THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY INSTITUTION IN THE SUSTENANCE OF CORE SOCIETAL VALUES

[1]BASHIR MUHAMMAD ABUBAKAR, [2]MURTALA MOHAMMED ALAMAI

[1]Department of General Studies, [2]Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Federal Polytechnic, P.M.B 0231, Bauchi, Nigeria
E-mail: muhdbashir22@gmail.com, mamurtala247@gmail.com

Abstract- Historically, the family institution plays an important role in the social, economic and political organisation of human societies. This is so, because within the family institution, core societal values are nurtured, institutionalised and transferred from one generation to the other. Over the years however, the family institution has undergone tremendous transformation in its structure, composition and role in the society. This paper therefore, examines the family institution in the traditional vis-à-vis contemporary Nigerian societies, thereby identifying some of the changes the family institution has undergone and how such changes affect the family roles in the sustenance of core societal values and aspirations. It is the conception of this paper that if societies in Africa generally, and Nigeria in particular continue to live the 'paradox' of civilization and modernity, the core societal values of African tradition might be strained or eroded, and the African civilization known for decades might be lost.

Keywords- Civilization, Family, Kinship, Modernity, Tradition and Values

I. INTRODUCTION

Anthropological and sociological studies revealed that the first documented human societies in human history are the primitive societies [1], [2]. In these societies, people lived in 'bands' and organisation, in these societies, was made possible through kinship ties or relationship. Political philosophers such as Hobbes, Rousseau and Locke were of the opinion that 'societies' emerged with familial organisation [3] and that societies would not have survived without strong political organisation. That is to say that in all societies in history, institution building began with the family; this has made the families the main vehicles of group identity, and the chief receptacles of core values. The family is in fact regarded as the architect of societal values, belief systems and socio-political ideologies. At the dawn of the twenty first century, major changes in the family structure were manifesting throughout the world. In Nigeria, the quality of communal life, which characterised the traditional family systems in most communities, has been fading away [4]. Religion, modernization, and the impact of western influence have had a tremendous effect on the traditional family values. The status of women has changed nation-wide. The young urban wives now prefer living away from their husband's families, because, they are no longer willing to be treated subserviently in family affairs. There has been counter current to the ideology of kingship and marriage; women now compete favourably with their men counterparts in almost all spheres of life. There has been a change in the economic value of children; and, hence, changing family priorities. Teenage and young adult sons no longer value working in their fathers' farms. In short, individualism has virtually replaced communalism or dependence in human social relationships [5], [6], [4]. Family system in this context is an institutionalised means whereby the human society organises and carries out important activities, involving mating and reproduction among other things; familial institutions provide for legitimate rights to sexual access, the procreation and training of children, the organization of domestic work groups in accord with gender division of labour. Society is generally defined as a self-perpetuating group of humans broadly distinguished from other groups by mutual interest, participation in characteristic relationships, shared values and a common culture [3].

Values are what the society cares about as a group. They are what motivate people from within. Values can be good and bad. Good value system ultimately produces good and sustainable societies while bad value system produces bad, weak and unsustainable societies. Some of the good values commonly uphold in Nigeria include hospitality, marriage, extended family, chastity, respect for elders and constituted authorities, communalism to mention a few. With the advent of modernity and contact with western values and belief systems, these Nigerian values are being challenged and facing extinction. It is on this premise that this paper examines the family institution in Nigeria with particular reference to its structure, pattern, role, problems and challenges arising from contact and influence, modernity and civilization, philosophy of right and ethical conduct with a view to ascertaining how family functions in the development and sustenance of core societal values.

II. FAMILY SYSTEM IN THE TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN SOCIETY

To explain how the traditional family system operates in Nigeria, emphasis is placed on

structure/composition, status of women and children, mate selection/marriage, division of labour, socialisation, kinship ties and inheritance or succession. Instances are mainly given from Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo societies.

[4] Argued that in the Nigeria traditional setting, the family rests squarely and firmly on a tripod consisting of, the extended family system, patriarchal authority and patrilocal habitation and patrilineal mode of inheritance and succession. [9] Similarly, pointed out that in Nigeria, families are patriarchal with extended family members having more say comparison to family setups in the westernized world. Although children are very important to Nigerian families, family relationships are mostly guided by strict system of 'seniority' and male tended egoistic values. Emphasis has always been placed on male members of the family more because of their rights to both family inheritance and extension of family lineage and name. However, women and children are considered as economic resources to the families because they add to the economic value of the father who houses them. In most traditional societies in Nigeria, it was believed that the larger your family size (including women and children) the greater your economic and social standing in the society. Women who do not have children are often ridiculed, molested and discriminated against. Sometimes they are regarded as being cursed because of the importance families attached to children. Among the Binis of the Edo state, [5] has observed that all dependants which include women and children are regarded as servants of the patriarchal head. Should the head of the family become deceased; the beneficiaries of his property are usually his brothers and sisters with his widows having no access to his property.

[10] Posited that among the Hausas of Metropolitan Kano as with many African communities, marriage is a highly valued milestone. It is a legitimate source of family and a building block of the Hausas. In addition, [11] argued that marriage among the Hausas is the backbone of socio-economic and political development. Thus, its progress and maintenance signifies harmony, while crisis and divorce in the family always signals dangers and insecurity in the society. In the recent past, mate selection among the Hausas, was the domain of parents or larger kinship group; parents or relatives were responsible for identifying the "ideal" suitors through reference to families that were known to be of high moral status. That was a clear indication of the role of families in socialization and initiation of members into adulthood. Among the Fulanis, marriage marks the beginning of social and economic maturity. Marriage is tied to the ownership of cattle and it provides an opportunity for individuals to own and herd their own cattle rather than herd cattle for their fathers. The Fulani are, in most cases, endogamous with emphasis on patrilateral parallel cousins marriage dewerdirabe or patrilateral cross cousins 'yeekirabe. Marriages among the Fulanis could be classified into two: first marriage Tegal biddo debbo and remarriage Tegal Zawarjo. In the first marriage, Tegal biddo debbo, the parents of the girl give out their daughter for marriage to a prospective groom whose parents have indicated willingness to accept the offer. The act of "giving out" is referred to as Koggal and can take place in one of three time periods: when the boy and girl are both very young, say, between 2 and 5 years of age; when the children are between the ages of 7 and 10 years old, when the boy is between the ages of 17 and 20 years and the girl is between the ages of 13 and 15 years [8].

Among the Igbos, four forms of marriage were identified-traditional, court, Christian/church and Muslim marriages. Marriage is perceived by the Igbos as a family affair. Thus, the families (immediate and extended) of both the groom-to-be and the bride-to-be are involved right from the time they were informed by their children of the marriage proposal [8]. In the Yoruba traditional milieu, mate selection for both male and female occurs at different times of their development. For the man, mate selection occurs at adolescent whereas for the female the process occurs at a slightly younger age. Some criteria are however set before scouting commences. For example, the young girl in question must not be a blood relation; no known hereditary diseases must be traceable to her ancestors. When a young girl has been located and contacted informally through a female scout, the next step is to contact her parents. If the parents of the girl consent, she is eventually betrothed to the young man. At this stage, the girl is usually around ten years of age. During the intervening period between betrothal and wedding, both boys and girls are expected to maintain emotional and physical distances from each other. This is done in order to discourage pre-marital intercourse since the girl is normally expected to be a virgin until her wedding night. A girl who has been "deflowered" before her wedding night exposes herself and her family to ridicule and scorn [7], [4].

[7] Has identified four major types of marriage among the Yorubas. The first type is the marriage in which the mutual consents of both partners and their parents are secured. The second type is one in which the bride is made a "free gift" (which is not usually refused) to her husband who is usually a very prominent man in the community. The third type is where both men and women get married without the usual parental consent.

The last type is the levirate where a widow either becomes the wife of her late husband's eldest son (mothered by another woman) or she is inherited by an older relative.

The process of socialization involves the inculcation of the norms and values of the community into the child as soon as he or she is born. In all ethnic groups in Nigeria there is a strong emphasis on respect for elders and this forms the kernel of early socialization. Even any demonstration of curiosity by the youngster through the asking of questions is seriously discouraged. Boys and girls are socialized strictly along gender lines where roles are strongly gender defined. All members of the extended family must jointly partake in the socializing of the younger members. Whenever a child demonstrates any aberrant behaviour, it is the duty of the older members to promptly effect corrective measures [12], [6], [4].

Division of labour in the traditional family among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria is usually strictly along gender lines, [7] has observed among the Yorubas for example that a man and his wife do not necessarily form a complementary economic unit. While both may work on the farm engaging in the acts of planting and harvesting, the wife may decide to engage in her own tradition activities independent of the husband. Among the pastoral Fulani of the Northern Nigeria, there is a very strong emphasis on the separation of the sexes [5]. In the case of the Hausas from the same part of the country, most women are under purdah. However, the Hausa women who are not under purdah actively participate in farming activities alongside their husbands. Even those under purdah engage in micro trading activities at home to earn income or to sustain a family. In this situation the wife's earnings remain hers and any contribution from her to the running of the household is regarded as a temporary loan [5] which the husband is expected to pay back later. The Hausa man is expected to provide his wife with food, firewood and other materials needed for daily sustenance.

III. FAMILY SYSTEM IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

In the modern setting, the extended family system is past fading away, although some relationships do exist in the urban areas which seem to mimic the extended family system. Here, social supports are based on a network of the relationships arising from professional, religious or political associations.

These relationships offer social and psychological supports to members especially in times of adversity. Unfortunately the relationships sometimes tend to be temporary as members may change occupations, lose their jobs or relocate to other parts of the country. In such cases, the process of building these relationships are started all over again. Another aspect of the modern urban family which deserves mention is the change in the size of the family [12], [6].

It is generally observed that the aggregate size of the average urban family is smaller than that of the extended family which is characteristic of the traditional family [13]. It was discovered that education, knowledge of birth control and the present economic situation in the country are perceived as some of the major determinants of small family size in the urban centres. The desire of many parents to educate and feed their children adequately has been frustrated by the high costs of living.

In the modern family setting and due mainly to the influence of western education, there has been a drastic change in the age at which young men and women marry. This change has been brought about as a result of long periods of time which must be devoted to education and training. It was observed that 14.3% of husbands without any western education had contracted marriage when they were still less than 20 years of age. In contrast, none of the husbands who were graduates got married before they were 20 years old. Among wives who were interviewed the following results were obtained: 28% of those without primary education got married before they were fifteen years old. Also only 1.5% of those with secondary school education got married before they were fifteen years old. However, of all the wives who were university graduates, none got married by or before they were fifteen years old [13].

In a similar study conducted by [14] among some Hausa women in the city of Kano, in Northern Nigeria, it was discovered that those girls who enrolled in primary schools postponed marriage beyond the traditional age of eleven or twelve years to complete their primary school education.

There are also changes in the area of mate selection in the modern family setting in Nigeria. This aspect of the family is so crucial because, the nature of mate selection will have a direct effect on the success or failure of a marriage. Generally, marriage in the traditional environment is devoid of courtship and, romantic love is usually expected to develop after the marriage has been consummated. With the advent of western education, it became necessary for young men and women to leave their local environment purposely to go to school or to seek for paid employment, most especially in the urban areas. At school or in the place of employment boys and girls of different social, economic and ethnic backgrounds began to interact and develop romantic relationships. Today, the process of mate selection takes place between young men and women free of parental interference. This has weakened the traditional marital conventions [10], [14], [7].

In the school, at work or in a typical urban environment, criteria for mate selection are based on achieved rather than ascribed attributes and romantic

love is the driving force behind mate selection. Incidentally, the independence to choose one's partner has occasionally resulted in both young men and women setting some criteria for mate selection which might be difficult to meet. [15] Interviewed some young men and women who were still single. The researchers wanted to know what attributes the respondents would like to see in the men and women they proposed to marry. The male respondents indicated that their future wives must be well educated, intelligent, responsible, homely and faithful. The young women on the other hand would want their future husbands to be firm, intelligent, handsome, tall, rich and with a good sense of humour. None of them indicated any interest in the family medical history, or other vital criteria which would have been emphasized in the traditional mate selection process. Also, in real life, only few human beings combine all the attributes which the respondents listed. Because of the unrealistic standard which some young men and women have set for their prospective partners, finding suitable partners sometimes becomes very elusive, problematic and result in prolonged postponement of marriage [4].

The traditional emphasis on chastity in the Nigerian family system has equally undergone serious challenge. [14] Has observed, for example that there is a decline of emphasis on virginity as a desirable attribute in a woman. It has also been observed that in the traditional African culture any woman found "wanting" on her wedding night was regarded as a disgrace to her family and clan. To protest the girl's "deflowered" status, a broken calabash was usually sent to her parents the morning following the wedding night. However, if the woman was still a virgin the stained bed sheet was publicly displaced and her parents were complimented. Nowadays, many partners sometimes insist that their brides get pregnant before they contract any marriage in order to prove their fecundity.

In the modern family in Nigeria parents have almost lost their places as major agents of socialization. Cliques, schools, peer groups now compete with parents as agents of socialization [12]. In the urban centers where both parents are professionals and therefore have to be away from their children for the greater part of the day, peer group members, babysitters may displace them as major agents of socialization [6]. Of particular importance is the impact of television on the modern family, most especially the children. The television is very important in keeping abreast of current events; it also exposes the child to some beneficial educational programmes. However, if television viewing by children is not closely monitored by parents, it can have very adverse effects on them. There are many research conducted by Child Psychologists on the effect of viewing on the child's intellectual ability. [18] has observed for example, that when children spend excessive time watching the television, it can result in slowing down their creative thinking, destroy their imaginative life and the time spent watching the television can eat deep into the time they need to spend doing their home work. Television may also accelerate a child's exposure to sex and violence; it can sharpen their taste for material acquisition and acceptance of violence as a way of life (see Bandura's experiment). Advertisements that portray drinking and smoking as masculine traits may have negatively affected a child's socialization. There are some movies that glorify deviant behaviour as a way of life. These may also lead children to adopt deviant ways of life [19].

The dual career family is the one in which both husbands and wives have their own professional careers. One of the most significant effects of the dual career phenomenon is the increase in the family's aggregate income. It has also led to an increase in the status of professional women within their families. It has resulted in the alteration of the traditional gender role expectations within the family. Women are no more strictly tied to the roles of mother and wife. Rather they have become co-breadwinners with their husbands by sharing financial responsibilities. According to [8], in a typical urban setting in Nigeria, while men may generally be responsible for rent, both men and women bear joint responsibilities for the day today expenditure, with women occasionally contributing more to buying foodstuffs. In recent times, the harsh economic conditions have forced husbands and wives to separate, especially where one member is forced to migrate in search of greener pastures to boost family income.

In recent times, there is a continued agitation by human rights activists, European countries and their American allies on same sex marriage. Even the United Nations share in this regard on the move to legalise same sex marriages in the African continent. The Federal Government in Nigeria has since taken stand on the issue, which drew national and international outcry. For most Nigerians, the decision of the government is a commendable one because same sex relationship violates fundamental values and belief system of human essence and existence. This has been an issue of concern not only to Nigeria as a nation but cut across all the African societies. Countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Gambia, Niger, Zimbabwe, and host of others have since passed legislations prohibiting same sex marriages and relationships in their countries.

This appears to be a common stand among Africans that same sex relationships violate core values and belief systems of their societies and therefore, should be seriously checked in order to forestall grave damage to the family systems and the society at large.

IV. FAMILY AND SOCIETAL VALUES

The family as a social institution has formalized sets of norms and values that make living possible. It also has a set of procedures which include courtship, engagement and marriage. The family has a set of values which include taboos, rules of descent, property ownership and others. As an institution, the family has a set of roles, and statuses which define division of labour and structures of relationship between family members. It also has a set of procedures which ensures that members perform their duties to socially required expectations. When these rules and procedures are properly obeyed, the basic foundations of social order would have been laid [6], [5].

There are many researches and academic texts that attest to the importance of family to the development and sustenance of core societal values. In most of these researches and materials, family is considered as the nucleus of society, a social unit from which institutional building began in all human societies (see [2], [20], [8], [1]). Though in modern societies the role and status of the family have been usurped by specialized institutions and agencies, the following quotations by some prominent scholars and reports indicated the importance the family has not only in the African countries but also in the Western Societies of Europe and America.

'American families are in trouble-trouble so deep and pervasive as to threaten the future of the nation'- Report to the white house conference on children, 1970

'The family is, as far as we know, the toughest institution we have. It is, in fact, the institution to which we owe our humanity'- Margaret Mead "The Impact of Cultural Changes on the Family"

"Far from being the basis of the good society, the family, with its narrow privacy and its tawdry secrets, is the source of all our discontents"-Edmund Leach 'A Runaway World?

"Parents should be responsible for the behaviour of the children"- David Cameron, in the wake of the 2011 England riot

All these point to the fact that in most societies, family is considered an important social unit, where certain basic needs of society are fulfilled. [6], [13] identified the following as some of the basic functions the family performs in most human societies:

- Regulation of sexual activity (The family is the principal institution through which most societies organize and regulate the satisfaction of sexual desires).
- The reproductive function (Every society depends primarily upon the family for the business of producing children. That is to say that as society needs to replace its old and the dead; it is the institution of the family that provides a socially approved context of child bearing. Though other arrangements are theoretically possible, but no society has established a set of norms for providing children except as part of a family).
- The socialization function (The family is considered as the basic unit of socialization in that all societies depend primarily upon the family for the socialization of children into adults who can function successfully in that society. One of the many ways in which the family socializes the young is by providing models for the child to copy. The boy learns to be a man, a husband or a girl learns to become a woman, a wife, etc by living in the family and copying from the statuses and roles in the family).
- The affection function (family life and processes create condition for mutual affection amongst its members. The family provides both emotional as well as physical companionship, intimacy, love and other responses that show care and love for the members).
- The status function (In the family every member is ascribed certain status within the family. When the family is established, there exists network of statuses and roles, and status is given on the basis of age, sex, birth order, etc.).
- The protective function (In all societies the family offers some degree of physical, economic and psychological protection to its members. In many societies, any attack upon a person is an attack upon its entire family with all members bound to defend it or to revenge the injury. This protection, extends also to guilt, shame and even food sharing).
- The economic function (The family is the basic economic unit in most primitive societies. It members work together as a team and share jointly in their produce. This situation, however, is now changing. The popular saying 'behind a successful man there is always a woman' proves to the fact that, even in 'modern' societies, family is considered as an economic unit).

V. THE 'PARADOX' OF CIVILIZATION AND MODERNITY

Distortion of African values, cultures and civilisations began in the 1880s with the advent of colonialism in the African societies. This is correct to the extent that colonialism serves as a vehicle of implantation of cultural imperialism in Africa [21]. Colonialism, perceived in this context, is an imposition of foreign rule over indigenous traditional political setting and foreign dominance and subjugation of African people in all spheres of their social, political, cultural, economic and religious civilisations. Western civilisation and culture began to creep into African socio-cultural milieu, first, with

the contact of Europeans and Africans through colonialism and, later, consolidated by the unstoppable wave of globalisation [21].

There are many reasons advanced for Europe's colonization of Africa. Some scholars like [22] argued that economics was the sole determining factor. Other scholars like [23] considered geopolitical strategy as a more decisive factor. Historical documents however, revealed that economy, christianity, develoment, search for knowledge, racial superiority, importation of civilisation and or, modernity were among the principal factors that facilitated the colonization of Africa [24].

The period 1945-1997 marked the decolonization of African societies, where most African countries gained political independence from the colonizers. The 1941 Atlantic Charter declared that the signatories would "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live". In 1945, the United Nations (UN) was founded when 50 nations signed the UN Charter, which included a statement of its basis in the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. The Charter makes reference to human rights and fundamental freedoms in a number of clauses and paved way for the adoption and proclamation of the universal declaration of human rights on December 10, 1948 [25].

On 4th November, 1946, a specialized agency of the UN, with a purpose of contributing to peace and security by promoting international collaboration through education, science, and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the UN Charter was founded. That agency is known as The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). UNESCO pursues its objectives through five major programmes: education, natural sciences, social and human sciences, culture, and communication and information [26]

In June 1981, a Charter known as The African Charter of Human and People's Rights was proclaimed by the African States members of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU). In the preamble, reference was made to the OAU Charter, which stipulates that freedom, equality, justice and dignity are essential objectives for the achievement of the legitimate aspirations of the African peoples; and reaffirming the pledge solemnly made in Article 2 of the OAU Charter to eradicate all forms of colonialism, neo-colonialism and all forms of discrimination, particularly those based on race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion or political opinion from Africa, to coordinate and intensify their cooperation and efforts to achieve a better life for the peoples of Africa and to promote international coopertaion; having due regard to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declarations of Human Rights. This is done taking into consideration the virtues of their (African) historical tradition and the values of African civilisation which should inspire and characterise their reflection on the concept of human and peoples' rights [25].

In the African Continent, one of UNESCO's major priorities is in the field of culture, where special assistance is given to the continent to enhance the implementation of the various UNESCO conventions, notably the 1972 World Heritage Convention, 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention and 2005 Cultural Diversity Convention [26]. A careful look at all these conventions reveals that they all aimed at safeguarding, promoting and securing the vitality of 'cultural heritage' and make sure full advantage is taken of its potential for sustainable development. But contrary to the provisions of the UN Charter, UNESCO-Africa priorities and Conventions, and African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, our sister countries in Europe, America and even the UN and its specialised agencies appear to be pursuing what seems to be 'a rejuvenated colonisation of cultures and values' under the pretext of 'universal freedom of choice', civilisation and modernity [27].

The contradiction becomes more evident when one looks at UNESCO's definition of Intangible Cultural Heritage, also known as 'living heritage', which refers to "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation" [28]. Again, the ethical principle of relativism suggests that cultural practices are relative which maintains that morality or cultural value is grounded in the approval of one's society, and not simply in the preferences of individual people. In addition, this approach to the metaphysical status of morality deny the absolute and universal nature of morality and holds instead that moral values in fact change from society to society throughout time and throughout the world. Proponents of this approach frequently attempt to defend their position by citing examples of values that differ dramatically from one culture to another, such as attitudes about polygamy, homosexuality and same sex marriage, promiscuity/chastity, single parenthood and host of others.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

- As we assess progress in terms of western technology and science, it is also necessary to measure progress by taking a critical look at the social aspects of the family. To minimize the negative impacts of western cultures and values on the family,

it is very important to retain some aspects of our traditional culture which impact positively on the family.

- The extended family system must not be allowed to be totally corroded by the adoption of western culture. In Nigeria, where there is a conspicuous absence of social welfare programmes by government, the extended family must be encouraged. This will provide social, economic and emotional safety nets for people. In the urban areas, membership of voluntary associations must be encouraged to cater for the physical, material and emotional needs of individuals.
- In the areas of mate selection and marriage, marriage counselors should be trained to provide advice and counseling to prospective couples and those having marital problems. Parents must monitor their children and inculcate in them, respect for elders and consequently, for constituted authority. Efforts must be made to provide adequate supervision for children so that effects of negative peer pressure and influence might be minimized.
- The Nigerian governments at Federal, state and local levels must continue to effect poverty alleviation programmes. These will reduce stress within the family and eliminate feelings of insecurity.
- Finally, if the gains of western education are to be maximized, more concrete steps must be taken to tease out those positive aspects of our traditional practices and integrate them with those of the modern western culture. Efforts must also be made to educate the citizens on those harmful cultural practices which are incompatible with the modern family institution.

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