family. Women are therefore tabooed in doing them. For instance:

- (11) *Nwanyi anaghi ari nkwu egbu akwu* – A woman does not climb palm trees to harvest palm fruits.
- (12) *Nwanyi anaghi ete mmanya* – A woman does not tap wine.
- (13) *Nwanyi anaghi ari oji agho ya* – A woman does not pluck kolanuts .
- (14) *Nwanyi anaghi atutu oji* – A woman does not pick a kola pods/fruit. She calls a man or any male child to pick it up for her. It is regarded as an abomination for a woman to do so.

Naturalization

In presenting issues as given, natural and commonsensical, the following taboos are pertinent:

- (15) *Nwanyi anaghi enwe ala* – A woman does not own land.
- (16) *Nwanyi anaghi ano ebe a na-ekwu okwu ala* – A woman does not partake in decisions/discussion about land.
- (17) *Nwanyi amaghi oke ala* – A woman does not know about land boundaries. This applies both in her father's house and in her husband's house.
- (18) *Nwanyi anaghi eje n'oke ala*. A woman does not go to (determine) land boundaries.

- (19) *Nwanyi enweghi oke n'ala nna ya* – A woman has no share in her father's land.

The reason given for this by interview informants is that a man owns landed property while a woman owns movable property since she will inevitably move to her marital home. It is interesting to note that this position is currently being debated as in the appellate case in the discussion section and the 2003 Widowhood Law of Anambra State enacted by the International Federation of Women Lawyers, Anambra State Chapter which stipulates among other things, that “widows have intrinsic right to be their husbands’ inheritors” of landed and other properties (Katchy, 2015, p. 91). This law is a prelude to women generally owning and sharing in the family land inheritance.

Some taboos regulate the type of food to be eaten by the sexes:

- (20) *Nwanyi anaghi eri anu egbe* – A woman does not eat kite meat.
(21) *Nwanyi anaghi ata eke okuko* – A woman does not eat gizzard.
(22) *Nwanyi anaghi ata ike okuko* – a woman does not eat the croaker of the chicken.
(23) *Nwanyi anaghi ata akwa okuko* – A woman does not eat eggs. This taboo is based on the belief that an egg is the source of life and since women produce eggs, it would be an abomination for them to eat eggs, that is, to destroy life.
(24) *Nwanyi anaghi ata akuru anu* – A woman does not eat kidney.

Note the song by the night masquerade (Ezeifeke & Ogbazi, 2016, p. 5) deriding church goers for watching helplessly while women converts eat the kidney with impunity!

Silencing and exclusion

The following taboos legitimize silencing of women in the Igbo culture:

- (25) *Nwanyi anaghi awa oji* – A woman does not break kolanuts.
(26) *A naghi egosi nwanyi oji* – A woman is not “shown” kolanuts (as a rite in kolanut breaking where every adult male will be shown kolanuts) before the oldest man performs the ritual prior to breaking it.
(27) *Nwanyi anaghi atunye onu n'okwu na nzuko ndi umunna di ya, naani ma a kporo ya kwuo* - A woman does not participate in decision making processes in her husband's kindred meeting unless she is called to answer some queries.

The taboos presented below regulate certain societal rights, reserving them exclusively for males to the exclusion of female participants. The various areas indicated below are restricted areas for the female in Igbo culture and so are predominantly the exclusive domains of the males.

- (28) *Nwanyi anaghi eti mmanwu* – A woman does not belong to masquerade cult.
(29) *Nwanyi anaghi ele mmanwu anya n'ihu* - A woman does not look a masquerade on the face
(30) *Nwanyi anaghi eso mmanwu* – A woman does not escort a masquerade.

Proximization

Certain widowhood practices exemplify this legitimization strategy:

- (31) *Nwanyi akpughi isi ya ma di ya nwuo.* – A woman must shave her hair for her deceased husband; otherwise she would have committed an abomination.
(32) *Nwanyi eyighi afe mkpe* – wearing the mourning garb is compulsory for women.
(33) *Nwanyi anozughi mkpe onwa isii, ebe ufodu otu afo* – not seen to be in confinement for a period ranging from six months to one year to mourn the dead husband.

- (34) *Nwanyi ihu ozu di* – (Especially in Nanka community), seeing the husband corpse is forbidden to women in some cultures
- (35) *Nwunye ighanye aja nili di ya*– Putting sand in husband’s grave (is forbidden to women in some cultures especially Nanka Community in Aguata LGA)
- (36) *Nwanyi emereghi di ya nwuru anwu aja ana* – (no direct English equivalent). This involves a practice in some cultures that prescribe certain rituals involving a widow sleeping with a witchdoctor to ward off the spirit of her dead husband so that she could be inherited by her husband’s siblings. If this bond is not broken in this ritual, the husband’s spirit will keep haunting the family.

Although this may be way too extreme to relate to the patriarchal legitimization strategy in the taboos under study, it offers an explanatory framework to account for the implicit threats in some of the identified taboos, especially as they relate to the sanctions that await defaulters. It follows that as women who are more directly affected by these taboos find the sanctions personally consequential; they endorse all actions towards acquiescence or removal of the threats.

Positive Male and Negative Female Presentation

This last strategy is adapted from van Dijk’s “positive-self and negative-other presentation” (van Dijk, 2011, p.396)

- (37) *Nwanyi anaghi abu eze* – A woman can never be “king”. This taboo is the reason for the song by a musical band “Oriental Brothers” who claim that “A land where a woman rules is doomed”
- (38) *Nwanyi anaghi ato nwoke* – A woman is never older than a male. This means that no matter how young a male is, he is taken to be older than a woman. A young man is taken to be older and superior to the wisest old woman. A male child is even taken to be older and wiser than his mother

It is evident from our data that these taboos emphasize prohibitions against women more than those against men, thus reinforcing Spender’s view that men make the world and so Igbo men, like others in literature, must have enacted those taboos to their gain and the women’s disadvantage.

DISCUSSION

As already hinted earlier, the taboos were analysed in line with the different domains of operation – the family, inheritance, marriage, leadership and social privileges – and the patriarchal legitimization strategies indexed by the listed taboos. Hegemonic masculinity (and femininity) is the major legitimizing strategy observed in the analysis. In economic activities of men and women, this is achieved by gendering. Just as domestic chores like cooking should not be done by men, certain economic activities should not be undertaken by women, such as climbing to harvest palm fruits, pluck kolanuts, tap wine or cut fodder. We have mentioned the reason given for tabooing women from climbing; so that she will not expose the sacred and sacrosanct birth passage to prying eyes. If we go by this reason, it begs the question of why women were also tabooed from picking kola pods that fell off the trees of their own accord (she must call a male, even if a small child to pick it for her) or why she should not harvest the palm fruits that are within her reach standing on the ground. A woman who stands up to drink palm wine presented to her by her husband or an elderly member of her husband’s kin indexes assertiveness, disrespect and masculine attitude and so is tabooed. Similarly, a woman sitting cross-legged is seen as adopting a manly pose and so should be stopped. These taboos thus point to the acceptable and unacceptable behaviours of the sexes which they have to strictly adhere to.

Hegemonic masculinity is also evident in the marriage institution where it is the man's place to seek a wife, pay the bride price and perform other marriage rites and not the other way round. A woman is tabooed to pay her own bride price even when she is economically more stable than her would-be spouse. If it happens that the woman paid the bills for her marriage, it should remain top secret, otherwise her husband will be subject of public ridicule for not living up to expectations and equally she will be stigmatized for running after a man or throwing herself on a man. Similarly, just as polygny is permitted for men, polyandry is strongly prohibited in a woman. In the case of a break with her first husband, a ritual of *ikwu ngo* (return of bride price) is performed; otherwise any second marriage is doomed to failure or may lead to untimely death or barrenness.

Naturalization of patriarchy seems to be most evident is in the family inheritance culture. The taboos recorded in this domain imply that a woman is vehemently prohibited from not only having a share in landed property both in her paternal and marital homes, but also is not supposed to know the boundary of any land or be seen or heard in any dispute regarding land for no other reason than "that is the culture". Even in these days of enlightenment, where some educated parents include their female offspring in wills to share their landed assets, especially those outside the ancestral land, male siblings contest such wills when the father dies as witnessed in the Purity 102.5 FM broadcast of October 2016, where the woman's siblings were contesting the bequeathed land with the rhetoric *onye nwuru anwu kesia ekpe, ndi di ndu ekegharia* meaning "the deceased will is open to modification by the living". The media was calling on the public and members of the extended family to prevail on the woman's siblings to leave the bequeathed property to its rightful owner. This development may be a much expected move towards denaturalizing this culture. Fairclough (1995, p. 95) notes a kind of "unsteady equilibrium" which may result from "hegemonic struggle" on the part of the dominant forces to preserve or restructure and renew their hegemony in the sphere of discourse, as well as struggle on the part of the dominated groups". In the latter case, the question may be whether the dominated aid in the maintenance of the normative practices by reproducing and sustaining them, or conversely, whether they are being subverted, challenged and contested, leading to social and cultural change.

Such naturalization is also evident in the restrictions imposed on women eating certain foods like the gizzard, the kidney, egg or the rump of a chicken in some areas in Igbo culture. Contravening these taboos involve the woman providing the husband with a life animal she ate the tabooed part. The reason for these restrictions in food is not known and our interviewees are not agreed as to its origin. For the egg, one of the interviewees, as earlier mentioned, claimed that since women produce egg as the source of life, they should not be seen destroying life by eating eggs. This claim loses sight of the fact that men eating egg equally destroys life. For the other tabooed foods, whereas some claim that allowing women to eat these delicacies predispose them to stealing, others claim that they are the exclusive preserve (*nzele*) of the males in the culture and a mark of respect, so women should respect their husbands by reserving these choice parts for them. However, in these days of urbanization and shopping in big malls that package these parts, especially the gizzard, kidney and egg, this taboo is fast losing relevance.

Constructing women's silencing in taboos is another very potent patriarchal legitimization strategy in the taboos. Kolanut ritual, masquerade cult and mixed-sex meetings are some of the domains where women rights to self expression are muffled. The kolanut ritual is one area where women anonymity and invisibility are constructed very effectively. Even in the cases where a woman is chief executive, she is just shown the kola, and thereafter, a male will bring

out one and hand over to her for her husband, who may not be present. This silencing is thus very potent patriarchal legitimization strategy in the culture. A woman is also expected to remain silent in mixed-sex gatherings except called upon to talk and is not supposed to have any opinion on land issues. These strategies of silencing and exclusion construct women inferiority and male supremacy in the expressions under study.

In the same vein, women are completely excluded from the masquerade cult and all women, uninitiated men and boys who try to pry into this secret cult is deemed to have ventured into a no-go area. I personally witnessed an amusing scene in our faculty where a professor (a woman) was presenting a research proposal on the Igbo masquerade performance as means of sustaining entertainment through carnival displays, a male professor got up and walked out murmuring in disdain: "a woman, talking to me about masquerade cult? Abomination!" Another Igbo professor in Wichita State University also confided in me on how her interest in the study of the *mmanwu* cult is hindered by women not being privy of the secrets of the cult. She did not tell me how she has been going round those hitches, though she seemed determined. These enlightened women's efforts to circumvent their socially assigned limitations through scholarship is part of the hegemonic struggle to denaturalize and demystify these taboos.

The inherent threat, especially metaphysical ones, in contravening a taboo, is more evident in widowhood practices where proximization is deployed as patriarchal legitimization strategy to harass widows into acquiescence to be "inherited" by their husbands' siblings, or to remove them from the scene in order for the siblings to take over her husband's property. To achieve this, spiritual as well as physical threats outside the deictic centre of the widow and her assailants are contrived to be encroaching on the widow and her husbands' siblings who are inside the deictic centre should she fail to obey these taboos. This is what Cap (2006) calls spatio-temporal and axiological proximization. By keeping these threats imminent (temporal proximization), they eventually encroach on the discourse space of the participants (spatial proximization) leading to devastating consequences (axiological proximization). Therefore, a woman must not see her dead husband, nor pour sand in his grave otherwise these threats will descend on the widow and her husband's siblings. She must be in mourning confinement for at least six months (in some places one year), shave her hair and wear mourning garb. The most obnoxious and dehumanizing of these practices is the *aja ana*, very common in the Awka culture, where a woman is expected to sleep with a witch doctor who will then perform the ritual to ward off the spirit of her late husband from her body in order to break the bond between them to enable her enter into another marriage, or be "inherited" without being haunted by the deceased spirit. According to this taboo, without breaking this bond, any prospective suitor for that widow is doomed to die prematurely or the marriage will be childless and beset with other physical and spiritual problems.

One female interviewee, on the reason for tabooing women from seeing their husbands' corpse but must leave the marital home immediately the husband dies and not return until the day of the burial, claimed that this is a strategy devised by the husband's kinsmen to remove any opposition from the widow in carting away her husband's (their brother's) wealth and important documents. There was no explanation as to why some cultures taboo a woman from pouring sand in her husband's grave. This arguably is injustice against widows, and incidentally is still being witnessed in many areas of Igbo culture, even in this modern era. A case in point is the episode in the early 1990s in Nanka community where a vehement protest by the Catholic Charismatic renewal movement against these obnoxious practices led to a serious violent conflict that claimed two lives, Augustine and Scholastica. The Catholic Church in the area immortalized these two martyrs by naming a secondary school, Austica Memorial

Secondary School after them. At the time of writing up this work, it was gathered that this practice is waning and is no longer strongly enforced, thanks to the evangelical works of the charismatic renewal movement.

Positive self and negative other presentation is another legitimization strategy observed in the taboos. By representing women negatively, they are construed as not fit to be leaders, thus the taboo *nawnyi anaghi abu eze* (A woman cannot rule/ be ruler). This taboo is reinforced by a song credited to a band group, Oriental Brothers, with the words translated as “a land where a woman rules is doomed”. This implies that leadership role is men’s sphere and women are not emotionally and rationally fit to occupy the position. Van Dijk calls this positive self and negative other presentation”. This taboo negates the well-known fact that Nigerian and Igbo women have been known to perform creditably in leadership positions both within the country and in the Diaspora.

CONCLUSION

The taboos under study seem to indirectly index stereotypical view of women and men in the different domains of operation in this study. These encodings are seen as ideological expectations, held in place by powerful gendered ideologies, and legitimized by the various strategies outlined in this study. The study has tried to problematize these discursive practices in the light of the current global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (WHO, 2015) in which the fifth item of the seventeen-point agenda is gender equality. For this to be realized, these taboos need to be put on the spot as they may have become hackneyed in the postmodern concept of gender as performance as against the notion of fixed identity.

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