

DWINDLING IMPACT OF KINSHIP/EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM AMONG THE NDI IGBO OF SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The institution of kinship arises from the fact that some members of the community are more closely related than others. Kinship provides the framework of social relationship. Kinship means relationship of the individual with the other members due to either a bond of marriage, adoption or blood. Kinship bonds are very strong in Igbo land. Kinship begins with nuclear family. Kinship takes its base from mother and father- children relationship. This is the foundation of other relationships among Ndi Igbo. It is basically a social relationship. Kinship is extra familial organization relevant to traditional societies. Kinship system in Igbo Land serves the needs of man. As culture changes, norms and values built round the kinship system also tend to change over time. This paper investigates the impact of dwindling kinship system among the Ndi Igbo of South Eastern Nigeria. The impact of capitalism, and such related forces of Modernization, Industrialization, Urbanization, Transportation, Communication and Western Education, have all tended to effect great changes in the socio-cultural life of the Igbo. This work analyses the dwindling influence/impact of the kinship/Extended family system among the Ndigbos. Towards this goal, this work covers the introduction, changes and trends of the kinship /extended family system among the Ndi Igbo, factors militating against the impacts of the kinship/extended family system, consequences of the dwindling influences of the kinship/extended family system and conclusion.

Keywords: impact, dwindling, kinship system, and Ndi Igbo culture.

Introduction

According to Aroh (2011) Kinship is the relationship between individuals based on blood ties or marriage, adoption or any other means by which a given society recognized such. In sociology, according to Salawu (2007), the term kinship has two aspects, namely; (a) The biological point of view in which kinship is a relationship which is obtained through two major means like blood or descent. (b) On the other hand, the socio-cultural aspect of kinship is manmade. From the point of view of biological aspect, two people are kinsmen if one is descended from the other. In other words, two people are kinsmen when the two are the descendants of a common ancestor or ancestress depending on which line of descent

is given prominence in the society concerned. Also from the point of view of the socio-cultural aspect, the society may approve that such and such persons are kinsmen. This is to say that kinship system in a society may be the function of the socio-cultural practice in the society. This means that biological relations through descent do not exhaust the whole idea of kinship.

According to Onwuka (2009), this is why one's brother-in-law, mother-in-law and sister-in-law are one's kinsmen. Society may accord the status of kinsman. This explains why adopted children among the Yako of South East of Nigeria are regarded as kinsmen. Thus, kinship involves the relationships of blood, affinity and adoption. There are different social relationships which are developed in the social system through kinship. According to Uwakwe (2003), such relations are: (a) parallel cousins (b) sibling and (c) uterine. Parallel cousins by definition are children of two siblings of the same sex. In other words, they are children of two brothers or two sisters. The second type of social relations developed through kinship is the sibling. There are different types of sibling relations. For example, there are the full siblings who are persons of either sex having the same father and the same mother. There is also the half sibling relation in which case it refers to persons who are the children of the same father and different mothers. Such relations are called paternal half-sibling in Sociology. There is another type of half siblings, which involves person's mother. Such persons are called maternal half sibling. Finally, uterine relationships according to Salawu (2007), constitute a third major type which are developed in the social system through kinship. By definition, uterine relationships are kin in which descent is reckoned through females.

According to Eteng (2008) there is the recognition that there is limit to which the immediate family can cope with the provision of the needs of its members. At times, some of these needs may border on the corporate interest of a group. They include: the allocation of resources, protection from invasion from neighbouring communities, provision of social welfare services, provision of labour both for farming and building etc. The kinship system which is an aggregate of people who share blood relationship developed especially in Igbo land to take care of these interests that are beyond what the family alone can handle.

According to Aniche and Onyia (2008) kinship system serves the need of man. As culture changes, norms and values built round the kinship system also tend to change over time. The impact of capitalism and such related forces of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, transportation and communication and western education, have all tended to effect great changes in socio-cultural life. Extended family is giving way to the nuclear family in this modern time, especially as a result of hardship. European contact has tended to drastically modify our socio-psychological states, as well as our values and belief systems.

THE CHANGES AND TRENDS OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY AMONG NDI IGBO

The basis of kinship among the Igbo rests on three elements: Common ancestor, marriage ties and adoption. However, the unit structure of the kinship is the nuclear family. According to Akubukwe (1997). A person is born or adopted into a family (A). In which he becomes a son. When this son grows and marries, he now becomes the husband and the father to his new family (B). In this way the relationship between the two nuclear families (A and B) exists due to a common member – a son in his original family (A). and a father in his new family (B). Simultaneously, a kinship tie exists due to the marriage between this

son and his wife. In this manner, common ancestry, marriage ties and adoption interact to produce a complex system of distant and close relatives called kins. The relationship between a husband and his wife is closer than that between their respective parents. This idea of the closeness of relatives is known as the range of the kinship. This range is indefinite among the Ndi Igbo so long as the concerned relatives can still trace their kinship ties. This goes to imply that a particular nuclear family in Igbo land can have several hundreds of close and distant relatives.

According to Okeke (2011) Prior to British incorporation of Igbo land into Nigeria in 1914, the Igbo (almost exclusively) live among their several hundred kins in their respective villages. Within these small villages, the inhabitants ensure an organized atmosphere where law and order prevailed.

Sexual control is strictly exercised to achieve a bastard-free environment and a society devoid of loose living. The coming of the Whiteman diluted this worthy exercise by explaining it away with what happens at puberty.

It was formally an exclusive function of the mature members of the extended family system to select wives for their sons. However, with passage of time and increasing modernization, these inexperienced sons are now allowed to exercise their freedom of choice as individuals with regard to marriage.

These facts suggest that the influence of the extended family system is dwindling among the Igbo. To further justify this assertion, evidence abound that it is not uncommon to find an Igbo multimillionaire who makes multithousand donations but cannot pay a few naira school fees for his cousin in the village whereas his own children enjoy the best of schools and the best of comforts that money can buy. Thus, the close knit nature of the Extended Family System has depreciated a lot, and people no longer have strong inclination of helping one another or being their brother's keeper. The apparent collapse of the Extended Family System is again indicated by the diminishing rigidity by members in visiting behavioural deviants with appropriate taboos and sanctions. This slack in effectiveness dysfunctionally boosts the forces that tend to undermine cherished values and long established traditions.

According to Okau, Metiboba and Tinuola (2013), the vital norms of good gesture and reciprocity have been almost entirely foregone, the Igbo have abandoned their relatives to fate, destitution and other societal ills because they did not (or rather could not) arrest the extended family system's downward trend.

Today, the thought about kins can hardly stop one from being a prostitute or an armed robber. All these are happening, not because, they were so intended but because kins have depreciated in their ability of exercising mutual control over one another.

Though the extended family system has so much dwindled in its influence on members, it still persists to some extent in Igbo land. Thus, the elders of an extended family can still settle disputes between relatives while the less-to-do can still live among his kinsmen that are better-to-dos. Dowries are still paid to relatives of the girl being married. The point of emphasis here is that while some of the influences of the extended family system have completely collapsed, others have diminished in their severity and actuality. However, none of these changes have completely eroded Igbo traditional values and customs, particularly the extended family relationships. The causes for these large scale depreciations in the influences of the extended family system are not farfetched.

THE FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST THE IMPACTS OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM

According to Owumi and Awa (2007) the drop in the impacts of the kins is geared by conflicts of institutions like religion, social mobility. Individualism and anomie. Such forces of mobility like mercantilism, industrialism, political centralization and freedom of movement accorded by modern democracy, have all combined to infringe the extended family system. Trend keeps the merchants constantly on the move affording him minimum time to intimate himself with his kinsmen. Industrialism keeps the industrialist captive in his industrial site while political centralization is an evolved means of sustaining some form of societal administration. A person moves because he has the freedom to move. Mobility therefore reduces the intimacy which would have been enjoyed by members of the family. With several groups of the same kinship holding unto different religious belief, there is bound to be a dilution in the influence of kins if not its total breakdown. Religion projects into life after death and as such people do not as a rule play with it. Individualism accords one greater legal and moral autonomy and as such freedom minded elements have opted for that pattern of life as opposed to the kinship system. According to Akanle (2007) Anomie explains the fall in standards of the extended family system due to differences in moral values of individuals. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand, as such you do not expect the extended family system to remain luxuriant with several members holding to different views of life as afforded them by their different fields of endeavour.

Relatives are separated by far geographical distances in their search for education and comfortable employment. With this separation, one's closeness with the newly born members of the system is only imaginary- never real. At times, these relatives marry in the far away country and so imbibe foreign culture that they either forget their own or consider them inferior to their newly acquired cultures. This is one of the ills of modernization.

According to Iffili and Ezeah (2004), the white colonialists do not believe in the extended family system and by their indoctrination and imitation by the Igbos, the impacts of the extended family system have been eroded. Thus, the advent of the whites shifted tendency from extended family system towards nuclear family.

Also, some of predicaments of the Nigerian civil war were to make those previously rich poor and those previously poor rich. It therefore removed the financial influence of some and established that of others. This turn of events produced a lot of negative consequences that deflated the effects of the extended family system.

According to Aniche and Onyia (2008), Modern economic system in Igbo land and attendant hardship occasioned by scarcity of resources are among the factors that disintegrate the extended family system. In Nigeria where the Igbo live, there is high cost of living due to government measures. This leaves the worker with small real income and poor cash reserves to allow him to even cater for his immediate family not to talk of hundreds of kins all around.

Also the prevailing hardship in the country where the Igbo live had necessitated freezing of employment and retrenchment at times. The influence these retrenched workers could have been exerting due to their position is now diminished since they no longer supports anybody financially.

Included in the factors that erode the extended family system according to Okeke (2001), are modernization and urbanization. Urbanization carries with it, a cross breed of cultures as a result of various peoples of divergent cultural background coming together to

work, live and interact in the urban centres, these new cultures due to modernization and urbanization tend to dilute the tenets of the extended family system.

Other psychological factors like jealousy, selfishness, ungratefulness and insincerity also contribute to the dwindling influence of the extended family system.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE DWINDLING INFLUENCES OF THE EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM

According to Iffih and Ezeah (2004), due to the dwindling in the influence of the extended family system people derive fewer (than adequate) amount of advice from relatives before they take to such issues as marriage. Such marriages that lack experienced advice usually end in illegitimacy, annulment, separation, divorce, desertion and internal dissolutions.

In this way both God and man are wronged for God forbids divorce (except for marital unchastity) while man's social standards are diluted to the social actuality of numerous illegitimate children.

Such bastards (in the absence of paternal care and guidance) will now grow up to become such behavioural deviants and delinquents, drug addicts and sex scandals because they are looking for sense of belonging and participation where they can never find them.

Since increasing deviance tend to dilute social perception and sensitivity to problems, it follows that our Igbo society would someday equalize America's, million annual abortion record due to lose living because there is no effective social reactionary force like the extended family system to inhibit such works of the devil.

According to Ugwuanyi (2013), the fact that the extended family system has so much dwindling in its influence of sustaining reputation by visiting deviants with strict taboos and sanctions have allowed women and women to develop into armed robbers and prostitutes because they see no institution powerful enough to stop their nefarious activities. There are police and there are courts granted, but the problems of these people are more soluble through re-orientation and re-socialization than through corporal punishment of the law enforcement agencies.

This slack in sustaining reputation also explains why some that are supposed to be mothers not only tolerate their daughters being fornicators but also condone and approve of their seduction. Such repulsive domestic malfesance would have been positively warded off by a will established and functional extended family system.

Conclusion

Kinship provides the framework of social relationship. Kinship bonds are very strong among the Ndi Igbo. As society has changed, so the functions required of the kinship/extended family system have necessarily changed. Kinship/extended family system among the Ndi Igbo must change to adapt to changes in other social institutions. Despite all the changes in the kinship/extended family system, it will remain viable unit in our Igbo society. It will continue to play a crucial role in modern society.

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