Foregrounding In Conspiracy Of Silence

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Abstract
Conspiracy of Silence is Chukwuemeka Ike’s novel that chronicles aspects of Igbo traditions as practised in parts of Igboland. To achieve this, Ike employs several linguistic means, prominent among which is syntagmatic foregrounding. Foregrounding, as we use it here, is semantically a prominence-related phenomenon, a means of linguistic highlighting. The density of lexical, syntactic and semantic foregrounding, both in the context of the traditions and in the interplay of personal experiences of the characters, provides the indices for determining the message structure of Conspiracy of Silence. Exploring this is the thrust of this paper.

Introduction
Conspiracy of Silence is a reasoned documentation of, and a sad comment on, certain objectionable traditions prevalent within the author’s area of Igboland —Enugu, Awka, Ndiagu, Umunwanguma, Onitsha and Aro-Ndizuogu. The plot of the story takes off with Nwanneka (who has been pining away for her fatherlessness and her mother’s refusal to disclose who her father is) and her friend, Gozie, approaching Femi Ayo to do a novel on Nwanneka’s life, using her unpleasant experience to draw public attention to the problems of fatherless children. ’A novel woven around her fatherless life could serve as a mirror of the trauma some traditions inflict on innocent young people….’ (11). Ayo, having accepted the deal, sets his machinery in motion for the gathering of material —from all and sundry, from Nwanneka’s friends and relations, from newspaper responses, from traditional ceremonies and from all manner of second-hand informants. Gozie’s assessment of the situation leaves nothing unsaid.

I am alarmed, sir, at the rate at which the number of fatherless children is growing. Unless something
happens before long, fifty to sixty per cent of the children in any village may be “fatherless”. The Implications of this for the future of the Igbo as a people are frightening…. (18)

So, with the idea of an impending novel by Ayo, Chukwuemeka Ike pools together, the flood of information gathered on the ’many fatherless children in Igbo society… subjected to varying degrees of psychological problems’ (18). The entire package (of the story) is brought home to the reader through the author’s good sense of foregrounding: lexical, syntactic and semantic.

The Concept of Foregrounding
Foregrounding is an all-embracing concept which can be employed at all levels of language, be it phonological, lexical, syntactic or semantic. It is a phenomenon that makes something prominent in a way. It was first used by Paul Garvin in the 1960s. Even as this technique is possible at all levels of language, scholars see it in two broad categories, namely, repetition (parallelism) and deviation. The former can be equated to syntagmatic foregrounding, while the latter, paradigmatic. Syntagmatic foregrounding points to unexpected regularity of lexical, syntactic, or semantic features with the artistic aim of drawing attention to the highlighted features. Deviation as another aspect of foregrounding, involves deliberate violations or twisting of linguistic norms, be it grammatical or semantic; the stylistic purpose being to project or make prominent some features as against the rest of the other features of the text, which are regarded as backgrounded. David Crystal (2008) refers to foregrounding as the ’relative prominence in discourse, often involving deviance from a linguistic norm; the analogy is of a figure seen against a background (and the rest of the text is often referred to as backgrounding). The deviant or prominent feature is said to have been foregrounded.’ Paul Simpson (51) says that “foregrounding refers to a form of textual patterning which is
motivated specifically for literary-aesthetic purposes. Capable of working at any level of language, foregrounding typically involves a stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from a linguistic norm or, alternatively, where an aspect of the text is brought to the fore through repetition or parallelism. That means that foregrounding comes in two main guises: foregrounding as ’deviation from a norm’ and foregrounding as ’more of the same’….” In Conspiracy of Silence, there is a preponderance of certain lexical items whose semantic intensity is of paramount importance to the explication of the text.

The Traditions as Invaluable Ingredients of the Story

The text is an exposition of the controversial traditions of Igbo people that have to do with marriage and paternity rites, inheritance and continuity of family lineage. To understand the text more, one has to be acquainted with the said traditions, which for the purpose of clarity, have been abstracted as follows.

i. An impotent husband could consent to his wife’s ’discreetly’ getting children from other men of her choice. This, of course, is kept secret. One of such stories in the Vanguard, as quoted by the author, has it that:

’… Their so-called father was impotent. She had married him nevertheless because she loved him intensely, and believed that God could change everything for the better. He too loved her deeply and when the facts stared them in the face five years after their marriage, he had consented that she could discreetly get children from other men of her choice’ (20).

ii. At the demise of a man, his wife could be allowed by members of the family to stay in the family and bear
children for him (the dead husband). Such children belong to the dead husband and they bear his name as their father. Gozie’s case (21) and the case of ‘the children’s factory’ at Ndiagu are examples. Ayo wonders whether the incidence is on the increase.

Ugo thought so, particularly as a result of schoolgirl pregnancies. He cited one of the fatherless children’s factories at Ndiagu, founded by a woman whose husband died before she could bear him a child. The woman stayed on in her late husband’s compound to make children of her own. Soon, a non-indigene of the town, acknowledged as a common criminal, made a daughter with her. Before the daughter could tell her right from her left, she had become pregnant without knowing which boy was responsible.

With encouragement from her mother, she made two daughters and a son. The two daughters grew up to join the production line (128).

iii. If a pregnant teenager discloses who is responsible, her people would prevail on the man’s family to undertake the traditional marriage rites, so that when the child is born, it becomes his own. That is, if the family of the man is acceptable to them. If the girl refuses to disclose the man, or the man is unacceptable to the family, the child becomes a child of the mother’s father, and bears their name, even if the man comes forward to undertake the traditional marriage rites. The following excerpt, which is Mazi Obioha’s contribution in a conversation involving him, his wife and Ayo, exemplifies the above tradition.

‘Okay, let me answer you,’ Mazi Obioha responded. ’If my sister-in-law had named the father of the
child, two courses of action would have been open to the family. One would have been to establish contact with the man’s family. If it was a family acceptable to them, they would have prevailed on the man’s family to go through the traditional ceremonies for taking a wife after the girl had given birth to the baby. That way, she would become his wife and the child would become his. If the girl refuses to disclose the man’s identity, or if it is a man unacceptable to her family, the child will be treated to all intents and purposes as a child of the mother’s father and bear his name. Even if the child’s biological father comes forward to claim the child, he would not be allowed to do so because he did not pay the traditional bride price on the child’s mother. The second would be to absorb the child as a member of the family and give him the family name.

iv. A father could go through marriage rites on behalf of his son, and after paying the bride price, send the bride to his son wherever he is. Where the son rejects the bride, she is kept in the family, and a trusted family member is secretly arranged ‘to make babies’ with her for the real husband. The children belong to the man for whom the bride was married, and none of them would be allowed to call the arranged family member father just because he fathered them. It is the owner of the wife that society recognizes as their father, even though he is not their biological father. A good example is Chìjioke Madu’s fatherlessness, which he contrives as the story of his friend’s fatherlessness and guilefully presents it so to Ayo.

v. Any offspring of a relationship between a man and a
woman on whom he did not pay any bride price is automatically fatherless; bride price implies that the man can claim paternity (68).

vi. Tradition forbids the parents of a married woman from accepting bride price from another man until they first pay back to the previous husband the bride price they had earlier received from him (68); otherwise, any child born thereof belongs to the former husband.

‘Another option,’ Ugo went on, ‘was to prevail on the woman to name whose child she was carrying, and get the man to accept responsibility for the baby. This, however, runs counter to Igbo tradition. A man who did not pay bride price on a woman has no claim over any child he and the woman make. As if to further compound matters, tradition forbids the parents of a married woman from accepting bride price from another man until they first pay back to the previous husband the bride price they had earlier received from him’ (68 —69).

vii. In cases of established infidelity/adultery, the woman is punished in customary law by imprisonment, and isa ifi ritual, and the child from such a relationship remains the woman’s husband’s.

‘I’ve heard of two traditional rulers from two different towns who caught their wives redhanded and sent them to the native authority prison for adultery. After serving the prison terms, the women were subjected to the isa ifi ritual before their husbands took them back. The ritual required each woman to admit publicly that she committed adultery, and to name the man with whom she did it’ (100).

viii. There is an absence of the concept of illegitimate child in Igbo culture. Ugo explains to Ayo.

‘You know what I mean, sir! The incidence of
fatherless children is on the increase because, in my humble opinion, Igbo society attaches undue importance to children. A child is seen as a priceless asset, always welcome no matter from what source. The Igbo man is happy to litter his compound with children, regardless of whether or not he can take care of them. We have a saying at Ndiagu that the ruler or the great man derives his prestige from the number of children he fathers. How he fathers them is of little consequence.

The absence of the concept of an illegitimate male child in Igbo culture is a reflection of the importance attached to the child. Until Igbo society reviews this attitude to children, until it appreciates that the existence of a male issue is not the only way to perpetuate the father’s name or the family name, until a man is made to accept responsibility for any child he fathers, and until the Church puts its foot down on all acts of sexual immorality, fatherless children may be with us for a long time’ (130).

ix. Igbo culture does not confer rights of inheritance on a child who (somehow) is made to answer the name of his biological father, when by tradition he is not. Also society does not confer paternity rights on the person who fathered such a child (68 —69).

x. In traditional Igbo society, a will is an oral declaration in the presence of witnesses, and by the same tradition, the man’s next-of-kin is empowered to modify the declaration after the man’s death. Ugo explains:

'Igbo tradition makes provision for a man to spell out in his lifetime how his property is to be apportioned when he dies…. He would normally make such a declaration orally in the presence of witnesses. But the same tradition also empowers
his next-of-kin to modify his declaration after death!’ (71 —72)

xi. A hitherto fatherless child who is told who his father is could legitimize his identity by performing the traditional ceremonies, so that his mother acquires the status of his biological father’s wife. We refer to the case of the newspaper features editor who was ’born fatherless’, found himself “a fatherless child, …suffered the pangs of fatherlessness, and …decided to set things right instead of grumbling perpetually!’(77).The Akukalia case is another example (116).

xii. A woman could marry a wife. Tradition permits this. The Umuada woman is a typical case (44 —48). She is one of the wives of a deceased polygamist. She had no son, but the other wife had. She wanted a son to guarantee a permanent place for herself in her husband’s compound. She commissioned three males within the family circle to make babies with the bride. It is kept top-secret. Such children are brought up to call the woman’s husband (deceased as in the Umuada case) their father. Ugochukwu refers to this as ’fatherlessness by design’ (46).

Lexical, Syntactic and Semantic Foregrounding in the Text

These traditions, as they exist in Igboland, are fraught with loopholes. The inherent flaws, ambiguities and anomalies of the traditions are a result of semantic mix-ups whereby some lexical items are forced by tradition to acquire meanings contrary to what they originally denote. As a result, characters and performances in the novel become despicable and unnatural. People exploit such semantic conflicts to commit adultery, fornication, incest, covetousness and all manner of aberrant behaviour. Community leaders, the government and the Church appear to keep quiet in
the face of a pandemic that challenges the role of the family, the role of government, and the role of the Church as moral and spiritual builders of the society. Ayo’s jottings reveal 'The conspiracy of silence by government, the Church, community leaders… (172)’. The case of the deceased ’woman husband’ at Umuada is one of the many such cases of a woman marrying a fellow woman who then is let loose as a sexual prey to men just because the ’woman husband’ wants to get children, especially males, to ensure a continuity of her line when she dies. At the funeral of the deceased Umuada woman ’husband’, Ayo notes that ’The Bishop himself presided over the service …implying that his lordship is fully aware of the bogus marriage (meaning) that the church approves of a marriage between a woman and another woman’ (48). The procession of the clergy, ’led by the diocesan bishop’ is made up of one bishop, two archdeacons, fifteen priests, five lay readers —two of them female, and six church teachers (44). There is also a cited case of a parish priest who fathered a child by a married woman in his congregation, and Ayo wonders why he is left to continue administering the sacrament to people. Gozie’s consternation is registered in her proverbial comment:

I, too, am baffled by the role of the Church in these matters… I don’t know whether it is the reluctance of the pot to call the kettle black that results in a conspiracy of silence on the part of the Church’ (102).

The complicity, duplicity and hypocrisy of the Church is further analysed by Chijioke Madu, and corroborated by Gozie and Ayo. The writer narrates:

He began with the issue of polygamy. Christianity proclaims one man, one wife. Igbo culture permits a man to marry as many wives as he wishes, provided he performs the requisite traditional ceremonies on each of them. The Church, he claimed, enforces its
teaching halfheartedly. A man who marries more than one wife is barred from the sacrament; when he dies, some refuse to conduct a funeral service for him in the church but may do so in his compound. In the books, unless he drives the extra wife or wives away, his sin will never be forgiven. Yet every year the Church accepts his princely donations and special thank-offerings…(102).

Then comes the issue of women bearing children without being married,’ Chijioke went on. ’The Church simply turns a blind eye at them, resulting in the proliferation of fatherless children. Unmarried women bear children at will, to the knowledge of every member of the congregation, including the priest. Their children are baptized without the officiating minister asking questions about their natural fathers. Single mothers receive the sacrament; they are admitted to the Women’s Guild….What inspiration is a woman who produced three children to three different men in adulterous relationships expected to give to young unmarried girls?’…. ’This attitude to single women making babies outside marriage,’ Ayo suggested, ’probably explains why the Church shuts its eyes to the adultery being committed by second, third, fourth and so on, wives of polygamists….The issue of fatherless babies cannot be tackled in isolation. The Church is in a unique position to reduce its incidence, through massive public enlightenment programmes and through the strict application of its sanctions, not on a selective basis, but on all parties involved. Would you agree?’(103-104).

Chijioke and Gozie agree completely. .

However, this appears a mere dream, for, the germ (of fatherlessness) has permeated the ecclesiastical realm and contaminated the Ministers of God, putting the sanctity of
Christianity in jeopardy. Nobody seems to be saying anything as the phenomenon of fatherlessness becomes so rampant in the society that the next person speaking with you on the street could be your child. This posture is exemplified by the fact that Ayo’s sources of data, unknown to him, are secretly fatherless: the newspaper features editor was ’born fatherless’; Barrister Ejindu is also fatherless; Architect Chijioke Madu and his wife are both fatherless, but told lies to each other about their paternity, that is, they used some clever subterfuge on each other to mask their fatherlessness so as to get married, and subsequently mask the truth from the children. The Obiohas, Nwanneka’s foster parents, do not know her father; the person who knows (her mother) keeps silent about it. Thus, from the individual level to the larger society, the tendency is to remain unanimously silent to those ’evil’ traditions that breed fatherlessness, and people go ahead to ’create a credible lie, and stick to it consistently’ (104). When there is an agreement among a group of people to remain quiet about some state of affairs, which is not supposed to be kept secret, because its disclosure could prove damaging, especially to them or their associates, we have a situation of conspiracy of silence. The title of the text is *Conspiracy of Silence*; the theme is pandemic sexual promiscuity and adultery in every facet of Igbo-land resulting in fatherlessness and its psychosocial effects, with the culture apparently endorsing it, the Church keeping guilty silence, and by half-hearted application of sanctions, gives a tacit approval to the overt and covert immoralities.

The effect of fatherlessness on the child can be traumatic. Ayo observes that their stories may be different, ’but they share one thing in common: despondency. Each suffers bouts of depression’ (127). Other psychosocial effects include a constant demure carriage, frigidity, and self-denigration. And for Nwanneka, hers assumes a paranoid level; for Uzoamaka, it is near-suicide.
Uzoamaka explains, ‘All these things make me look like stockfish all the time…’ (121). In one of their discussions, Ayo counsels Nwanneka:

’If you don’t mind, I would like to make a few more frank comments…. I have observed that something appears to be running you down…. I’ve noticed that you don’t wear trinkets. I’ve noticed that you’ve never let go even the faintest smile in my sessions with you, including this session. Your dress is always formal, which is all right when you are at work, but I was surprised to find you in a formal trouser suit at home.

Do not allow one accident over which you had no control ruin your life. Forge a new life. Play games. Socialise….

And, please, when any eligible young man comes around, or, if there is one hovering around the corner, don’t send him away’ (95 —96).

The linguistic scaffold through which the author conveys the entire story is syntagmatic foregrounding. Leech and Short, discussing ’Style, Text and Frequency’ say:

’…we may define deviance as a purely statistical notion: as the difference between the normal frequency of a feature, and its frequency in the text or corpus. Prominence is the related psychological notion… “the general name for the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, whereby some linguistic feature stands out in some way…..” We assume that prominence of various degrees and kinds provides the basis for a reader’s subjective recognition of style…. We shall associate literary relevance with the Prague School notion of foregrounding, or artistically motivated deviation…. Foregrounding may be qualitative, i.e. deviation from the language code itself —a breach of some rule or convention of English —or it may simply be quantitative i.e. deviance from some expected frequency…’ (48-49). Wales also
says:

… within the literary text itself linguistic features can themselves be foregrounded or ‘highlighted’, ’made prominent’, for specific effects, against the (subordinated) background of the rest of the text, the new ’norm’ in competition with the non-literary norm. It is this ’internal’ foregrounding that critical attention is largely focused.

Foregrounding is achieved by a variety of means, which are largely grouped under two main types: deviation and repetition, or paradigmatic and syntagmatic foregrounding respectively. Deviations are violations of linguistic norms: grammatical or semantic, for example. Unusual metaphors or similes (the traditional tropes) produce unexpected conjunctions of meaning, forcing fresh realizations in the reader. …Repetitive patterns (of sound or syntax, for example) are superimposed on the background of the expectations of normal usage, and so strike the reader’s attention as unusual (182).

There is a remarkable level of lexical foregrounding both in the context of the traditions (afore-mentioned) and in the interplay of the personal experiences of the characters and others as they are narrated to Ayo. First, the writer, Ike, wants special attention focused on the two young women in his story: Nwanneka and Gozie, the former “to play the role of a guinea pig”, (18) the latter to play the catalyst —corroborating the role of the former. Nwanneka is the first to come on board, and Ike adorns her with captivating descriptive words: ’A slim, young woman in a beige jacket and black skirt suit, with a pretty, expressionless face….’ Around to see Ayo, ’she settled into the lounge chair, screened off both knees with her skirt, and discreetly positioned them away from Ayo’s eyes’ (1). And as she speaks to him, ’She guided her knees from right to left of Ayo’s eyes….’ (2). She is a remarkable beauty, no doubt, and this stuns Ayo so much that talking to his
colleague, Ugo, he describes his visitor as ’A charming young professional woman’ (13). And within a space of five pages, this description, without any lexical or semantic alteration, is repeated eight times. This syntactic order is retained unaltered for the first four times, thereafter, a minor syntactic (without semantic) alteration occurs, and we have, ’the young, charming professional woman’. We are aware that there are rules for the correct order of adjectives, and that an adjective of age should precede a participle adjective. The syntactic rearrangement in the first four does not imply semantic alteration; it is characteristic of the flexibility of the spoken, informal style of language. Ike is aware (and wants his reader to note it) that the pretty Nwanneka is conscious of how she sits, to cordon off parts of her body she does not want the prying eyes of a man to see. This is an immediate demonstration of a woman whose psyche is conditioned by bitter experiences, who has come for business and not for any indecent seductive exposure whatsoever. When the discussion with Ayo is over, Ike concludes the chapter with ’She withdrew without a smile’ (7). During her second visit to Ayo in his office, the narrator says, ’Ayo had hoped for a smile of appreciation, but Nwanneka’s face remained as placid as ever’ (52).

Immediately Gozie arrives in the story, Ike says that ’her figure reminded Ayo of Dr Nwanneka Ofoma, the young, charming professional woman’. She is slightly bigger without being overweight.…’ (Hers is a) ’captivating outfit… and the warm disarming smile she beamed at him as they shook hands, suggested the addition of two extra adjectives, elegant and vivacious,’ to those used to describe Nneka: ’Young, charming, elegant, vivacious, professional woman!’ (17)

What Ike is doing at this early stage with these two women is purely artistically motivated foregrounding, the quantitative foregrounding referred to by Leech and Short, which K. Wales puts forward as syntagmatic foregrounding. With this, he focuses attention on the two women, one to play the role of a guinea pig to
unearth the problems of fatherlessness throughout the novel, while Gozie is to play the catalyst—a corroborative role which exposes another way of tackling the problem of fatherlessness. This she does by creating a credible lie, and sticking to it consistently, by which subterfuge, the fatherless can get married, and live out their lives normally without the usual bouts of despondency, depression and other psychosocial outcome of fatherlessness.

When the novel is read against the backdrop of these Igbo traditions, the semantic interpretations of certain lexical items quickly reveal the underlying ethical muddle plaguing the Igboland of Ike’s novel. We see such words/lexical items as *biological father* (26, 41), *natural father* (20, 67), *natural kids* (30), *de facto father* (56, 83, 84), *foster parents* (10), *wife* (45) *widow* (45), ’*woman husband’* (twice 132), *bastard* (22, 75, 94), *incest* and *fatherless*. *Biological father* and *natural father* mean the same: real father, not adoptive. Natural kids are the real kids, not adopted. *De facto father* implies the father figure, playing the role of a father, but not legally the father. Foster parents, like de facto ones, play the role of parents —taking care of the child without becoming the legal parents. Etymologically, *wife* means a woman to whom a man is married; *husband* being a man that a woman is married to; *widow* presupposes demise of a husband, that is, a woman whose husband is dead and who has not remarried. But ’*woman husband’* is a complex coinage the import of which does not exist in the semantics of English. A bastard is a child born of parents not married to each other. The concept of *fatherless* implies without a father, either because he is dead, or does not live with the children. An illegitimate child is the child born to parents who are not married; this implies that the child is a bastard. But in the society in question, there is an absence of the concept of illegitimate child (130), which tends to cancel out the concept of *bastard* in that society. So, one wonders why Gozie thinks that ’she cringes like a bastard’ (22), or the features editor referred to as a bastard by his biological father’s wife (75), or why
Nwanneka keeps referring to herself as a bastard while talking with Ayo. By fashioning out ancillary and contradictory meanings for *wife*, *husband* and *widow*, such that a woman can become 'husband' to her fellow woman; can become wife to her fellow woman; can become a widow at the demise of her woman 'husband', Ike’s Igbo society perpetuates the cultural aberration that results in fatherlessness.

These foregrounded lexical items, like essential arteries in human anatomy, provide a sense of direction for the plot and theme of the novel, and the semantic conflict between the denotation and the society-imposed connotation of some of them is responsible for the general mood of despondency and depression which those regarded as fatherless have in common. The syntagmatic foregrounding Wales is talking about has to do with the prominence achieved by the repetition of these lexical items. These lexical items are of uppermost importance in realizing the message of the novel. The frequency ratio of the lexical item, *fatherless*, for instance, in a novel of just 189 pages, underscores the importance the author attaches to that phenomenon. The adjective, *fatherless*, the noun *fatherlessness* and their phrasal forms (*no father, without a father*) occur no less than 160 times in the novel, thus foregrounding or highlighting them as the hub around which the title and the message rotate.

From the traditions, we see that there is the 'unnatural' practice of a woman (married or unmarried) marrying her fellow woman; thus, there exists a nomenclature as 'woman husband', which implies the existence of 'wife of a wife'. But the tradition has no place for a man marrying a man, so there is nothing like 'husband of a husband', for that is purposeless as far as the culture of the author’s Igboland is concerned.

And curiously enough, nothing in the tradition reflects the problem of incest. One may argue that semantically, *incest* can be subsumed under *adultery* or *fornication*, which has a place in the
tradition, but the truth is that *incest* has a shade of meaning much
darker than *adultery* or *fornication*. It does appear that hitherto the
practice of incest is almost non-existent in the society; hence, it is
taken for granted in the mores of the people as gathered by the
author. This is deliberate. The structure of the novel survives on a
robust technique of suspense. The suspense hinges on the single
word, *incest*. To sustain the suspense to the end, the writer
deliberately avoids the word, even in his weaving of the traditions
of the people. But immediately the suspense is broken by the
'carrier' of the suspense (Mrs Ukamaka Okafo —Nwanneka’s
mother), the word rolls out 10 times within a space of eight pages,
and the story winds up. We note that it is Nwanneka that first used
the word in a hysterical outburst: ’Mummy, you are a beast! Oh
my God! You drugged Uncle Ik and went on to commit incest
with him! I feel like killing you (180)!’ We note also that her
mother never used the word, instead, she and the narrator
articulate the intensity of the offence with such words as
*abominable, horrible, (183) heinous, damnable, despicable, (185)
grievous* (186). With the revelation comes a serious interior
dialogue highlighting the level of anguish Nwanneka is plunged
into by her mother’s incestuous act. She finds herself wrangling
with an inner voice which argues with, criticizes and admonishes
her for every step she took to uncover the truth about her
paternity, from not letting sleeping dogs lie since the incidence of
fatherlessness is a common phenomenon in the society, to the
attempted suicide. Like a final verdict, the inner voice wakes her
to the stark realities ahead of her:

Talking about children, have you considered that
any child you bear will carry the incestuous
imprint for life, and so will any children born to
your children, and children born to your children’s
children, and so on down the line (187)?

And this inner voice verdict informs her final decision to flee to
London, become a missionary doctor, to minister to the medical needs of children in any Christian hospital or relief agency in any part of the developing world. And to minimize distractions, she decides to remain celibate and childless for the rest of her life.

Conclusion

*Conspiracy of Silence* deals with the objectionable traditions of Chukwuemeka Ike’s circle of Igboland. He does this story with a good sense of syntagmatic foregrounding. The semantic interpretations of selected lexical items used vis-à-vis their society-imposed meanings reveal the underlying ethical muddle plaguing Igboland. In the text also, Ike, just as he does in several of his novels, demonstrates a flair for neologicistic style with such obscure negative noun coinages as *familylessness, parentlessness, husbandlessness, wifelessness* and *moneylessness*. These are instances of lexical foregrounding. The relative statistical frequencies of certain key words, unusual phrases and neologisms are a guide to the understanding of the crux of the message.

We have also noted how the author craftily avoids the use of his final arsenal, the key lexical item, *incest*, until the end when the bitter truth is out. With this craft, he succeeds in sustaining the robust suspense upon which the story structure is built.

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