

**LINGUO-CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OUTDOORING CEREMONY OF THE NURSING MOTHER TO INTERCOMMUNAL RELATIONSHIP IN AWGU TOWN**

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**Abstract**

*Outdooring describing certain ceremonial observances in Igbo land encapsulates "Iru Mgbede" (for married and marriageable nubile), "Ozo" title investiture, intra-and inter. communal wrestling contest (/gba Mgba), and ceremony of termination of confining a nursing mother for four weeks (or eight market days in Igboland). Outdooring of a nursing mother is a ceremony marking the end of the confinement of the nursing mother after twenty-eight days of fattening to regain lost flesh and energy. It is a children's celebration as children are formally invited to accompany the nursing mother to a nearby stream to mark her purification, reintegration and rejuvenation. The significance of this ceremony to the nursing mother, the community and the language or the people are highlighted. This paper purposes a save-our-culture awareness in order to extract highly edifying traditions being abandoned in print to tell visitors and scholars that we were once persons in their roots.*

**Introduction**

Many communal fiestas in Awgu are occasions for expressing concern for one another. Yam, oracular, marriage, funeral and outdooring ceremonies are seasonal shows for people to converge at an arena, a market place or a compound to identify with existing traditions handed down by generations of motley migrated forebears. The Igbo sayings occasionally compressed to personal names as "*Onye aghana nwa nne ya*" (Let no one 'eject or neglect your relations), "*Igwe bu ike*" (Unity is strength), "*Nwanne bu ike*" (Brotherliness or neighbourliness is strength), "*Nwanne amaka*" (Brotherliness is good) find their reenactments tangibly displayed. People, especially closely related ones, struggle to outclass one another in registering identity with those they come by and by providing alcoholic beverages to less privileged ones or contemporaries. Neighbours having long standing quarrel might inadvertently run into themselves, and, possessing no avenue to melt into thin air, would exchange, though reluctantly, hand-shake greetings and monosyllabic pleasantries. This, in most cases, marks a beginning for hardened heart softening and a possible commencement of peace initiation.

No boundary is erected to exclude certain passers-by as visitors. Hosts welcome uninvited as well as the invited ones. No cases of discrimination, intrusion or snubbing are overtly advanced to exclude gatecrashers. Avoiding any compound during any of these celebrations is suggestive of ostracism or excommunication for abomination wreaked on the custom of the town. Brotherly keeping, brotherly recognition, brotherly identification, brotherly sustenance are natural features infused in these ceremonies and nurtured from

generation to generation. Outdooring is no exception.

### **What is Outdooring?**

According to Frederick (2004: 880), outdoor, adjectivally, means "of or relating to the outdoors" or "performed outdoors"; adverbially, outdoors means "outside a building: in or into the open air"; outdoors, nominally, is "a place or location away from the confines of a building" (880). Derived from these explanations, outdooring means performing something outside the confines of a building. That something being performed is a ceremony marking the exposition to people and social activities of a newly born child, An expectant mother delivered of a baby is confined to her house for twenty-eight days to purify, reinvigorate and normalize herself. This period of the "quarantine" and rejuvenation fattening grants the mother and child the task of continuous feeding to make the mother look buxom and the baby fatty. Anything to the contrary, that is making the nursing mother attend the farm, fetch water, go to market, fetch firewood or cook, is highly preposterous as it is against tradition, ridiculed by neighbours as unbecoming of the norm, resisted by in-laws as a punishment to their daughters and if not firmly checked, detrimental to the lusciousness expected of the bodies of mother and child. However, the end of these restrictions actually marks the beginning of the ceremony of outdooring. .

The four week restriction of a nursing mother to ensure her rejuvenation, purification and fattening as terminated by fanfare displayed by children, wives of the community and tacit encouragement of the male folk is however not the only ceremony performed outdoors. "Iru Mgbede" called "Iru Eni" in Awgu town I the ceremony of confining marriageable and married nubile to their houses to fatten for six months, according to Ogbalu (1979:32) and Orji (1999: 106), terminates its course at an arena or a particular market day at a chosen square. Similarly, 'Ozo' title taking (Ogbalu 1999: 116) and (Ubesie 1978: 118) as well as intra and inter communal wrestling contests (Ogbalu, 1979: 71) is also performed outdoors.

This paper nonetheless concentrates on nursing mothers restriction observed through restraint from domestic chores participation and by termination ceremony of readmission and repossession of initially lost duties. In addition, relevance of this ceremony to the nursing mother, the community and the contribution of language to sustenance of this dying custom are touched upon.

### **Pre-Readiness for Outdooring**

Fattening of the mother and her child is uppermost during the restriction period preceding outdooring. The mother is lionized on sumptuous dishes, exclusive delicacies, undiluted palmwine to induce breast milk production and flow. The mother sleeps when necessary, feeds her baby and herself and attends to visitors who will dash in to exchange pleasantries, crack jokes or share gossips as their currency enlivens the psyche and makes round the village. In this condition she receives the company of five different people who identify, by degrees, their relationships with the mother and the newcomer.

The first is the happy husband whose devotion is unequalled. He fishes out any monetary reserve for this readiness and lavishes it upon his wife, baby, friends and well wishers. The attendant merriment is commensurate with the choice of a newcomer (male or female). The concerned husband leaves for farm or to inspect his traps. Any game caught is considered goodluck and will be used for a choice dish for the wife. Endearing sobriquets will be exchanged from time to time to elicit the joy of the wife "for purchasing what the husband has deligated her to buy" that is the baby. In this bosom love, cases of unexpected

conception of a new baby 'always result.

The second companion' is the mother-in-law. Many mother-in-laws move houses whenever their daughters have new babies. In Awgu Town, a wife's mother gathers condiments for soup and stew, and adequate cassava pulp and few yams that may see her through in taking care of her daughter during the restriction period. She takes care of cooking, fetches water and firewood where no grow-up children are around, buys at the market, washes utensils and sweeps the house. She ensures that her daughter and her daughter's baby are fattened' to 'avoid sneering utterances concocted to spread her weakness, carelessness and pennilessness as a mother-in-law.

The third company is those described as communal solicitude. This group is recognized as those with filial relations, friendly relations and relationship seekers. The people involved are anxious for the comfort, health and happiness of the nursing mother. Some bring along with them for the comfort of the nursing mother such raw or cooked food .resents as a large dish of yam porridge, sufficient quantity of pounded foo-foo or cassava pulp, dried meat and or fish, steaming pot of soup and assorted baby soaps, pomades, and clothes. These presents, in the majority of the cases, are unwritten debt. This is because if he presenter is still conceiving children, the recipient of these presents will reciprocate this gesture when the donor puts to bed afterwards.

The fourth group will be tagged endless visitors. These range from dose-by neighbours who are always concerned about the welfare of the mother and her child, passersby who will come in to inquire after their welfare, loafers who will make their abode temporarily at the compound and help themselves in any comes tables going around to a lumber of children who will be flocking to the compound as their new playground or whose mothers will bring them around for the nursing mother to take care of them while they are away to the farm or the market. This group however unacceptable makes the compound exciting, lively and boredom free.

The fifth group is called the dusk visitors. This comprises all the women of the hamlet. They converge at the compound of the nursing mother to dance, sing and praise the Almighty God for the gift of the new baby. One of the songs they sing and dance is translated thus:

Chi na enye nwa	God Who gives a child
Gi ekema k'uwa	Don't allow the world
Koo m onu nwa	To abuse me because of a child
Ka a ghara iju m	So that I shall not be sneeringly asked:
o lee ebe nwa m ahu no?	"Where's that child of yours?"

One of the women will step into the circle of the women: the soloist will sing and the others will chorus the last line to the accompaniment of their claps and the beat of the instruments. Strong drinks (gin, schnapps, etc) and soft drinks are usually provided for entertainment.

### **The Outdooring Ceremony**

The ceremony is certainly child rents ceremony. It marks the end of the restriction of mother and child. Children from the. hamlets and villages are invited to the ceremony four days before. These children gather at the compound at the appointed time of the day (12.00 noon to 1.00 p.m). And when the celebrating mother is ready, they accompany her to a

stream as they chant certain songs handed down in the past, an unknown time. These songs are rendered in Awgu dialect of Igbo. Three of the songs translated thus;

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|--------------------------|---|--|
| 1.                       | Unu akwavo<br>Layi alaitawa oo<br>Iyaeee<br>Eeeeee<br>Iyaeee<br>Unu akwavo<br>layi alamite oo | You do not cry, ,<br>We are returning<br>ya e e e<br>Eeeeee<br>Iya eee<br>You, do not cry<br>We are already close by |
| 2.                       | Ololu ibe jila ndu<br>Kpogam lavuvo uzoo<br>lyaiya e e e<br>Eeee                              | You who swallowed a sliced yam unmasticated<br>You thought I was; blind<br>lyaiya e e e<br>Eeee                      |
| 3.                       | A Nka ooA Nka oo  | Nka (anama) ... Nka ...  |
| Ooo                      | Ooo   |  |
| A Nkanwonyino oo         | Nka the daughter of Onyino  |  |
| Oo                       | Oo  |  |
| Dufu nne wu obodo        | Accompany your mother to the arena  |  |
| Ooo                      | Ooo   |  |
| Dufu nna wu obodo        | Accompany your father to the arena  |  |
| Oo                       | Oo  |  |
| Ochiri ji lambo a bia oo | A bowl of Cooked yam is brought   |  |
| Oo                       | Oo  |  |
| Och iri ede lambo abia   | A bowl of cooked Cocoyam is brought   |  |
| Oo                       | Oo  |  |
| Ooo oo                   | Ooooo   |  |

At the stream, the mother may protect her nakedness in outgrown shrubs, or a booth of palm leaves and little sticks will be improvised to shed her from prying eyes. In any of these, she takes her bath. After the bath, she rubs fragrant pomade over her body and dresses herself in new clothes bought by her husband. She then collects little water for bathing her baby. The children who will have all plunged themselves in the stream, for their own bath after some water collected for the nursing mothers bath will now brush streaming droplets of water off their bodies, put on their clothes and happily accompany the woman home.

At home, they will form two groups of males and females. Cooked rice, yam, pounded cassava and in some cases sliced cassava are served to the children. They eat, sing and dance to the excitement of onlookers. If a male child is born, the boys will stage a mini wrestling match; if a female, the girls will do the same.

### **Significance of Outdoor Ceremony to the Nursing Mother**

The period preceding outdoor ceremony is a period of purification for the mother. Fluids of water and blood still ooze from the mother. Certain herbs and seeds are mixed with food,

prepared to hasten dryness. The completion of this dryness is the Washing of her body at the streamside.

It is also a period of reintegration to all domestic chores barred from her, She can touch raw food, cook it, fetch water and firewood. These really are not taboos as present development shows, but the woman is considered delicate and should be handled with care to avoid stress and possible ill health.

Outdooring is a period of mother rejuvenation. For twenty-eight days, the mother keeps on replenishing lost blood, energy, weight and sunken eyes and hollow cheeks. sleeping and waking; bathing and eating at will are sufficient therapy to regain vigour and make a mother once again bubble with life.

This ceremony as well creates a mother consciousness. Certain household chores, instead handling, business handling are abandoned during the period preceding outdooring. A mother, now strong and reintegrated, knows that the water in a potsherd is for dog, and she will now apply herself to her normal job. Nevertheless, the time spent at any socio-economic activity is always short as the care of the baby is still her priority until the baby is weaned.

In addition, outdooring is a reminder of mother's acquiescence to husband's overtures. A husband going about for one month without a channel of letting off sexual steam" will surely make many men lustful. Outdooring reminds husbands that their wives are "pure" bodily and strong enough to admit them. However, in a hurry to start cultivating i r fertile farms the inviting farms are unexpectedly fertilized and the process for preparing for another outdooring sets off again.

### **To the Community**

Outdooring signals communal unity. Unity manifests in togetherness and neighbourliness. Children from different homesteads converging, on, and accompanying a mother to a stream suggests absence of division. This is a veritable feature of social survival.

Outdooring suggests communal Joy and happiness. Happiness and joy accompany the birth of a baby. Any birth suggests "Arna echina", "Obodo echina" "Obi echina", Arnefuna", "Ikemefuna". These names have one meaning in common. The household should not suffer extinction, So, whenever a baby is born,' a household is sustained from extinction.

Outdooring is suggestive of communal peace, Feud in a community will not grant freedom to helpless and innocent' children to traverse their homes to another possible tile one: parents will object to that; children will be warned against it; no one will even lay bare their doors to admit, outsiders, Nonetheless, outdooring shows that glory is to God on high and peace on earth to men of goodwill. Suffer little children to come to me, according to us Christi for to such belong the Kingdom of Heaven; is a clear aphorism. encapsulating outdooring, Welcome a little child and you welcome peace, and in so doing, you beget yours if you have not had any.

Outdooring suggests that a child is a communal child. The number of visiting groups to the home of a new baby shows that a baby is not individually owned. This knowledge makes the Igbo in general give such names as "Nwaoha" (Nworah,Adaora)-A child of the community (of the people). Inviting children to outdooring ceremony is driving this meaning home as all the children of the people of the hamlets (villages) converge to tell the world they its children.

Outdooring assures communal security of children. Suspicion of witchcraft, kidnapping and poisoning is non-existent.. Children honour outdooring invitation, accompany nursing mothers joyously to and fro the stream, sing excitedly, dance lightheartedly and eat innocently, unmindful of any danger.

Outdooring cement communal friendship. Really, children in a compound are children of friends of such a compound. Asaying in Awgu says "Enyi nwata bu enyi nne ya na nna ya" A child's friend is a friend of his mother and father. Absenting one's child to this ceremony is putting a question on the possibility of continuous friendship between families. Friendship denotes love, caring, concern, protection, and actually proving that a friend in need is a friend indeed. Outdooring is suggesting that a friend is in need of the children of other family friends, and these families' honouring of this invitation is presenting themselves as friends indeed since a collection of trees (friends) makes a forest (a communal entity).

Outdooring is communal trust maintained. Children of a community are entrusted to the care of a family for few hours to be entertained. Who can entertain children selflessly and debtlessly but God. Yet, this is what takes place at Awgu, No family organizing outdooring has ever developed cold feet since it knows that children are little gods (angels) whose joyful handling and hosting would herald blessings, check evil attacks and attract healthy living.

### **Linguistic Significance**

Language is a vehicle of culture. Language encodes cultural, norms and idiosyncrasies which are passed on by past generations. The extermination of a community of speakers robs the world of a veritable locale of a language which has sustained that community and of a medium of knowledge of this speech community. Modernism is fast knocking, to comatose many languages in Nigeria, Awgu dialect inclusive. Rejecting this dialect is rejecting the tradition ferried. And so, the gradual dying away of outdooring and its nuances,

The language significance is noted in the heartrending songs spread through innocent hearts and mouths. Song Number One is lullaby like soothing very young ones, too weak to come to the stream, to sleep or calming them down as those strong enough to go to stream are already near home. Song 2 lampoons greed: people who crave for lion's share of what belongs to a group are satirized, Song 3 celebrates recognition and identity: it invites the persona, called "Nka", to accompany her parents to a feast at a known arena where bowls of cooked yam and cocoyam would be eaten.

In capturing these songs, all the word classes are present as the translated English versions show, There are phrases, clauses and sentences. These words, and groups capture the ideas and the contexts of these songs. The death of Awgu dialect may make it difficult to remember these songs. As can be seen, the dialect appears not to have any structural relationship with the Igbo language, Nevertheless, this paper strives to tell the world that the writers still remember though incoherently these songs' and have striven to match them on a context in which they are used even though this aspect of culture is at the verge of extinction as few' or no one is interested in its existence.

Linguistic significance too manifests in the literariness of the language of the songs, All the songs mentioned are vocatively patterned: God is addressed in "Chi na-enye nwa" (God, the giver of a child); in Song One, the children at home are addressed (unu akwavo ... - you, don't cry again.); Song Two addresses a nameless person with the subject clause O lolu lbe ji... You, who swallowed a big sliced yam ... ); Song Three addresses a particular person called "Nka". Forms of nouns and pronouns are used as vocative in literary genres. ,.

This style of language use makes a written or an oral text conversational or personal, come alive, endearing and interesting.

Again, repetition or refrain or chorus makes a text suffused with aesthetic colour: "Olee ebe nwa m ahu no?" "Where's that child of mine?" is repeated in the song of appeal to God; ideophonic or onomatopoeic words or letters used as sounds run through Songs 1, 2, 3 as refrains or choruses. It is language that represents these sounds before musicalness is infused into them as rendered.

Language similarly peoples any text with characters or personas. Actual rendering of these songs in their contextual locale may not involve the use of language to represent human and material parts of the songs in all situations. What is observed is strings of sounds being sung as captured by language, but excluding the mention of sources of these sounds, instruments giving the sounds, their sonority and tangible comestibles and drinks conducive to incentive inducement of the songster and singers. But as the songs are collected and published the words become institutionalized, that is, permanent. Now, apart from the words in print, language is used to represent those people who render those songs: the word children represents those invited to outdoor ceremony; the word women stands for those wives of the villages or hamlets; the words rice, pounded cassava, strong and soft beverages, soup, condiments represent material comestibles brought into the context.

#### Conclusion

Language is the vehicle for encoding and transmitting cultural norms and meanings to successive generations. The death of a language robs a speech community of a veritable medium of conveying its thought, world values and togetherness. Painstaking venture to arrest language death is fundamental. The underlying purpose of this paper is to inspire further investigation into dying traditions, extract such comatose traditions, publish and disseminate them to acquaint people with the edifying culture in decline.

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Practiced norms as observed and participated in by the writers In Awgu, Awgu Local Government Area, Enugu State. .

Personal Interview with Reginald Okolie Chukwugwaa, a 75 year-old farmer, 16 July, 2012.

#### Note:

#### About Awgu

Awgu town is in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State. It is a border town: it is bounded on the East by Ishiagu in Ebonyi State, and on the South by Lokpa in Abia State.