

## **IGBO TRADITIONAL CRIME AND ABOMINATIONS IN THE FACE OF MODERN TRENDS OF DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW OF IGBO VALUE EDUCATION.**

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### **Abstract**

*It is obviously very easy to identify many countries of the globe experiencing a very fast growth in technologies, human capital improvement, to mention but a few. The third world countries precisely witness the same trend of modern advancement at their own levels and pace. Nigeria particularly is not kept aside in this trend of modern development. The traditional Igbo society is grossly affected in the face of these modern trends of development. These developmental tendencies have cushioned or motivated the development of this paper. It has been found among other things that modern trends of development in Nigeria have influenced the archaic/traditional institutionalized observances given to crimes and abominations. Certain crimes and abominations have turned to be blue-prints people appreciate or honour in order to simply achieve their quest for worldly or mundane pleasures. These are the problems this paper has been designed to address. For example, it was traditionally a serious offense for a child to pilfer. It was also an abomination for an adult to watch a tethered goat or sheep give birth to kid(s). In the midst of the ugly situation, the paper recommends to mention but a few that various prohibited criminal acts and abominations of various Nigeria traditional societies should be kept at alarm and made known for all and sundry to note them in their lives. The paper adopts historical and evolutionist research approach.*

*Data were secured from primary and secondary sources. Data collected were analyzed with phenomenological method of data analysis.*

**Keywords: Traditional value system, Igbo society, Crime, Abomination, Modernity.**

## **Introduction**

In every society, there are ways of regulating human behavior and excesses. No matter the level at which any society is being viewed degenerated; there are “does” and “don’ts”. These control measures make the society to appear as an organized entity. Most of the time, the level of the exposure and orientation acquired by the majority of the population of a people go a long way in influencing the nature of the people’s guiding principles and patterns of living. The environment and the resources around a place can also influence rules that would be promulgated for the people. It is the problem that arises from the application and conception of the rules that gave room for the study of law as a field in academics. When people are being fed with the tenets of law, and are produced as experts, or professionals in the legal studies and practices it is believed that the law which is the guide to human behavior could be well interrelated, promulgated and executed.

Then, before the law comes into place, the organized lifestyles of independent societies are considered in the discharge of legal provisions. It is on this background that the study of man and his society come into being. When we speak of studying the society, we concentrate more, on an area of study known as “Sociology” and when we concentrate on the study of man, our interest is directed to an area of study called “Anthropology”. It is these areas of study that tries to collaborate with other academic fields in studying the actions and behaviour of man as a member of a given society. From one’s behaviour, feeding habit, language, etc, others can guess better where he or she hails from. In the light of this, an individual’s awareness on things to avoid and things to acknowledge as acceptable ways of action are embedded on this aspect of human knowledge of his interaction with fellow man. These formations traditionally come in form of customs, norms, mores, culture, tradition etc. In these traditional ethical and legal platform, the people will be able to identify those actions that are crimes or criminal and abominable.

In the Igbo traditional world-view, there are behaviour and actions that are conceived to be crimes, while some are abominations and others perceived as nobility. The Igbo consider the following as either crimes or abominations or both: Stealing acts e.g. pilfering, armed robbery, burglary, profiteering etc. Sexually related ones include, fornication, adultery, incest, bestiality, masturbating, sex with the under age, sex in the bush, sex while standing up. For some professionals like the priests, elders and medicine-men, sex with certain persons and in certain periods are crimes or abominations. Others are: lesbianism and homosexuality. Recreational/social, economic crimes and abominations include: unveiling the masquerade cult, husband and wife lying in opposite directions, plantain producing one fruit, vulture perching around someone’s household when there is no dead animals for the vulture to devour, a hen laying or hatching only one egg etc. Traditional Igbo crimes and abominations that fall into biological and health sphere are: Suicide, death by being drown in water, death by falling from tree, pre-mature death, blindness, poisoning, children growing upper teeth first, children born with less or more than ten fingers and ten toes. Others in this class include:

Albino, twins, triplets, etc. There are some wrong natural occurrences that are also seen as abominations, such as trees being cut by thunder, appearance of certain destructive insects or animals especially in their large number in a defined settlement etc. It has been discovered in this research, that some of these crimes and abominations have being countered by the present modern development. Some Igbo communities appear not to observe so many of them. The study agrees to the fact that some of them are not worthy of attracting attention of the masses while some deserve attention to make the Igbo society and the Igbo man noble. Some of them that are neglected by the modern Igbo people are helpful in organizing the Igbo environment.

The paper therefore presents recommendations that are focused on merging good modern trends of development with the good norms and customs to upgrade the Igbo people strategies in moderating criminal mindedness among the Igbo people. The traditional Igbo people indulge on educating the younger people on their values through proverbs, Idioms and so on. This goes a long way in shaping the attitude of the younger generation for a better Igbo society. The research adopts both historical and evolutionist research approach. Data were gotten from both secondary and primary sources for example dictionary, textbooks, internet materials, journals, interview etc. Data generated were analyzed with phenomenological method of data analysis.

### **Clarification of Terms**

The terms this research offers explanations include The Igbo, crime, abomination, traditional value/Traditional education, and modernity. The Igbo according to Isichei in Okafor (2016:17-18), identifies the Igbo thus:

One of the key themes in Igbo history undoubtedly concerns Nri, which an early missionary described as “a kind of Holy City, the Rome or Mecca of the Igbo”. Nri traditions describe the invention of agriculture and on working and the introduction of the four week. They tell of an original focus of settlement in Anambra Vally, and a common historical heritage with Igbo land’s northern neighbour, the kingdom of Igala. The antiquity of Nri civilization was strikingly attested by archaeological excavations at Igbo-Ukwu. Igbo Ukwu is very close to Nri and one of the sites excavated is thought to be the burial site of a ninth century king of Nri. The objects discovered include: beautiful and elaborate bronze, ornamental and ritual objects, a rope vase, an altar stand, a human portrait, bronze shells, bowls and so on.

On the other hand, Njoku (1990:5) emphasizes that:

The Igbo have no common traditional story of their origins. Historians have proposed two major theories of Igbo origins. One claims the existence of a core area, or “nuclear Igbo land”. The other claims that the Igbo are descendants from waves of immigrants from the north and west who arrived in the fourteen or fifteenth century. Three of these are the Nri, Nzam and Anam.

We can see that there are different historical narratives to the origin of the Igbo people. There are other authors and scholars with other historical theories of the Igbo origins. But, when we use the narratives given by Isichei and Njoku here, one will be left with the idea that either the Nri is the Original home of the Igbo or Nri, Nzam and Anam are the ancestral homes and

triple descendants of the Igbo. Moreover, whatever is the origin of the people, the study identify the people meant here as that ethnic group that live in the South-East geo-political zone in Nigeria. The people settle in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States.

Crime has been ordinarily defined by the lay man as an action which constitutes an offence that is punishable by law. Meriam (1828) gives four explanations in defining crime. Firstly, crime is defined as an illegal act for which someone can be punished by the government, especially a gross violation of law; Secondly, a grave offense especially against morality, thirdly, criminal activity, and finally, something reprehensible, foolish or disgraceful. It is worthy to note here that crime is synonymous to offense, sin, vice, scandal etc. from all indications, crime is a serious anti society phenomenon. Abomination according to vocabulary dictionary is a thing or action that is vile vicious or terrible. It is an action that arouses disgust or abhorrence. This definition shows that abomination is not far from crime. They are twin brothers, while crime is more of modern terminology, abomination is that of traditional term.

Modernity in Light Reader is a historical period defined as one that left behind traditional culture and advanced exponentially in science, arts, technology and business. It can be employed to identify the current era or past significant periods of mankind's history, depending on context. It should be noted that modernity originated from the Latin *modernus* (*modo*), which means "just now". It refers to what is current or happening at present time. Traditional value and traditional education on the other side of the coin, has to do with the art of educating a child traditionally, on expected behaviour and values as it conforms with the customs and culture of the society. This act is also a form of socialization. Nwabuisi (1988:13) stresses on this sort of value education in a traditional community thus:

When a child is born he is born into a community of men and women with established customs and ways of life of thinking and behaving. It is this community with established customs and ways of life and of thinking that will shape the young person's view of the world, his way of life and his way of thinking ...

Traditional value and education in this context is not far from what Nwabuisi has stressed here. This is an education process in which the traditional Igbo start inculcating into the child's thinking from the day he was born. In this education, he learns creativity in arts, traditional science and the behavioral patterns – those that are wrong and those that are right. With such knowledge, he is bond to distinguish between right and wrong, rewards and punishments.

### **Factors that Motivate Criminal and Abominable Actions**

Nothing appears for nothing and from nothing. Crimes and abominations are noticed in various African communities, and in the world at large. The existence of criminal and abominable actions is motivated by some factors. These factors include: personal attitude, peer-group, modernity, science and Technology, urbanization, inadequate and wrong family upbringing, curses to mention but a few. Individual's personal attitude is a factor. There are people that are personally bad in their nature. Mr. Nicholas Okafor Nkpa (personal communication 27 August, 2011) states that some people are born with some genetic traits that are not in conformity with the lifestyle expected by the members of a society. He maintains that such people spontaneously act wrongly without knowing that what they do are shameful. People of this nature are in most cases dangerous to the communities where

they live. The second factor in this research is peers. People can be born good, sound and eager to learn the acceptable ways of life in their communities but due to their peer relationships, they can turn bad. They can become bandits, terrorists, criminals, hoodlums, homosexuals, lesbians and so on. Chief Casmir Orji (personal communication, 2 July, 2013) lamented that bad peers can frustrate the effort devoted by the family, school and other rightful intention agents of socialization. After spending time and other resources to shape a child's attitude to conform with the customs and culture of a people in form of blue-prints, bad peers can destroy the sound behaviour that had been built in this child. Such victims can join dangerous secret cults where he will be taught a lot of criminalities and abominable actions.

A group of factors like globalization, industrialization, modernity, science and technology, and urbanization contribute in increasing crimes and abominations. As it is contained in this research work, modernity affects the existing traditional measures of reducing crimes and abominations. Otherwise, they encourage the increase in the rise of crimes and abominations. Igbo (2007) concurs with this when he asserts that there were conducts that violated some standardized norms in which severe sanctions were applied. Urbanization, modernity, globalization, science and technology have appeared as barriers to the implementations of these sanctions. This group of factors will be discussed in detail in the subsequent part of this study.

Inadequate family upbringing is also a factor some children who happen to lose their parent at the early stage of their lives in most cases lack standard and sound upbringing. Some face inadequate family upbringing as a result of poverty. Such people can indulge in a form of cruelty to survive. Over pampering can also make a child to lack adequate up-bring from his parent(s) or guardian(s). This over pampering could be as a result of availability of wealth; it could be because of circumstances surrounding child bearing and child birth in the family. The issues associated with first son, first daughter, last child, only son, only daughter, only child etc can make parents or guardians fail unconsciously in rendering adequate and proper training to a child. The Igbo use this adage *Nkita Nwanyị zuru na ata akwa*, meaning that a puppy reared by a woman always eat egg. Woman here connotes application of light approach in addressing issues that demand for strict measure which is common among women due to their natural emotions.

### **Types of Crimes and Abominations in Igbo Traditional Society and their Sanctions**

In this paper, it is deemed necessary to group these crimes/criminalities and abominations according to their categories at the same time reflect on their attributed sanctions. In this grouping or categorization crimes and abominations will be considered or discussed on the bases of economic, recreational/social religious, sex cum biological/health and even physical nature of crimes and abominations. Mr. Ezekiel Ukachukwu (personal communication, 12 May, 2017) points that apart from the perception of crimes and abominations according to their categories, among the Igbo, they also conceive crimes and abominations depending on their magnitude and dangerous effects against life and well being of man. This segment of the study examines the magnitude and dangerous effects of crimes with regard to their penalties, punishments and sanctions.

The first group of crimes and abominations as contained in this study are sheltered under sex cum biological and health related crimes and abominations. They include: certain illnesses

like swollen belly and body, leprosy etc are abominable biological and health issues. Others include pre-mature death, death caused by falling from a tree (especially palm tree), suicide, death caused by poisoning, death caused by thunder, death by drowning in a river, or sea, etc. Ekeopara (2005:91) emphasizes on some of these abominable health and life issues and their sanction or treatment thus:

Bad death includes those of children between the ages of one and fourteen. Those in their teens all these are regarded as premature deaths and are attended with little or no funeral ceremonies at all. Death by suicide is regarded as a bad death. This is based on the African belief in the sanctity of human life, for it is against the traditional norm that one should take his own life. Life belongs to the Supreme Being the author of life. Those who die by poisoning (either by themselves or others) are regarded to have died badly. In the past they are not buried but are thrown into the bad bush to decay and are not given any form of burial ceremony. Death by thunder is another bad death. Death by drowning in a river or falling from a palm tree is also regarded as bad death among Africans. All these forms or types of bad death are attended by little or no burial ceremonies. Africans' belief is that every death has a cause especially when it is a bad one ...

All these deaths stated here are bad and abominable in Africa. Igbo as an extract from Africa observe them as bad and abominable. People in traditional Igbo society are educated on circumstances that attract such deaths and their consequences to enable all and sundry to beware. Dead of these nature are often believed to have occurred due to crimes committed by the deceased or by their relation(s). A crime committed by a generation or a member of a generation is believed to torment younger generations indefinitely.

Therefore, for the Igbo, a crime or abomination committed can attract a generation sanction or penalty. For those that are killed by thunder, bad illments like leprosy, swollen body etc are thrown in the bad bush as a punishment. Those that die premature death, they are given wound(s) in form of a mark that will be used to identify them in case they repeat in biological transition in their mothers' wombs. People that die at teen age are mostly regarded as "Ogbanje" born-to-die". Those who are drown in a river, are punished by burying them by the same river side. This is because such individuals are believed to have offended the marine spirits and should be left at the same scene to settle with the spirit(s) concerned. Those that fall from the palm tree are also buried at the base of the same palm tree. For the Igbo, there are punishments both at death and while living. As Ekeokpara has stated, these deaths are left with less or no burial ceremonies.

Other serious sex cum biological and health related crimes and abomination are: abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, incest, lesbianism, bestiality and even masturbation. Abortion could simply be taken to be "the termination of pregnancy or "the expulsion of the foetus from the womb before it is viable, that is before it can live outside the mother (Ekwutosi, 2008:43) Abortion amounts to shedding of blood. They condemn it as a crime and abominable. Offenders are rejected by their families and kindred. Some are killed by the gods of the land, some that confessed are tasked to spend expensively on items that will be used to appease and atone the gods of the land. Euthanasia is also a crime and abomination.

According to the people man must be taken by his God, not by man. People that take part in such are seen as murderers. Some Igbo communities excommunicate or ostracize them while some insist on inflicting serious injuries on anyone involved. The victim himself is not accorded any burial ceremonies. Incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality and masturbation are always called for urgent attending. Mr. Leonard Anidiobu (Personal communication, 12 August, 2020) avers that issues with incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality and masturbation are left for the gods of the land to handle. In most cases according to Mr. Leonard Anidiobu, the earth goddess inflicts mental disorder on the actors. The art of fornication and adultery is also a serious matter. The people believe that sex must exist between two opposite sexes who are married patterns. Men who are caught in the act pay heavy fine to the women's husband. Women caught are not allowed to cook for their husbands. Children who grow upper teeth first, twins, triplets, children born with more or less than ten fingers and toes are killed immediately, and thrown to the bad bush or evil forest far away from home.

There are crimes and abominations that fall under social, cultural and economic group. They include: stealing of any kind, be it armed robbery, burglary, profiteering, pilfering, kleptomania, unveiling the masquerade cult, husband and wife lying in the opposite direction, a man barbing his wife, plantain producing just a fruit, hen laying or hatching one egg, vulture pitching around someone's house where no meat is openly available. In the traditional Igbo society, any sort of stealing attracts massive beating rubbing of ash, young palm fronds, and hang whatever the person steals or its symbol around the culprit's body. After that, the person will be expelled from the community indefinitely or for a period of time, as the case may be. For animals and plants that are considered to have done something abominable are better preferred to be killed than selling them. When vulture pitches abdominally, divination is called for clarifications on the crime or abomination committed, so that whatever that needs to be done will be done. If husband and wife lay in the opposite direction or husband barbs his wife ignorantly, it calls for necessary rituals. In fact, there are a whole lot of crimes, abominations sanctions or punishments the nature of this research would not permit to be exhausted here.

### **Igbo Traditional Crimes and Abominations in the Face of Modernity and the Place of Traditional Value Education.**

The modern trend of development has seriously affected the consideration of virtually most criminal and abominable acts in Igbo tradition and culture. Modernity is sponsored by Christianity, Western education, industrialization urbanization, globalization, and science and technology. Ilogu (1974:91) tries to separate different trends of modernization posed by Christianity and European civilization with its science, invention and so on when he states thus:

Christianity became clearly separated from European civilization and such civilization with its science, its inventions and its organization of life for material ends, became at variance with Christian beliefs, but yet sought to mould the future of African continent from that time on, all African, including the land became confronted with two influences from Europe – Christianity and secular, technological scientific modernizations. For some time, some missionaries in the Niger Mission behaved as if Western technological and commercial interests were still respecters of Christian values and life.

Ilogu has shown the influence of commercial and technological interests of the missionaries. This also influences the way and manner they planted or propagated Christianity. But all the same, both Christianity, their technological and commercial interests really affected the observation of what the traditional Igbo society condemned as criminal and abominable. Though in some cases, the traditional society and Christianity seem to challenge the interests of science and civilization. An example is on the biological and health sphere, as it concerns abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, masturbation, etc. The traditional Igbo society and Christianity totally condemn these acts as criminal and abominable. The only difference is that while traditional Igbo society is projecting in immediate penalty, sanction or punishment, Christianity focuses so much on more grace for repentance. Civilization, science and technology today make serious effort to make sure that such acts are not crimes and abomination.

Though there are issues they agree to be criminal and abominable, most times approaches given to them differ. Stealing of any kind is assigned penalties sanctions or punishment in the Igbo traditional society. But for the modern people, some are earnestly seen as crime; for example burglary. The modern people see some of them as business opportunities but the traditional Igbo condemn it in its totality.

Industrialization, urbanization and globalization are also factors that counter traditional Igbo people's attention on certain things they condemn as crimes and abominations. Onuigbo (2009:161) discusses the effect of industrialization and urbanization on the general well being of farming and rural settlement thus:

Unfortunately, the rate of farming is vastly reduced in Igbo land due to cultural intermingling that brought about serious changes in the lifestyle of the Igbo, especially the youths. The cultural changes made their land mark in this area through western system of education and mentality which affected the youths greatly and standard of living ... The result is that office work has, as it were replaced agriculture in Igbo land. As a result, urban cities in Nigeria are swollen with young people who drifted from the villages ....

Industrialization has attracted urbanization where globalization flourishes effectively. Most people especially the youth do not understand abominable and criminal acts in their father land. This is why we see our young people indulging on homosexual activities, lesbianism, incest, abortion, profiteering, suicide, and other crimes. The modern society nevertheless, is helpful to the people in so many ways. There are practices that are obnoxiously condemned as criminal or abominable yet they are in human or superstitious. For example, the killing of triplets, twins, children that grow upper teeth first, the belief in "born to die" and so on.

In all, the traditional value education tries to encourage the growth of the knowledge and awareness on the actions that are traditionally considered as crimes and abominations. Mrs. Jeremiah Obu (personal communication, 2 July, 2020) points that as little boys and girls, their grandfather used to explain to them actions that are forbidden in the land. He used to cite on incest, stealing, unveiling masquerade cult and abuse, to mention but a few. This form of education helps to alert the people as they grow on matters criminal and abominable, unlike the modern society where so many things go.



## Recommendations

This study recommends that:

1. Diaspora meetings of people from various ethnic groups within and outside Nigeria should be intensified beyond its present strength. Such meeting bodies especially those resident in over-seas should sponsor the transportation of elders within the ages of 65 and 85 years to spend time with them for a space of two weeks every year where children and adults will converge to learn their independent cultures and traditions.
2. The Igbo living outside their dialectical zone should try as much as possible to encourage the speaking of Igbo and their community dialects in their respective homes outside Igbo land. Apart from this, parents should encourage the consumption of their Local delicacies, make out time at least once or twice every month to teach their wards the implications of indulging on crimes and abominable actions.
3. Mass media should intensify efforts by introducing Igbo crimes and abominable offences as special media programme on different local and council area programmes on air.
4. In the promulgation of the national constitutional, traditional laws, customs and norms should occupy a reasonable part of the national law.
5. Igbo traditional religion should not be allowed to go into extinction since it is an indomitable source of fear against human interest on criminalities and abominations.

## Conclusion

The traditional Igbo society has so much time devoted in their consciousness to curb crimes and abominations. They make acquisition of knowledge on Igbo values very easy and accessible. There are no personal charges to teach people who do not know much about the norms and values, and about the does and the don'ts of various Igbo communities. Among the Igbo, crimes and abominations cut across human to plants and other lower animals. Therefore man is grown to be very careful with things that exist in his immediate environment. This conscious alert aids avoidance of numerous crimes and abominations in the traditional Igbo society.

Modernity has affected the attention given to these criminal and abominable actions due to the sophisticated nature of Western civilization, globalization etc. But it is crucial to add here that the traditional value education is still effective in shaping the behaviour of most people that reside in the rural areas in Igboland. What is mostly needed is to significantly extend the knowledge on Igbo traditional values to those Igbo people that dwell in urban cities and outside Igbo land mainly.

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### **Interview**

1. Ozo Nicholas Okafor Nkpa, Farmer, Enugu State, 84years, 27/8/2011
2. Chief Casmir Orji, Civil Servant, Imo State, 74years, 2/7/2013
3. Mr. Ezekiel Ukachukwu, Trader, Abia State, 53years, 12/5/2017
4. Elder Fredrick Nebokike, Retired Civil Servant, Enugu State, 91years, 2/3/2020
5. Elder Ezi Ozoude, Farmer, Enugu State, 93 years, 14/5/2014
6. Mr. Leonard Anidiobu, Traditional Priest, Enugu State, 58years, 12/8/2020
7. Mr. Jeremiah Obu, Welder, Abia State, 55years, 2/7/2020