

THE IMPORT OF PLEDGES AND VOWS IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of pledges & vows to the deities among the African traditional practitioners is the main thrust of this work. The pledge and vow to the deities are part and parcel of African traditional religion. These practices are very important among the people. The work discovered among other things that the reasons why some traditional religion practitioners do pledge and vowed to their deities are search for happiness, to avoid calamity, rustications, offence, quest for continuous progress in life, security, appreciation and the fear of unknown. The researchers made use of primary and secondary sources of data collection as their methodologies. The work recommends, among others, that people should not pledge and vow out of fear or without knowing the future implication of their action.

KEYWORDS: Import, Pledges, Vows, Deities, African Traditional Society.

INTRODUCTION

In response to man's problems, fear, need for a social order, Africans from time immemorial had developed and practiced their set of beliefs (religion) which were handed down from the forebears. Unlike other religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, African religion cannot be traced to one singular founder or group of founders. Okwueze (1998:51) traces the origin of Judaism to Moses' experience at the burning bush, Christianity on the other hand is founded by Jesus Christ and Islam has its founder as Mohammed, but the reverse is the case in African Traditional Religion. This has contributed immensely to the structure of the religion which remains virtually the same among the people. Africans believe the supreme God is benevolent and stays away from the world while men devise means/ways to approach Him through lower spirits. Isichei (1977:13-14) posits that:

One should not neglect to mention the value of traditional religion... West African religion tend to hold that the supreme God is benevolent but that He stays remote from affairs of men. It is therefore believed that worshippers should give most of their devotion to many lesser spirits... Because they did not write, their wisdom has usually died with them.

With reference to Isichei's view, it is pertinent to recall the opinions of scholars like Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:32-49), Idowu in Gbenda (2006:19) and quarcoopome (1987:40-43), that

African religious cosmology centers on the Belief in Supreme God, the Belief in Divinities, the Belief in Spirits, the Belief in Ancestors, and the Belief in Magic and Medicine. These beliefs patterns vary from one African society to another probably because of their cultural differences. Writing on the Igbo people, Abanuka (2004:5) asserts that the...established symbols chi (reality); belief in supreme being (Chukwu) and gods (arusi/agbara)such as Anyanwu (sun god), Ala (earth goddess), Agwu (god of medicine and healing), Ahajioku (god of yam) and Ikenga (god of achievement and success in life). He never kept aside the belief in ancestors (ndi-ichie/nde bunze).

Abanika names the supreme God as Chukwu and the other gods like anyanwu, ala etc. as assisting Him. These lesser gods are what we mean here as deities. Ifesieh (1989:25-41) in the same vein relates the people's beliefs to celestial/semi-celestial sphere: the sky (igwe), stars (kpakpando), sun (anyanwu) etc. as abode of supreme God (Chineke), the Earth, he addressed as (mother of fertility) the mother earth that is full of beliefs surrounded with myths and rituals. They (Igbo) according to Ifesieh say that it (land) is free gift from chineke- the creator to man-“Onyinye Chukwu;” spiritual powers are also attributed to trees like Ofo tree, Ogbu –tree etc, mountains-Ugwu, rivers, irrational animals like Okuku-spirit of fowl, mmuo anu- ofia- spirit of wild animals etc, spirit of family/kinship-mmuo uno+spirit of the house (domestic), and the individual spirits-Ancestors (Nna Anyi fa). He calls these spirits Igbo-four-arch-spirits. Onuh (1992:21-28) classifies African religion beliefs as follows: Belief in Supreme God, Belief in the Minor Deities namely the sun Deity-Anyanwu, Sky or Thunder Deity-Igwe or Amadioha and the Earth goddess-Ala, the Belief in Ancestral veneration and the Belief in Evil spirits and Forces-Arusi. Madu (1997:51) categorizes Igbo spiritual beings based on their vital ranks as follows; First the supreme being (Chukwu, Chineke)- the Creator ,Second , the Deities (Mmuo) which include: (a) Anyanwu- lord of life and light (b) Ala- the earth goddess mother of life and queen of morality (c) Amadioha- God's orderly and agent of instant justice, (d) Muo-Mmiri-the divinely appointed temptress, (e) Ahiajioku- lord of agriculture and (g) Agwu-nsi- lord of divination and healing. Third in the order of ranking is the spirit forces (arusi/alusi), fourth group is the ancestors (Ndichie), Fifth is the medicine (Ogwu). This research work will dwell much on the second itemization or categorization which is deity; with specific reference to the pledges and vows Agbaja people make to deities and its implications to the practitioners and the society. It is on this classification lies a clear background of head-word in this paper, that is the second category, notably the belief in 'Deities' and its interested in the relationship between the traditional Agbaja people and the Deities especially on the pledges and promises they make to them (Deities), implications to the traditional practitioners and the society. Therefore, this work covers only Ezeagu and Udi areas of Enugu State who are traditionally known as the “ Agbaja people”.

Definition of concepts

It is always vital to define concepts in any academic work to foster understanding of the academic idea of the work or topic. The major concepts that call for definition are:

Pledge: summers (2001:1080) defines it as “a firm promise or agreement, especially one made publicly or officially 2: old fashioned; to promise never to drink alcohol, for religious or moral reasons”.

Vow: summers (2001:1602) defines as “a serious promise: marriage vows/vow to do something, a vow to avenge..., take/make a vow...” from the ongoing, it is comprehensible that pledge and vow are synonymous. The two words principally contain “a firm or serious promise”. But pledge is officially or publicly made, while vow could be private. Okafor (2001:27) wrote that the act of vowing and fulfilling what was vowed was also an aspect of worship in the Old Testament time. Once a vow was made, it was binding on the bearer. Vows of Hamah, Jehthah, Attah of Igala etc are examples.

Deity: Summers (2001:357) calls “Deity” God and “deity” a god or GODDESS. Hornby (1974:230) defines deity as: divine quality or nature; a state of being a god or goddess. Onuoha in Madu (1997:6) refers to Deities (Mmuo) or those gods as Ambassadors or Deans. Deities are those gods or spirit beings that are believed by Africans/Igbo to be assisting the supreme God-Chukwu or Chineke. They include: the earth goddess- Ala, Anyanwu etc,

African/Traditional (Religion)/Practitioner.

Religion itself according to Onyeidu (2001:14) has no accepted correct definition, when he wrote that:

“as early as 1912, James Leuba had collected some forty-eight definitions of Religion. But none of these was accepted as the correct definition of the term religion. While many of the definitions are arbitrary, others are subjective”

Karl Max in Onyeidu (2001:16) defined religion as “an opium that converted economic oppression into false consciousness of we-being. St Thomas Aquinas in Okwueze (2003:3) defined religion as the virtue, which prompts man to render to God the worship and reverence that is his by right. Religion is man’s awareness and concern for the divinely absolute control of the universe.

Awolalu (1976:275) in Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:4-5) defines African Traditional Religion as:

.... The indigenous religion of the Africans. It is a religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans. It is not fossil a religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is “written” everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the people’s myths and folklores, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings. It is a religion whose historical founder is either known or worshiped.

Africans, the Igbo precisely still adhere to this religion today. It was transmitted to Africans/Igbo by their fore-fathers unwritten in a documental form. In a similar way, Ekwunife (1990:1) in Ugwu and Ugwueye defines this religion as:

Those institutionalized beliefs and practices of indigenous religion of African which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears mainly through oral tradition (myths and folklores and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings and names), sacred specialist and persons, sacred space and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each

generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical process of continuity and discontinuities.

When we refer to this African religion as being traditional, it means those morals, customs, values, beliefs etc. that have existed for a very long time among a given group of African people. Therefore, the traditional practitioners are those people that ardently adhere to those long existed laid down morals, customs, values, beliefs, etc, of Africa.

Society: Okwueze (2003:7) defined society as “those who live together within a geographical location.... Nigerian society...”. A society is a group of people that live within a geographical location with an organized way of life, for security, sustainable livelihood, peaceful co-existence etc.

Agbaja people's perception of Pledges and Vows to Deities

Like other traditional African (Igbo) people, the belief in deities among the traditional Agbaja people is derived from the natural instinct of the demarcation between the natural world and supernatural world. It was in this vein that Idowu (1962:129) wrote to say that:

There existed a sharply defined spiritual line of demarcation which could not be crossed except with due and adequate precautions.... That there was an irresistible urge in man to have contact with the supernatural world because of man's dependent upon it.

This idea of dependency was what Udeh a Chief priest to a shrine at Aniaka of Umuaji Aguobu Owa in Ezeagu said that they are nothing on their own, for this reason whatever happens to them is believed to have come from God. Therefore, to be on the safe side, they approach Him through lesser spirits or divinities with precautions. Moreover, he continued by explaining that both in times of dangers and out of danger they make pledges and vows to deities for safety and appreciation respectively. Enuwa adds that even when they know that much is not happening either of good or bad, pledges or vows are made to deities within reach for long life and prosperity to both individual practitioners and the society. Aniebonan (a.k.a Agudike na-eri ebune), maintains that it is through the act of pledging and vowing, and the attempt to fulfill them or plead for unfulfilled ones to be fulfilled later, that contact opportunities with God through deities are created. Ozo Johnson also pointed out that no ardent Ezeagu or Agbaja traditional practitioner can live without pledges and vows, if he does, it means he has retired from his faith since he can no longer worship the gods as he lives. From the foregoing, it is palpable that the traditional Agbaja people perceive pledges and vows as the standard, precautionary, unique, and accepted measures of keeping or flourishing their relationship and contact with God. In this respect, they are very curious about the spirit world and conscious of what they pledge or vow to deities.

Reasons for Pledges and Vows to Deities

This section examines those factors that are responsible for the traditional practitioners to make pledges and vows to deities. They include here; the search for happiness and frenzy, to quell calamity/frustration and in cases of offence/pollution (e.g. abortion), quest for continuous progress in life, for security/protection, and to show a sense of appreciation/acknowledgement. To these we turn:

Search for happiness and frenzy

The Agbaja man engages in religious pledges and vows to enable him be psychologically and spiritually balanced. God is the sole arbiter and controller of man and his activities here on earth. Based on this, he continuously makes pledges and vows because of this problem that assails his feelings. Okafor (2001:2) explained that “man’s attempt to throw away the idea of religion has not only robbed him of the true happiness that he searches for...” To this end, the act of pledging and vowing, and fulfilling or pleading for unfulfilled pledges or vows affords the practitioners the opportunity to be in regular and constant communion with the deities. He thus derives spiritual satisfaction from this religious exercise. Within this same factor is frenzy. During worship, according to Okeke from Obinofia who said that happiness caused by feeding, drinking, singing and dancing during worship can make a worshiper pledge or vow to the deities. Mbiti (1975:67) agrees with this when he stated that “when there is a communal act of worship in which prayers are offered.... This is often an occasion for singing, and dancing”. Achebe (1958:14) also concurs with it by stressing on the effect or power of songs as Okonkwo mourns the death of Okudu who sang war songs for Umuofia people. Achebe’s statement, it is understandable that one can pledge or vow to be dedicated in defending his country home at wars and otherwise. Again, during worship, as the priest officiates, he would warn against embarking on or committing some notable evils as against the will of the gods, a worshipper who is there present might out of showing remorse for his wrong-doing, confess, pledge or vow to offer or bring sacrifice to calm the anger of the gods. Calamity/Frustration and offence/ pollution (eg. Abortion):

Among the factors that prompt the people to pledge or vow deities include calamity or frustration. When calamity falls an individual or the Agbaja society, and they become frustrated, it could force them to make pledges to deity or deities concerned. Ezeilo (Nono) confirmed this when she said that sometimes ago in the late 1960s, there occurred a drought from October to April. This distress made almost the whole women of Umumba clan in Ezeagu, to go to Ajali deity- a marine deity installed in the clan and other parts of Ezeagu with the name of Ajali river and pledged that if it gives them water (rainfall), they will sacrifice to it heavily from their harvest. They then fetched clay pots of water known as “mbara mmiri” in Ezeagu dialect to an earth deity called “Ihuagba” and filled all the big clay pots at its shrine, by late afternoon before night that same day, rain fell in cats and dogs. After a very rich harvest that year, they offered sacrifices to Ajali-marine deity and other deities of the community for assisting “Ajali” deity in restoring rain. In fact, natural problems or frustration can make the people make pledges or vows.

Offence or pollution

Offence or pollution of the land can make a votary pledge a deity something material or behavioral. For example, Ndu from Awha narrated a story in discussing this point; that there was a man called Donatus Ejiuche (a.k.a Omenjo Ejiuche meaning eveil-doer)- a notorious robber, who stole goat at Awha, and was caught, and was beaten to a deity’s shrine known as “Chiagriga” in Awha clan. He was forced to vow to the deity that he will never steal in his life again. He (Donatus) vowed not to steal again. After some years of taking the vow he still fell back and stole. Few days after the crime, he joined his kinship members to traditional (marriage) wine-carrying at Umana-Ndiagu. On their way coming back home, they had a ghastly motor accident in which he was the only person that died, his wife was seriously injured with other passengers. This incident took place in January 2008. Sacrifices not meant

for human consumption were made with reference to the episode. Also, when the land was to have been felt polluted that is, when a lot of atrocities or evils are committed, deities are pledged to fight or trace those culprits, if the deities get hold of them mainly by inflicting unknown diseases etc, the traditional practitioners fulfill their pledges because they believe the deities have done the assignment entrusted to them. Those involved in the evil (s) or their relation (s) consequent to this are bound go to the deity/deities to lay sacrifices of purification. Awolalu (1976:279) in Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:90) regarded such offence as abominable and polluting which demands a propitiatory sacrifice to appease or placate the gods. A common case in respect to this among Agbaja people-Ezeagu/Udi as observed by Anieke from Ebe town in Udi L.G.A. is abortion. He said that some girls/women remove the foetus in order to prematurely terminate a pregnancy, some expose the being to death outside the womb. Ekwutosi (2008:45) called it "induced Abortion "such abortion and similar cases are seen as pollution of the land.

Quest for continuous progress in life

People wonder why those who are already rich and are considered more comfortable than others pledge to the deities. Thinking in that direction is wrong because in the study of economics we are taught to understand that human wants are insatiable which means that man always wants more wealth than he has. We are Oliver Twist who always asks for some more. People pledge to deities in order to grow more progressively and prosperously. If a man had barn of a hundred stands of yams, he pledges to deities a particular offer if the barn increases probably to a hundred and fifty stands of yam.

Security/protection

The people also pledge and vow for security and protection in their undertakings. For instance, it was very common among traditional Agbaja people in the past that whenever they go for hired labour which was popularly called Olu Ochanja, they make so many pledges and vows to many deities of the land for safe trip. They prayed not to be harmed by enemies, or maltreated by their hosts, and vowed never to trouble their hosts. Presently, among the traditionalist when their children embark on difficult projects like building, marriage etc, they go on their own, pledging and vowing to deities that if they live to see the projects to its finish, they will offer the gods things like ram, cow etc. in some cases when such pledges or vows are not consummated either as a result of death or otherwise, the children could bear the burden of fulfilling the pledge made to deities by the parents.

Appreciation/Acknowledgement

The last reason that prompts the traditional practitioners of Agbaja people to pledge or vow to deities is to show appreciation or acknowledgement to the gods. Some pledge to sacrifice to the deities for long and healthy lives given to them. Some pledge to sacrifice to the gods in appreciation for level of success attained. In cases where a couple is in dire need of a child (say male child) they also go extra mile to make pledges and vows to deities of fecundity in the land. When such desires are consummated they normally do not hesitate in fulfilling their pledges. In some cases such children are dedicated to the deities as sacred officials in the shrine.

Sources of revelation that prompted making pledges and vows to deities

There are some sources that encourage making of pledges and vows to deities. The sources include: divination, insinuation and free-will, dreams/vision, and customs.

Divination: Awolalu and Dopamu (1979:147) define divination as “the practice of attempting to foretell the future, reveal the unknown, or find out the wish of a divinity or spirit”. In their definition, it is clear that through divination the traditionalists know the wants of the spirits or divinities. If he is not yet ready to do it, he is persuaded to pledge to the spirit (deities). In agreement to the above, Magesa (1998:199) writes that “ in both Ifa divination with sixteen cowries, the central objective is to determine what kind of sacrifice the client must make to get rid of an affliction or to obtain favor”. On the same note, Mbiti (1969:177) adds that “diviners are the agents of unveiling mysteries of human life”. For more details, the words of Asiegbu (2006:26) are relevant as he says, that “the dibia foretells the future.... He prescribes remedies against unforeseen... he determines the victim for sacrifice”. In an internet extract, Ilogu points out like others quoted on the issue of divination, that occasional private worship is done when ordered by a diviner as a result of his being consulted by the individual concerned. It is clear from all these explanation that divination is one of the basic sources through which the people know about the hidden facts of what to do the deities. If they cannot afford it at that point in time they will decide to pledge to do it on a later date.

Dreams/vision: on the source of revelation in African Traditional Religion, Onyeidu(2001:29) stated thus:

In religion which have written scripture of their own (like African Traditional Religion), sources of revelation depend on ‘nature’ and people’s relationship to it..Such source includes...oracles and diviners, priests, dreams....

Among the list of the sources of revelation in Onyeidu’s work, which this paper’s interest lies on are; oracles, diviners, and dreams, the traditionalist receives information about the needs of the deities which can give rise to pledges and vows to the deities.

Insinuation and free-will: sometimes according to Ajuluchukwu, one can anticipate or envisage an unpleasant phenomenon, and decide to pledge to the gods some sacrifices if such is curbed.

Custom: the customs of the land, which contains some measures of controlling and maintaining social order, serve as a source of revelation. If certain crimes are committed, certain measures are in the customs on how to appease the deities. The customs package rituals and sacrifices for certain mistakes, offences etc made by any adherent or votary. Take for instance, if a man lies in opposite direction with his wife on a bed, it is regarded as a serious abomination (known as “din a nwunye ina isi”). To the holistic traditional Agbaja people when such mistake is made, it would give rise to pledging or vowing to deities.

Implication of pledges and vows to the traditional practitioners and the society

This part attempts to look at the implications of pledges and vows to deities to the Agbaja traditional practitioners and the society from the following viewpoints: (1) religio-cultural viewpoint which includes; type of burial, reincarnation (inouwa), priesthood, moral consciousness, maintenance of cultural norms, customs and ethics of the society, (2) economic

cum health implications which include; land waste, poverty, over-population, hunger, type of harvest, chronic mental disorder-agwu, other diseases; deformity, good health, and death, and (3) socio-political implications that include 'osu'-caste and its equivalent, procreation of people of good and questionable characters, title-taking, and festivals and its transmutation.

Religio-cultural implications: the religio-cultural implications here refer to those aspects of the implications of pledges and vows to deities that have religious and cultural undertone. They are;

Type of burial: it is agreeable that in the act of making pledges or vows, the type of burial to be given to a deceased could be influenced. When it is revealed that a deity killed a person for not fulfilling a pledge or vow he made, such corpse according to Chikelu is buried in a nearby wilderness. But decades ago, such corpses were thrown away in the evil forests where wild animals devoured them. In like manner, a deity might kill one's parent(s) or relative(s) for an offence committed, and the deity may continue to disturb the living member(s) of the family. To quell the gods anger, the family if not yet ready to cleanse the land from the offence its member committed, can pledge to offer the ascribed sacrifice later. If fails to fulfill the pledge on a given date, and any member of the family happened to be killed by the deity, the body is also treated the same way. The family and the society suffer sacrificial and social stress.

Reincarnation-"ilo-uwa": reincarnation in this work is a religio-cultural implication. Ekwunife (1999:24) buttresses the idea of reincarnation-"ilo uwa", thus

"despite the uncompressing position of dissidents against traditional belief in "ino uwa" ("reincarnation); despite the negative attitudes towards the phenomenon as well as its rejection by Christians in this culture area, the spectre keeps staring in the faces and psyches of christians and other dissidents. Names like Namdi(my father is alive), Nnenna (my fathers mother)...Nnamani (my ancestral father)... keep tormenting the conscious minds of Christian bearers.

From Ekwunife's words we can see the reality of ino/ilo-uwa (reincarnation) in Igbo Traditional Religion Culture. Those people that are believed to be reincarnated by deities-ndi onu maa yola uwa (if I were to speak in Agbaja dialect) can answer any name, but some of them answer names like Ugwueke (hill Deity has created), Anieke (the earth goddess has created) Bonosi (Bonosi shrine has reincarnated) etc. Ezekwugo (1999:197) lists the names of their Yoruba counterparts as Iyatunde meaning mother that has come back and Babatunde meaning father has come again. Among the Agbaja people one who always make pledges to deities and fulfils them can be blessed by a deity by reincarnating any of his children for him. Children of this nature are known for their surprising features and destiny. They use their extra ordinary features believed to have been gotten from the gods to assist in the progress of the society, enemies do not normally get them, and most of them are talented and seasoned diviners, medicine men. Warriors etc. in reverse, some who always fail to fulfill their pledges to deities can receive reincarnation of their children from deities but in most cases such children are disfigured or deformed. These types of children are not valuable in the society.

Priesthood: this also forms part of the religio-cultural implications in the discussion here. In a situation whereby a worshipper keeps to what he pledges to a deity, during divination on having some disturbances or confusing signs in life, can be found to be chosen by a deity to be its priest or chief priest sometimes at the death of officiating chief priest, or to assist a chief priest. Again, some people in appreciation to favour believed to have got from a deity, give their child out to the source of a god as a priest. These priests are the custodians of morality, and ethics, they help in general progress of the society. They can pronounce curse on individuals or group.

Moral consciousness, maintenance of norms, customs, and ethics of the society: these are integrals of religio-cultural implications. To avoid doing what might cause a practitioner or indigene to make an expensive or exorbitant pledge or vow to any deity which will be hard for him to fulfill, and to make sure nothing stains his relationship with the gods, the traditionalist remains morally careful. Individuals are refined and sanity prevails in the society. Ugwu (2004:289) affirms the idea in writing that “...a man without conscience who goes about committing atrocities and stepping on sacred toes only to leave the stage full of regrets and shame”. To same agreement, Okwueze (2003:68) pinpoints that “... in most traditional societies in Africa, the earth-goddess is understood to be the custodian of a community’s morality”. The traditional society gives concern to morality and failure could attract expensive pledges or vows, because of it, the people are morally alert. Avoid doing what might cause one to make an expensive pledge or vow to any deity which will be hard for him to fulfill, that could adversely affect his generation or children, and to make sure nothing stains his relationship with the gods which he sustains with pledges, the traditionalists are conscious of the moral and cultural tenets of the society. Individuals are by this refined and sanity prevails in the society. Individuals are by this refined and sanity prevails in the conscience who goes about committing atrocities and stepping in sacred toes only to leave the stage full of regrets and shame”. To same agreement Okwueze (2003:68) pinpoints that “...in most traditional societies in Africa, the earth goddess is understood to be the custodian of a community’s morality. The traditional society gives concern to morality and failure could attract expensive pledges or vows, because of it, the people are morally alert.

Economic cum Health Implications:

This part dwells on the implications that touch the economic and health spheres of the traditional practitioner and the society. They are:

Land waste: in some areas in Agbaja, lands lie wastage as a result of death of a whole family or a person that owned the lands, owing to the fact or belief that the death was caused by a deity because a pledge or vow was not honoured. The hands are left to be used by nobody for people dodge to intrude into a battle land of blind spiritual sword. Closest relations to the affected family might on the instruction of the chief priests of the concerned deity begin to pay for the pledges, after a very long period of time when the ritual processes would be accomplished; they will take possession of the lands. But there can be a situation where by the closest relatives may be reluctant about eh matter, and the deities will continue with their killings amidst their closest relatives. Consequently, a catastrophe of economic degradation is created both to the individuals affected directly, and the society.

Poverty: this is an economic cum health implication. It is said that a healthy nation is a wealthy nation because when people suffer in order to fulfill a pledge to a deity/deities, at the same time, the lands are not resourceful; the affected will become upset and unhealthy psychologically. Ergo, they face poverty. Even though Akukwe (1996:5) quoting Jn 12:8 claims that the poor we always have among us, does not mean an afflicted poverty but natural poverty or destined poverty rather. Igbo and Anugwom (2002:101) see poverty as a typical social problem in Nigeria. The outlook of this type of poverty to the individual victims and the communities where they live is always boring.

Over-population: over population can emanate from inability of people to fulfill their pledges or vows. For example, when a person is insolvent to his debt, on reporting him to a deity by the lender, he can go to the deity and pledge to pay the debt on a given time. If he fails to keep to his words, should be killed by the deity. In a situation like this, his relations carry on the fulfillment of the pledge to a reasonable stage, but cannot finish it up; they are bound to give their daughter to the deity. These girls because of their excess sexual freedom bear to the deity and the chief priest children to any number of their strength. The result is increase in population of the inhabitants of the chief priest's residence. Living example is the population of the children of Ugwu-Ezema deity of Aguobu Owa in Ezeagu L.G.A. This causes a lot of hunger and managerial problems to the priestly family and the society.

Type of harvest: it is believed among the traditionalists that the type of harvest to be gotten in a year is influenced by the people's ability or inability to fulfill their pledges or vows to deities. They believe that if they fulfilled their pledges and vows to the deities, there will be rich harvest, but if they did not fulfill them, the opposite will happen.

Chronic mental disorder known as agwu: Agwu can hold someone in a family because the parent(s) vowed to the Agwu deity that they will be treating a particular type of diseases, when the person chosen by the deity refuses to be treating those illnesses, he is always seriously and mentally affected. Even when the person treats the diseases, he still behaves strange. The society loses trust on the Agwu – medicine men (ndi dibia) in terms of their appointment and/or business with any member of the society for they do not keep to their words because of the influence of the Agwu in their psyche. Adibe (2006:45), Onunwa (2005:103), and Anigbo (2005:140) are of the opinion that Agwu could be used in putting human body in order by the dibia. Honestly speaking, notwithstanding the strange life style some agwu/dibia people live, they promote and provide good health condition for all and sundry.

Diseases: diseases are also caused by inability to consummate a pledge or vow, in some cases, the result could be death. Fulfillment of pledges and vows gives the people hope of restoration and enhancement of good health and economic growth and development.

Socio-Political Implications

This section examines the social and political implications of pledges and vows to deities among the traditional practitioners and the society. The implications are:

Osu-caste and its equivalent – (Umuarusi): In some places among the Agbaja; osu caste and /umuarusi exist because pledges or vows made could no longer be fulfilled. Mr. Ajulu from

Ezeagu ascertained that inability to pay a debt pledged before a deity in most occasions results into death. In order to stop incessant death that could be caused by the deity, the relation(s) to the victim or deceased run(s) an Igbaishi/Mgbaishi sacrificial rites. The Igbaishi/Mgbaishi rites are serially done as follows: Ishishi/Oshishi-ite, Ogwugwaka, Ogbugbuehi (now replaced as Ogbugbuebune), ogugo aro bun'agu, ohuhoakwukwo, and mkpochi onunu. After the Ogbugbuehi/Ogbugbuebune which is a compulsory rite or stage, if they cannot afford to pay the debt the demised pldged, they give out their daughter to the deity, the girl becomes the deity's wife, bears children, and the deity owns the children. The writer puts it here as "osu" equivalent because many areas in Agbaja know such people as "Umuarusi" e.g. Aneke-oghu is an earth goddess that owns such people at Ebe in Udi, Ugwu-Ezema - Hill-Deity and its chief priest own them in Ezeagu. Ngwo people in Udi according to Chris Ezech know them as "osu". Dike in an internet extract lists the names the way different Igbo people call them; according to him, the Nzam in Onitsha call them Adu-Ebo, in Nsukka they are called Oruma, Awgu call them Umuani or Ohualusi, etc. in Ngwo, the society clearly holds it that a freeborn does not marry an "osu". In Ezeagu, it is allowed, but many do not like marrying them. Okwueze and Kanu (2003:81) lament that the "osu" caste system has remained a perennial problem in Igboland". In Ezeagu they (Umuarusi) are free to participate in social activities like in politics etc, by none has succeeded in winning or gaining elective (political) position that demands wider community's vote because people cooperate with them in sham or pretence. This dislike affects them and the society because better leaders can be found among them.

Procreation of people of good and questionable characters: Due to the excess sexual freedom given to wives of deities, men of different characters and status troop into the residence of "Arusi"/deity's wives copulating them, and they procreate, giving birth to people of good and questionable characters. The good ones help themselves and foster peace and tranquility in the society; for example, in Aguobu Owa, one of the Umuari is about to be ordained a clergy (precisely a Roman Catholic priest). Nevertheless, the bad ones in their midst disturb and torment the Agbaja society.

Title-taking: Title taking is a socio-political implication of pledges and vows to a deity in Agbaja land which is often automatic to a professional priest. Many communities have it that once an individual is selected or dedicated as a professional traditional priest, he is bound to be initiated into the Ozo title taking institution. It is a prerequisite that before a person officiates as a professional traditional priest, he must reach at least a title stage known as Iwa-Alo Ozo. So, when a child is dedicated by his parent(s) to be a priest, automatically he must be a title-holder in the Ozo institution if he must serve. This class of title-holders plays a very good political role within their group and the community as a whole. They are believed to give the society right directions of administration and are regarded as the mouths of the gods.

Festivals and their transmutation: This is the last but not the least in list of socio-political implications of pledges and vows to deities in Agbaja. Some festivals are held in Agbaja in honour of the Eke town in Udi, Akani festival of Owa clan in Ezeagu, Ihuji/iriji etc. These festivals are introduced to honour some pledges and vows made to the gods of the lands for their aids to humanity. The society for the preservation of Ekwulumili cultural Heritage in an internet material writes that:

“...has vowed to restore our cultural festivals to their enviable glory since they form the backbone of who we are as a people... though Iri Ji festival is now secularized, but the sacred part of this celebration is the Uhiejioku, or Ifejioku or Ahajioku, which is homage to the yam Deity for a bumper or promise of a bumper harvest”.

This relates to us that festivals can be introduced in response to a vow or pledge. The society's vows quoted herein should help us understand how and why modern age transmogrifies festivals. Festivals to the best of the writer's knowledge are occasions that create opportunities for exchange of mythical, proverbial, traditional, and cultural ideas. Customary cases are at the same time treated. In the opposite, they are occasions and avenues which enemies use to hunt their prey. People enjoy their favourite dishes once again; see relations, and friends they had not seen for a very long time.

Recommendations (the way forward)

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby made below:

1. The traditional religious practitioners should do well in maintaining morality in the society. This will minimize conflicts and promote peace in the society.
2. People sometimes pledge or vow out of intoxication caused by the influence of alcohol for instance. Room should therefore be created to sit whoever pledges or vows to a deity down by the priest for clarifications to curb any disastrous consequences that might befall the individual(s) concerned and the society if not fulfilled.
3. Despite the shortcomings of traditional religion, those goodies should be appreciated by the modern people, irrespective of its (modernity's) commitments to foreign religions.
4. The out case system of “osu”, “umuarusi” etc should totally be abolished just like the abolition of slave trade and slavery for people ought to exercise their fundamental human rights.
5. Sound education needs to be provided to all to avoid misconception of other's perceptions on issues.
6. People should not pledge and vow out of fear or without knowing the future implication of their action.
7. Machineries like the mass media, the law courts etc have to sit-up and look into matters relating to religion for a better way forward so that traditional religion will operate freely with other religions in the continent.
8. They should look at the mindsets, capacities etc of the hoi polloi before agreeing on the charges on a broken pledge or vow

Conclusion

Looking at the traditional religious man from a distance makes the lay sacred. Some outcomes of his religious practices appear disastrous, but he must not be feared, knowing full well the poor preservation of his knowledge or wisdom which can accumulate problems of forgetting, and misapplications. Hands need to be on deck by having close contact with him so that only the good applications supersede. To be candid, without traditional religion of the Agbaja people that is flourished, and fortified with pledges and vows, the society will be bombarded with a lot of messy stories. We need an environment where the lion and the goat can eat together in a plate. The late Chief Oliver de Couque in one of his albums sang: “Live and let live” – “Ibiri ka m biri”. We shall tolerate and adjust with others for the betterment of all;

hence the traditionalists ought to open their minds to adjust to cogent criticisms against them, to attain an enviable socio-political, religious, economic, and educational development. There is hope for positive advancement in future if a atmosphere is provided or obtained.

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