

# TABOOS AS A SOCIALIZATION, ACCULTURATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY AMONG THE BAYEI OF BOTSWANA

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## Abstract

This paper aims at documenting and analyzing the use of taboos as a strategy for socialization, acculturation and communication among members of the Bayei community in North Western Botswana. It is an assessment of how the Bayei use taboos as a socialization agent to communicate, to regulate behaviour, to teach and to impart cultural values. In addition, the paper attempts to deconstruct taboo meaning with an aim of demonstrating its utilitarian values and functions among the Bayei. The data for this paper was largely drawn from Seronga, Shakawe, Gumare and Maun in Botswana. It observes that the Bayei use taboos for guidance and protection in their daily socio-economic activities such as during fishing, hunting and in rites of passage. Preliminary investigations reveal that taboos have a practical value in nurturing, upbringing and the development of Bayei children. of particular interest is the fact that the taboos significantly contribute to the Bayei philosophy of life. Also of interest is the observation that taboos reflect and provide insights into Bayei spirituality and philosophy. Finally, the paper notes that among the Bayei, taboos are at the core of the social-economic survival, identity and continuity as a cultural group. The paper applies a discourse analysis theoretical framework to deconstruct taboo meanings.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, communication, culture, discourse analysis, socialization, taboos

## 1. Introduction

Taboos are prohibitions and restrictions found in almost all societies of the world. They are considered a very important part of most cultures cultural and religious practices. Their scrutiny, however, reveals that taboos are the foundation on which principles of communal engagement are based. In non-literate societies taboos are unwritten, oral or spoken social rules that restrain people from breaking expected social norms. Taboos are part of the dos and don'ts that guide behaviour and decorum in a community. Through their preservation by way of indigenous languages and customs, taboos help preserve harmony in society by erecting codes of conduct. They therefore regulate people's behaviour and caution against certain practices that are deemed dangerous within a cultural and linguistic group. The import of this observation is that taboos are usually disseminated and understood within the

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confines of indigenous expression and communication.

Indigenous languages not only give us our first language for communication but they also dictate the type of cultural practices we acquire and live by. Those practices may be manifested through the spoken and performed genres such as, among others; rituals, superstitions, religious beliefs and taboos. This is to say that our languages determine the kind of culture we are socialized into. Being acculturated gives us a sense of identity, of belonging and of shared values and norms within a linguistic group. Language and cultural communities share music, attire, foods, beliefs, stories, proverbs et cetera. In literate communities, cultures and traditions such as taboos are preserved and disseminated through both spoken and written forms. In fact, we can argue that the Ten Commandments in the Bible are a set of written taboos set out as rules to guide behaviour among ancient Israelites.

Taboos are acts that are forbidden or are to be avoided to the extent that referring to them is taboo in itself (Fromkin & Rodman, 1998: 279). This means that if a community forbids doing something, it is also anathema to talk about it. Fromkin and Rodman's assessment is problematic in that taboos are transmitted and disseminated through generations by word of mouth and may be technologically recorded for prosperity through writing or any other media. It is not uncommon to nowadays find taboos and other aspects of culture such as oral narratives, proverbs and riddles on the Internet.

Taboos are meant to caution against unacceptable behaviours and actions deemed to be dangerous to the lives of the people within any society. As an integral part of a people's cultural heritage and identity, taboos have been used for generations to teach, restrict, prohibit and to forbid certain behaviour and associations during specific times and periods. This is the reason why taboos are generally associated with certain rituals and rites within cultural groups. Taboos have also been responsible for defining who we are as members of specific communities. They partly define our understanding and perception of cosmos and world-view. As we tell and hear taboos that define who we are, they (taboos) become a part of our lives' philosophy and spirituality. They therefore exist and are part of most African cultures.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

The underpinning theory of this article is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is generally used to describe a collection of approaches that may be used to analyse different types of texts that range from oral (spoken) to written, sung or chanted; and anything in-between. The vitality of discourse analysis is such that it may be applied in as diverse textual materials such as audio and video records of folk and public speeches.

This paper is based on what Gee (2014: 08) describes as a descriptive approach of discourse analysis. It looks at the meaning of taboos as an 'integration of ways of saying (informing), doing (action) and being (identity) because as part of folklore, taboos communicate to members of a particular society so that the participants can act according to their directions. Taboos form part of the identity of those particular people and, therefore, discourse analysis is hereby harnessed so as to review the underlying structures that make up cultural knowledge. Discourse analysis offers a way of studying how knowledge is produced.

The knowledge that is produced in a community is normally passed on to younger generations through various methods of cultural reproduction, often resulting in transferring aspects of society such as norms, class or status, gender roles and integrity to upcoming generations. This transmission can be done through both informal and formal methods, such as through taboos, training, demonstrations and education.

According to Gee (2014), discourse analysis is a way in which we can engage and think more deeply about the meaning we give people's words so as to make ourselves better, more humane people and in turn also make the world better. This theoretical approach is relevant to this study as it seeks to investigate the connections between the Bayei tabooed expressions and their relevance in the upbringing of children and their day to day interactions. Discourse analysis argues that because histories and cultures condition and determine underlying structures in a community, they are susceptible to bias and misinterpretations.

To understand an object or text, therefore, it is necessary to study the object itself, the subject(s), and the systems of knowledge that produced both the object and the subject. In this paper we have analysed the taboos, their interpretation and efficacy in the socialization of the Bayei. The three variables are agents of cultural production and socialization. They are alluded to in this paper to explain why taboo meaning is, sometimes, gender-specific among the Bayei.

Meaning has a performative and practical dimension to the extent that it is renewed, updated or transformed through the generations. Consequently, meaning is not fixed through any objective or theoretical process but gets reviewed and changed over time. Meaning is also not a representation of an objective world as it morphs into various interpretations determined by the civilizations in any given stage in the development of a community.

Meaning becomes the disclosure of a world of meaning within which we make sense of life hence linguistic meanings are never complete but always exhibit ambiguity and contradiction. According to discourse analysis, a reader's response

creates meaning; hence, a text's meaning is never stable but is always changing and shifting meanings. This is why a specific taboo is enforced through a belief system which is supported and regulated by superstitions, rituals and beliefs. Viewed this way, taboos are linguistic codes that require subordinate elements such as superstitious beliefs and rituals to enforce. Such an approach demands the use of Derrida's (1976; 1978) deconstruction as a subordinate theory to complement discourse analysis.

### 2.1 *Deconstruction*

The other theoretical underpinning that complements discourse analysis in this article is deconstruction. Derrida (ibid) developed deconstruction as a technique for uncovering ambivalences and ambiguities that, in his view, permeate every text: often leading to multiple interpretations. To Derrida, it is almost impossible to arrive at a final and complete interpretation of any text. Derrida promotes deconstruction as a method of inserting additional or different meanings to a text. This view mirrors the discourse analysis principal that both spoken and written texts embrace social and cultural communicative perspectives and functions.

Agger (1991: 113) also seems to support Derrida's view when he argues that "...deconstructive reading prises open unavoidable gaps of meanings that readers fill with their own interpolative sense." Seen this way, reading and listening to texts becomes a vibrant activity rather than merely a passive reflection on an objective text with a singular and uncontested meaning. Agger (ibid) further states that readers contribute to giving sense and meaning to a text by "filling in the gaps and conflicts of meaning, even becoming writers, and hence challenging the hierarchy of writing over reading, cultural production over cultural reception", a standpoint that resonates with Barthes' (1967) essay, *The Death of the Author*.

Some of the taboos in this paper are interpreted, out of necessity, with the objective of understanding the value of language and symbolic usages through assuming that the taboos are composed, preserved, transmitted and owned communally with the express aim of communicating a community's values. Consequently, the taboo texts are interpreted as having been authored by the community rather than as being individual informants' creations. The taboos are, to that extent, socially and historically constituted texts whose meanings are culturally constructed to reflect the Bayei world-view. This is testimony to the fact that discourse analysis and deconstruction both reveal how language helps constitute reality through the dissemination of communal knowledge.

On the other hand, however, Foucault (1972) argues that systems of knowledge are never pure or devoid of stake but are always formed by power interpretations rather

than by objectivity. This proposition contradicts and contests the traditional model of objectivity which claims to represent or describe social reality. Foucault upholds the contrary view that language does not connect with a “truth” or “reality” outside of it, but that it is a structure or code which derives meaning from a connection with an outside world. In other words, if there is a reality, it may not have any bearing on our sense of “truth” at all (Foucault, 1972). This may explain why a taboo or superstition in one cultural group does not necessarily constitute a reality or a truth in another. This is to say that it becomes a ‘non-taboo’ within a different cultural setting.

The aim of discourse analysis juxtaposed with deconstruction is to analyse specific texts such as utterances and cultural practices in terms of specific cultural, linguistic, historical and communicative contexts as proposed by Weedon, 1987.

## 2.2 *Language*

Language is an important element in discourse analysis because it is through language that an individual makes sense and meaning of the world. It is also through language that socially specific meanings are constituted within language, not by those who utter the words, but rather its contextualization through social positioning. In other words, language is not mere words but a meaning-constituting system. An analysis of language (discourse or text) provides a starting point for understanding how social relations are conceived, how institutions are organized and how collective identity is established.

Further informed by Palmer’s (1990:3) assertion that “language is the stage on which consciousness makes historical entrance and politics is scripted”; this study maintains that language is a vital element in understanding the philosophical and ideological standpoints regarding the taboo philosophy of the Bayei, and indeed any African community. In the context of this paper, and as guided by Scott (1994), utterances regarding taboos possess highly connotative historical and contextual meanings. This study takes cognizance of taboos as a discourse that serves as a valid source of knowledge and operates from the paradigm that words can be a medium through which we can gain insights into the life-world of a cultural community. In the analysis, this article asks several questions regarding the taboo text. How and in what specific contexts, specific textual and social processes; has taboo meaning been manifested?

## 2.3 *Culture and socialization*

According to Hall & Jefferson (1976: 10-11), culture is the “peculiar and distinctive ‘way of life’ of a group or class, the meanings, values and ideas embodied in institutions, in social relations, in systems of beliefs, in mores and customs, in uses of objects and material life”.

The most common definition of culture is that it is “a way of life followed by a community or society” (Tanase, 1959: 18-19). It is the mode of life in respective social groups. Culture also includes a community’s practices such as the arts and methods of communication and representation that have relative autonomy from the economic, social, and political domains.

Hall (1976: 16) further observes that culture is neither genetically inherited nor can it exist on its own. Culture is comprised of similar characteristics such as tribe, language, traditions together with numerous shared experiences by members of a society. The shared experiences may include, but are not limited to taboos, rituals and superstitions. Hofstede (1980: 21-23) supports this view when he avers that culture is “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another” and that it is passed from generation to generation through a method termed socialization.

Socialization is a process of learning and training on how to behave in acceptable ways within any society. Similar views of culture have been promoted, with various Africanist perspectives by Okot P’Bitek, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Taban lo Liyong, among others; who uphold the notion that culture is a strong tool for the conscientization of the mind. In contrast to the perspective used in this analysis, the African identity envisaged in the Afrocentric definitions of culture as a factor for colonization and decolonization are beyond the scope of this brief exegesis of the Bayei taboos.

From the foregoing, culture is a complex concept and that no single definition of it has achieved consensus in literature. It is impossible to understand a culture without taking into account its language(s) because language plays an important role in creating the context of negotiation and in allowing negotiators to prepare for cross-cultural interactions. Nonverbal communication, such as movements, emotions, attitudes and feelings shown in different gestures and motions may be conveyed unintentionally by facial expressions, gestures, and body language for dramatic effect and histrionics (Okpewho, 1992: 46). This is the reason why some experts consider culture as the communication of information, ideas, beliefs, concept, symbols, and technical knowledge across the human population. Hofstede (ibid) conceptualizes cross-cultural communication in terms of the ‘cultural constant of cultural changes’ because culture is changing all the time and that each generation adds something of its own before socializing the next generation.

#### 2.4 *Culture and communication*

The use of the word ‘communication’ in defining culture suggests that culture is meant to be distributed either from one individual to another, from one family to

another or from one generation to another. For instance, Ferraro (1990:45) opines that communication can be divided into three categories: verbal, the use of words with specific meaning; paraverbal: the tone of the voice; and non-verbal communication. The language used in verbal communication by any group is not a universal means, but is, according to Hargie and Dickson (2004), deeply rooted in a particular culture.

On the other hand, Linton (1936: 14) suggests that the culture of any society consists of the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour which the members of that society have acquired through instruction or imitation; and which they share to a greater or lesser degree. This definition suggests that culture conveys elements of what people think, how people feel, and how people behave. It is further suggestive of the fact that culture is acquired and shared through communication and imitation. It is for this reason that culture can be acquired through diverse methods of socialization such as through indoctrination and reproduction.

In this paper, culture is understood as the totality of what groups of people think, how they behave, and what they produce. These human features are passed on to future generations as part of their common heritage. The cultural productions bind humans together and, at the same time, separate them into different communities and gender categories. Culture is therefore both a method of inclusion and exclusion.

### **3. Methodology and data collection**

The research was carried out among the Bayei in Seronga, Shakawe, Gumare and Maun as part of a Department of African Languages and Literature at the University of Botswana project. The researchers collected primary data from informants of different age groups and gender. The data was collected in the Setswana and Shiyeyi languages and was later transcribed and translated into English for analysis.

The paper adopts a qualitative research approach because it is mostly concerned with making sense and meaning out of the subject (taboo philosophy). It employed open-ended questionnaires and individual interviews in Setswana as the taboos used in the paper are in Setswana. Information in the field was always gathered from more than one informant so as to get representative and reliable data. The qualitative research paradigm was found to be relevant as the researchers sought to understand and interpret traditional practices that contribute to the moulding of a complete and responsible Motswana citizen, particularly a Moyei.

### **4. Analysis and discussion**

There are several actions and behaviours that are prohibited among the Bayei community which are conveyed as tabooed expressions. These expressions

are essentially passed from one generation to the other through oral means. The description used in relaying them depends mostly on speakers who try by all means to make them relevant and truthful to their environment. As a result of this, taboos may slightly vary from one locality or even from one family to another. This section discusses and analyses some selected Bayei taboos to show the values reflected in them and how they contribute to the socialization of their children. It focuses on taboos used in activities such as child rearing, hunting/ fishing and birth rites. Whenever necessary, the spiritual nature of the taboos is also investigated.

#### 4.1 *Taboos on child rearing and nurturing*

Like most other Botswana communities, Bayei believe the Setswana maxim *'lore le ojwa le sale metsi'* (a stick is best shaped while it is still moist/ soft). This literally means that children should be guided into rightful behaviour while they are at a tender age. The saying suggests that Bayei children should be nurtured to be responsible adults. The wisdom of the proverb indicates that it is disgraceful for the community and parents to raise an irresponsible child who cannot take care of him/herself in adulthood. Among other cultural and informal socialization methods, the Bayei use taboos to bring their children to nurture socially responsible adults. They understand that taboos can help children to lead an abundant and meaningful life and to become good members of their community. This is confirmed by Makgeng (2000) who highlights that taboos help to develop a child and shape their behaviour so that they become humble and conscious of their deeds. For instance, [(i) *when a girl-child gets her first menstruation, she is not supposed to pass men from the back/rear as it is believed they will get tuberculosis. (ii) A boy-child should not play with girls as he will develop breasts.*]

These taboos are directed to Bayei adolescents with the aim of guiding them as they approach puberty. Whereas the taboos cited above seem to focus on bodily hygiene, they also play on the children's psychological fears of suffering some consequences in case of any transgression.

The 'first menstruation' alluded to in the example above alerts the girl-child that she is now a mature woman who should avoid unnecessary contact with men least she acquires the deadly TB; a euphemism for pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs): which in today's world may include HIV/AIDS. The two taboos therefore serve as a caution that teaches pubescent girls to be wary of men who may lure them to premature sexual acts because a Moyei girl is raised to be a responsible woman who will be a wife and mother in adulthood. Several taboos directed to girls are meant to warn them against anti-societal behaviour such as indulging in sex before marriage. The taboos are also used to guard against unwanted and unplanned pregnancies. A pubescent girl is attractive, beautiful and mature for procreation.



The Bayei are a patriarchal society which ascribes different social roles and responsibilities to different sexes, hence the second taboo above which is directed at boys. Menstruation in most African cultures is portrayed as a form of uncleanness; hence it is taboo to have close contact with menstrual blood. Among the Bayei, menstruation is kept as a woman's secret hence they have a practice of secluding such girls from the public eye. When they are in seclusion, the girls are taught to take good care of their bodies. They are also cautioned against engaging in sexual intercourse which may lead to serious consequences. This is understandable in a society where modern methods of hygiene such as sanitary pads and tampons are unavailable. Moreover, menstruation is cumbersome and the girls and women require rest and hygienic conditions during its cycle. This is why women are prohibited from carrying out daily chores such as cooking, fetching water or firewood during their menses. Sex and menstruation are considered taboo topics in most African cultures. Yet another Bayei taboo advises men to throw hot charcoal at a girl who is on her menstrual periods. Such a taboo indicates that the Bayei caution their men to keep away from women because they are considered unclean during their menses.

Fire is symbolically used here as a cleanser. Whether the men actually throw hot charcoal at women or not is immaterial. The important thing is that the women kept their biological function as private as possible to avoid the shameful act of having hot coal thrown at them. The taboo therefore serves both as a deterrent to unbecoming behaviour and promotes social decorum.

On the other hand, boys are prepared to be brave and healthy men who can protect their families and communities. They are also expected to care for the needs of their families or face ridicule. Boys are socialised to be good farmers, fishermen and hunters as the lives of the Bayei are dependent on their immediate environment for survival. It is rich in wild animals and fish from the Okavango River. On the basis of this, the boys are encouraged to interact amongst themselves and male elders where they will learn masculine duties. Taboos therefore provide important lessons to children to guide them into responsible adults who will add value to their society.

#### 4.2 *Taboos on hunting and fishing*

Hunting and fishing forms a very important part of the economic life of Bayei people. It is through these two activities that the Bayei survive the harsh desert climate. Fish and wild game are their main source of food and proper nutrition. Hunting and fishing activities are mainly the social roles assigned to men and boys and, therefore, hunting and fishing taboos are directed at the males.

- (i) *When a man is going fishing, he should not make up his bed in the morning as he will not catch any fish.*

- (ii) *A man should not warm water before going fishing or he will be attacked by a rhino or crocodile.*
- (iii) *A man should not have sexual intercourse before going on hunting or fishing expedition otherwise he will be engaged in some form of accident during those activities.*

Taboos among the hunters and fisher-folk such as those above are a reflection of the commercial nature of the activities as time and safety are of essence in undertaking them. Some activities, such as spreading the bed and warming water in the early hours are time consuming. Fishermen and hunters need to rise early enough to catch their game as early as possible. The Bayei experience and indigenous knowledge informs them that fish and game animals are crowded in certain places of the river and bushes at dawn when water is still cold and the bushes undisturbed by other animals. The taboos also reflect the Bayei understanding of, and intimacy with their environment. The Bayei intimate relationship and respect for nature and the environment are demonstrated in the examples above.

As earlier noted, most cultures consider sexual intercourse as a sacred, sacrosanct and energy sapping activity. Among the Bayei, sexual intercourse do not only weaken the body for such arduous tasks as hunting and fishing but it also ‘contaminates’ and renders one unclean thereby exposing the men to bad omens and loss. Fishing and hunting are hazardous enterprises that require energy and alertness. In fact, another Bayei taboo forbids men from eating left-overs for breakfast. Such a taboo emphasizes the need for a proper meal to give strength to the fishermen and hunters. It indirectly shifts the responsibilities of making the bed and preparing a wholesome breakfast on their women partners (wives). Even in modern times, most African athletes and footballers are frequently advised to avoid sexual contact before competitions to avoid defeat.

#### 4.3 *Taboos on confinement and births*

- (i) *A pregnant woman should not get used to sleeping in the afternoons as the child will be lazy to come out during concealment/confinement.*
- (ii) *A pregnant woman does not eat boiled eggs as she will suffer prolonged pains before conceiving.*
- (iii) *It is a taboo to cast a shadow over a baby.*
- (iv) *A woman should not touch or hold the baby during menstruation.*
- (v) *A woman in confinement (breast feeding) should cover herself with a blanket whenever she leaves the room to avoid any sickness.*

Some of the above Bayei taboos such as those cited above are directed towards pregnant women. They are generally concerned with child bearing, nurturing and confinement (*botsetsi*). The taboos are meant to encourage healthy livelihoods among mothers-to-be and those with newly born babies to avoid giving birth to unhealthy children. They promote good hygiene for women to avoid high mother and child mortality; a worthy objective for reproduction and procreation in a landlocked country of a sparse population of 2, 024,787 million people (Central Statistics Office, 2009: 82).

The above set of taboos emphasise the importance of health and hygiene for expectant mothers, the unborn and newly born babies among the Bayei. The taboos are a defence mechanism against 'the sociology of danger' (Njoku, 2014). Whereas one of the taboos exhorts the expectant mother to be active for a healthy pregnancy as she needs to exercise, yet another forbids an expectant woman from eating eggs. The prohibition is logical in that overweight babies or obese mothers face complications during child-birth. This is especially valid in a community that relies on traditional birth attendants who may not have the skills or tools to save lives during complicated labour. In some communities women and children are believed to have a 'weak spirit' which needs to be protected against strong ones especially as symbolized in animals and birds leading to some food taboos. For instance, the Bayei forbid a breast feeding or expectant woman from allowing an eagle to defecate on her lest her baby suffers from epilepsy. The eagle symbolises a strong spirit which can harm a child.

The Bayei and, indeed, most Batswana take great precautionary measures to protect both the mother and child from all types of danger. For instance, a log is usually placed at the entrance of the hut where a newly born child is housed. Most Batswana communities, including the Bayei, keep both the mother and child in confinement for six months to avoid communicable diseases, witchcraft and the "evil eye" from malevolent people. This precaution is enforced by having the woman in confinement cover herself with a blanket as demonstrated in the example above. Bayei taboos encourage women to use a spoon for eating while they are in confinement during puberty rites and also when taking care of the new born babies. They discourage women from using their nails to scratch their bodies but rather to use *lekwati la setlhare go ingwaya* (a stick or piece of wood) to avoid contamination or skin diseases.

During confinement, absolute care is taken to nurture both the mother and child to good health. Special foods, herbs and clean clothing are provided for the mother and child to minimise contact and contamination from the outside world. Whereas this practice is increasingly becoming difficult to implement owing to

urbanisation and modern-working lifestyles, most Bayei in rural areas adhere to it. It is for hygienic and pseudo-spiritual reasons that it is taboo for a woman in her menses to touch a newly-born as pointed out above or one to cast one's shadow over a baby as indicated in the example above. Shadows, ghosts (*thokolosi*) portend evil. They are bad omens for the child. They, like the eagle alluded to earlier, are considered strong spirits which may affect the fragile 'spirit' of an innocent baby. It is evident from the cited examples that the Bayei have institutionalized a prenatal and postnatal care regimen through the culturally-sanctioned taboos.

#### 4.4 *Deconstructing Bayei taboos*

An analysis of some selected taboos provides an opportunity to explore the ultimate meaning of life as reflected in the Bayei taboos, beliefs, and practices. From the taboos discussed in this work, it is evident that the Bayei have a particular way of conceptualising their world. It is clear that they draw on their indigenous knowledge and orally transmitted wisdom of the community. It can be seen that Bayei use taboos to educate girls and boys.

Taboos have been described as 'good teaching aids' (MojaAfryka, 2014). They are seen as being helpful because they can be relied upon to determine behaviour where one lacks the intellectual ability to impart the importance of some moral principles. They are also a convenient way of transmitting that same value from a different perspective. It is not unusual for a taboo to be enforced through a superstitious belief such as when a fisherman is made to believe that he will have a poor catch or drown if he engages in sexual acts before venturing into the deep waters. The teaching of good behaviour and morals therefore reinforces the values and sentiments that are important to the maintenance of the society (Douglas, M. 1966, Radcliffe-Brown 1939).

The philosophy of life and spirituality are also embedded in the Bayei taboos. The taboos show that the Bayei value and respect life as they view it as the most precious gift from God. This is evident in the way they use some of their taboos to protect and nurture the gift of life. The self-preserving nature of the Bayei ensures their survival in the harsh desert situations of the Okavango delta. They use taboos to protect expectant mothers, their babies and bread-earners from imminent danger. These taboos promote health and hygiene. They are vital components for actual and literal procreation and reproduction.

It is apparent from the analysis of Bayei taboos that they also aid in maintaining harmony between the people and the spirits, the invisible and the underworld. Some of the Bayei fishing and hunting taboos are meant to protect them from dangers that may befall them during those activities as a result of disgruntled ancestors. The Bayei

believe that there are some supernatural beings that live in the rivers, forests and caves who determine how and when to use these resources. There are urban legends that some people disappeared in the rivers and jungles never to be found as they are taken by the spiritual beings which include a very big snake with a human head which lives under the water. This is consistent with some observations made to the effect that taboos are in most, if not all African cultures associated with supernatural beings and that they are a religious link between the people and their Gods (Gyekye, 1987; Gelfand, 1979). Harmony is therefore created by moral order dictated in the taboos. It has the power to enforce the smooth operations of the society and ensure that they enjoy the generous and precious gift of life from their gods.

Lastly, there are consequences that may arise as a result of non-compliance with a particular taboo. Taboo expressions contain in them certain assumed repercussions and consequences that are directed at transgressors. It may be presumed that the attached dangers act as the main deterrents to discourage unwanted behaviours. The negative outcomes reinforce values such as responsibility, stability and social cohesion which are considered to be essential in the community. An important observation is that the values enshrined in taboos are never questioned but are religiously accepted the way they are. Questioning a taboo is a taboo itself and it can attract punishment for the offender as it is equivalent to questioning the wisdom of the ancestors, the spirits and the gods. It does not matter whether the beliefs are intelligible or not or if they are logical or not. Whether taboos are scientifically correct or not, they protect the Bayei in a hostile world and they should be understood as part of a cultural system of meaning which is central to their survival as a community.

The above analysis demonstrates that the Bayei have their own unique way of conceptualizing their world. Taboos as part of Bayei culture aid in the cohesion of the community. A well-bred Moyei is respectful and does not engage in undesirable actions as he/ she is scared of the punishment that may come with that, and the dangers associated with such deeds. Bayei children grow up adhering to the rule that come out of the taboos. Like children from other communities, they do not question them and do not know the reasons behind them. What they know is that they are their unwritten rules that pass from one generation to another to regulate their lives. The people get to know what is acceptable, unacceptable or outlawed in their society through taboos.

Taboos are part of the informal education, socialization and acculturation of the Bayei. They are embedded in every communicative acts that are interpreted and understood within a cultural frame supported by beliefs, rituals and spirituality. The taboos are meant to shape childhood behaviour so that children will grow up into responsible citizens.

## 5. Conclusion

This work explored the taboo philosophy among the Bayei. It has examined some of the taboo expressions and determined why certain behaviour is prohibited. It has looked into how taboos assist in building a complete Moyei personality who is accepted in the community.

Taboos have been proved to be a good socialization and acculturation strategy as they help Bayei children to learn their cultural practices so that they act as per the expectation of their society. Taboos also help the Bayei to maintain their identity and cohesion in the face of others and, therefore, create a feeling of oneness in their society. Taboos are ensconced in verbal expressions and they therefore constitute an integral component of a community's folklore and communicative acts. Lastly, taboos are good 'teaching aids' and could still be very helpful if they can be adopted and incorporated into the school curriculum to break the current trend of delinquent behaviour exhibited in schools and societies. There is therefore need to investigate the different taboos concerning other Botswana cultures in relation to their livelihoods and current globalisation trends.

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