

# CHAPTER SIX

## INTERGENERATIONAL FAMILIES AND NIGERIAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### INTRODUCTION

The family is undoubtedly the building block of society. Every identifiable community in Nigerian begins on the nuclear and lineage basis and matures into an identifiable community (Modo, 2016). Most Nigerian and African families are patrilineal and marriage stability is mostly associated with this cultural family system. According to Max Gluckman in his Divorce hypothesis (Gluckman, 1953), the patrilineal family system witnesses a fewer marriage divorces than the bilateral and matrilineal family systems. This is because of the inbuilt cultural norms of genitricial and uxorial rights, a cultural system that has become intergenerational. The family types in the patrilineal system depend on the socio-cultural system adopted by each cultural group. The nuclear family naturally increases to compound as husband takes more wives and ultimately to joint family system as children get married and dwell beside the epic ancestor patrilocally (Modo, 2016). This socio-cultural structure in three generations becomes an indelible lineage which when this ancestral tree becomes hazy because of several generations and as epic ancestors' descriptions almost fease into the thin air, we talk of clans and even moiety. A typical illustration of this could be found in figure 1 as Appendix I. The structure and functions of the intergenerational family mature ongoing depending on the unique cultural system and the deepened enculturation. This issue has been addressed in the traditional marital arrangements and processes in Nigeria (Modo, 1999).

The issue of family development in Nigeria should be taken seriously considering the fact that the family is the building block of society. The problem of family development in a post-colonial Nigeria is the problem of competing acculturated diffused non-indigenous educational system which the new generations of adults and youths believe is the way forward. These are the extraneous variables that mostly conflict with the traditional educational methods in homes and work places (Fafunwa, 1976).

When the new received family growth system and the accompanying educational methods eclipse the enculturated family indigenous educational and industrial system there is bound to be a problem. Can Nigeria afford to marry both cultures effectively without having a hybrid system that negates what Nigerian family system should ideally be? It is true that no generation comes up exactly like the previous generation especially since there are seemingly different cultural influences but should the differences be such that the Nigerian society loses its cultural foothold? The human factor analyses of human kindness, love, hardwork, ethics, marriage stability, family stability, lineage cohesion, are being sacrificed at the altar of acculturated modernization. The goal of this work is to see whether the family system in the different generations has persisted and developed for younger generations to share equitably from the development identity.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This paper takes the underdevelopment paradigm as the point of departure for this work. The Liberal scholars such as Nurke (1953), Easterlin (1981) conceive of underdevelopment in terms of backwardness and primitivity. The underdeveloped parts of the world especially Africa are seen by Europe as agrarian and pre-industrial. They see underdevelopment as a natural and original condition which has existed for centuries. They did not see underdevelopment in Africa as caused by external factors such as slave trade, colonialism and imperialism but as caused by internal cultural factors. These factors make them to be culturally and psychologically inferior and are also responsible for their state of backwardness.

Easterlin (1981) sees underdevelopment as being occasioned by climate, overpopulation and lack of motivation on the part of the populace. To these-bourgeois scholars underdevelopment is a natural state of social, psychological, political and economic backwardness occasioned by natural and internal inadequacies. They therefore see the way out of these underdevelopment as modernization which is embracing American or European economic model in order to stimulate growth and progress.

To the Marxist (Radical Scholars) it is not correct to say that underdevelopment connotes backwardness or primitivity or lack of development. To them underdevelopment is a man-made process and a manifestation of the long period of relationship between those underdeveloped countries and the advanced industrialized parts of the world. The proponents of this thesis include Gunder Frank, Osvaldo Sunkel, Walter Rodney et cetera. These scholars contend that underdevelopment is the state of backwardness, retardation and economic distortion caused by the exploitation and plunder of the economies of the underdeveloped areas as a result of their integration into world capitalism.

The knowledge of underdevelopment gives an opening into what is called the Third World. The characteristics of this Third World include high birth rate, meager rate of capital formation, poor communication network, high illiteracy rate, low status of women and political authoritarianism (Okereke and Ekpe, 2010). The developed countries see underdeveloped countries as nations that should be civilized, thus bombarding the nations with acculturative lectures in education, agriculture, technology and aesthetic values, thus changing the culture of new generations thus making Nigeria a society in a state of flaws.

## **Literature Review**

Britain came to Nigeria to colonise and rule through setting up structures that function more like their home states than African or Nigerian cultural system. However, Ijomah (2011) sees the emergent colonial society as an aggregate of disparate tribal bands held together by a superior transcendental authority of the colonial power. Common opposition to foreign domination leads this band of erstwhile different and warring tribes to perceive themselves as one and to mobilise, their differences notwithstanding in order to free themselves from colonial domination. Fafunwa (1974) argued that the traditional education in Nigerian family was disjuncted through the introduction and reinforcement of modern education system; which became fashionable till date. Modo (2016) further argued that the introduction of English language as a language of interaction further eroded cultural systems in Nigeria for language is a vehicle for transmitting culture. The legal system; work and its ethics created further polarization of society and created new crimes that never existed while old crimes were referred to their customary courts, while new features of unemployment not known in traditional society emerged (Modo, 2016).

Going back to the basics, Fafunwa (1974.73) said “with the transfer of educational authority from state to church the curriculum was changed both in nature and purpose. The ultimate reason for any form of education was the advantage it brought to the faith. The typical man of learning was no longer the cultivated man of affairs but the educated clerk and the secular business of society which required the highest learning for its performance fell as a matter of course into the hands of church men. The church monopoly of education lasted for more than a thousand years. This had a tremendous

impact on the intellectual life of Europe and America and later on the British colonial territories in Asia and Africa.” With this educational development system in Nigeria, which is termed modern education, the family development pattern was ultimately affected and vigorously transformed to the extent that intergenerational families in Nigeria fell into the Western family type through acculturative practices.

### **The Traditional Intergenerational Family and Changing Family Structure**

Marriage takes place between a man and a woman once their two families agree to the relationship and legalise the deal through bridewealth which Otite and Ogionwo (1979) rightly called a symbolic payment with legal and social implications meant to bring the marriage relationship into a formal-being. This token payment once accepted by the girl’s parents is a means of demonstrating their approval of the new relationship. The family starts off as nuclear in a typical patrilineal setting. The groom and his family admit the wife into their patrilocal residence and the children born belong to the lineage of the husband (with genitricial rights) while the man enjoys the full sexual and other services of the wife (uxorial rights) (Mitchel 1957).

In the event of the demise of a senior brother (number 9) as in figure 1 (Appendix 1), the principle of the solidarity/unity of the sibling group (Radcliffe-Brown 1976) comes into play. The man (number 11) culturally inherits the wife (number 8) in a form of levirate where he (genitor or levir) takes over the dead man’s wife and produces children for the dead man. While the dead man remains the social father (Pater) of the children. This is popular among the traditional Yoruba and Kanuri people (Ahaiwe 1997) for the same sibling and lineage support system the dead man’s wife (number 8) could be taken over in the culture of widow inheritance. In this instance number 8 becomes number 12 and wife of number 11 (Fig.1). This enables the new husband to cater for her and her entire children. This ensures that there is continuity in the sibling and lineage group. However, in Ibibio and Igbo culture, such a widow might also be free to refuse to be inherited for various reasons including her age, the number and ages of her children et cetera (Ahaiwe 1997, Modo, 2016).

The good intentions in the cultural arrangements for the sustainability of Nigerian traditional families as in levirate, widow inheritance, sororate, woman to woman marriage have been ignored and the cultural system looked down upon because of modernity and European laid down acculturations. It has been argued elsewhere that if some of the traditional marriage systems were jettisoned for religious reasons, that would have been understood (Modo, 2023) but the resultant negative human factor problems including immorality, dishonesty, prostitution, ethical problems have brought in family disorganizations. A few examples of family disorganization from imperialism and its control will serve as illustrations as to whether some new generations are a mismatch or not.

### **Imperialism and Received Acculturations**

Imperialism is any relationship of effective domination or control, political or economic, direct or indirect of one nation over another (Okereke and Ekpe, 2010). Elaborating earlier on this, Chilcote (1981) said it involves control and dependence among nations irrespective of whether they are large or small, rich or poor. This relationship has made Africa and particularly Nigeria dependent on the capitalist west; in political, economic, technical and cultural relations as their underdeveloped country. Nigeria borrows from the developed West for even road construction or one subsidy or welfare (Channel, 2023). Nigerian youths (boys and girls) almost walk naked in Nigerian cities wearing imported second hand clothes that are normally worn overseas at Florida or other beaches for swimming and pleasurable sea outings.

It becomes fashionable for Nigerian youths under the influence of cultural acculturation to become homo-sexuals or lesbians and even secretly involve in gay marriages etc. These are no longer foreign influences only but in the main these unknown cultural influences are even enforced by our imperialists or ex-colonial masters. We must appreciate our Nigerian government for living up to expectation in the issue of same-sex marriage. The imperialists’ powers were out to water down our marriage culture and the attendant marriage stability. They had infiltrated the generations of the youths

and some elders with same sex marriage of the English and Western culture. However in January 18, 2007, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) proposed a bill prohibiting same sex marriage and urged the National Assembly to pass it urgently. On January 7, 2014, the Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan signed the same sex marriage prohibition bill into law.

Unfortunately the British Prime Minister's Theresa May during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Westminster on 18th April, 2018 still used her imperialism overtures to ask all commonwealth countries including Nigeria to sign up for same sex marriages in their countries. All known church leaders (Methodist, Anglican, Catholic etc) and Muslim clerics condemned this British attempt to derail our younger generations (Guardian 2018) cultural and ethical uprightness.

## DISCUSSION

The cultural shift from traditional cultural values to colonial and imperial values involves complete transvaluation of values. Education moved from traditional to modern education. English language a vehicle for transmitting English culture came into being. New cultural ways of life, making livelihood and new marriage norms emerged with the concept of modern family. In the traditional cultural system almost everybody was working in one business of the other depending on the environment as a cattle rearer, fisherman, farmer, blacksmith and so on, but from the modern system till now many people remain unemployed (Fafunwa 1957).

With modernity came the problems of single parenthood, poverty, homosexuality infidelity, pressure at workplace, financial problems, job loss, divorce, gambling addiction and internet fraud. For example, many of the cultural issues that levirate or widow inheritance resolved became in the new intergenerational families single parenthood issues. In many instances the young men and women being trained by the single parents become Europeans in character (by acculturation) reporting their mothers to police at will. Some become wayward, flirts even become college dropouts.

The new generations of Nigerian boys and girls in many Nigerian universities became cult members and beyond the control of universities and communities. Cult clashes are now normal for youths in communities, secondary and tertiary institutions. Divorce which was very rare in rural, semi-urban and urban areas in Nigeria are the norms now (Modo, 2016). The economic and financial crimes commission formed in 2003 has almost all its Guardrooms filled with young men and at times women of tertiary institutions detained for internet fraud. The authorities go about Nigerian universities warning students duping people (Bawa, 2003).

Murder cases involving husbands and wives which were almost unheard of in the 1960s' are a daily occurrence in the 2020s. According to recent Sahara Reporters, 49 husbands, wives were killed by spouses in 15 months as domestic violence rises in Nigeria. From the cases compiled by Daily Trust out of these, 39 deaths were related to domestic violence while six killed their spouses over allegations of infidelity. Other cases of homicide according to experts are from mental disorder, ritual killings and forced marriages. The latest is the Abuja based gospel artiste, Osinachi Nwachukwu. The Minister of Women Affairs, Pauline Tallen had on live television in April, 2022 painted disturbing situations within the household of Osinachi when she visited the children.

On empirical research on intergeneration families, Akinrolie (2020) examined intergenerational support between older adults and adult children exploring the perception of reciprocity; between older parents and adult children in Northern Nigeria. The older children felt their support of their older adults is less than what they received and have sense of indebtedness. This has implication for sustainable development. Fagbohun (2021) enjoined universities to lead discussion around intergenerational contracts towards addressing contemporary challenges facing Nigeria and Africa by extension.

Fagbohun (2021) further said that wide intergenerational gaps have contributed to the problems facing Nigeria. Each generation has each unique strengths and weaknesses and until cross fertilization of ideas among representatives is done, the country may not be out of the woods. He said that the apprenticeship system of the South East 'Igba boi' where successful Igbo traders go back to their

villages to take young boys to learn their trade is very helpful in closing and helping to reduce intergenerational differences.

Adewumi (1987) observes that in urban areas such as Ibadan the direct relationship between family size of orientation and that of procreation may not always apply because of the use of modern contraceptives and such a change in family size could lead also to a change in family culture. Agupusi (2019) observes through a longitudinal study that the perceptions of an attitude towards education by first parents of each family have a lingering impact on the educational attainment of their first, second and third generations.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The work examines the Nigerian intergenerational family and the ways and means of making a good family sustainable. It looks at the family types, and family theories. Using the methodology of secondary data based on the abundance of literature on Nigerian family, it examines in detail family related cultural policies, the methods of modernization, the effect of enculturation and acculturation and family sustainability measures in the 21st century.

Our main focus is on intergenerational families and Nigerian sustainable development. Can we actually see this present generation as leaving a good generational legacy for the next generation? The colonial affectations have changed our cultural heritage but we cannot even hold fast to a few of the progressive traditions of old in order to bequeath something good to our children. With the present generation that seems to demand immediate gratification it is as if we cannot imagine that a future exists. We need to learn from the past and plan for the future but with our youths focused on internet fraudulent activities for living, domestic violence that ends in homicide, abuse of trust for many in government for quick money society is in a flaw. 'To your tents oh Israel' is not the way-out; and the present developmental focus that is heavily reliant on modern capitalism of the west which is exploitative of our economic endeavours and has subjected us to borrowing from the West could only lead to loss of our cultural identity, so the question is whether this is the legacy to be bequeathed to the next generations in our African humanity.

The intergenerational family structure in Nigeria has been culturally disfigured following the infiltration and diffusion of Western (foreign) so called modernity. For younger generations in Nigeria to have true cultural affiliation and close identity with earlier generations there should be some indigenous cultural reconnections which should involve:

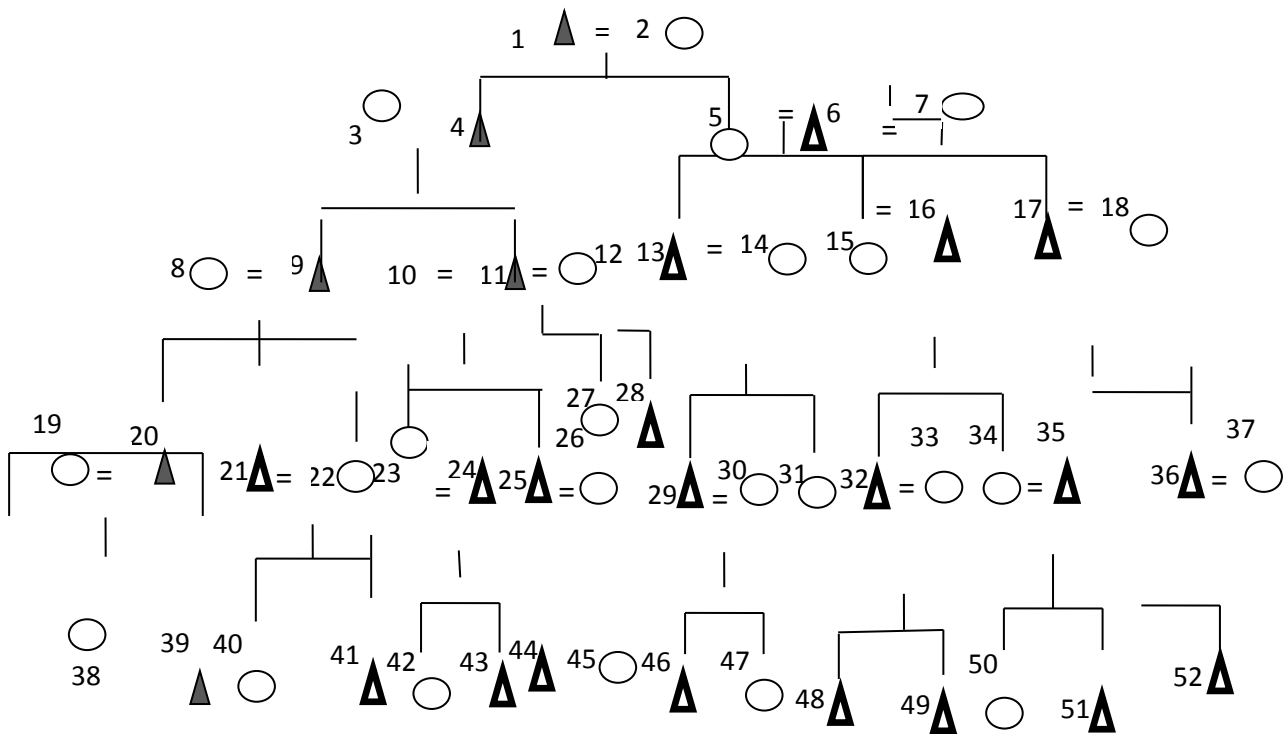
1. Indigenous lineage/cultural and moral revival for respect for the dignity of persons – youths, elders, women and treasurable artifacts.
2. National policy on ethical orientations and dignity for the Nigerian ethnic nationalities to be made as appendage of National Orientation Agency.
3. Defined International Relationship of countries based on dignity of human beings and races and devoid of First, Second and Third World.
4. There is a need for maintenance of Nigerian family identity in the midst of economic down turn and migration *en masse* to other well endowed countries.

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## Appendix 1

**Fig. 1: A Typical Intergenerational Patrilineal Family**



In a typical ideal patrilineal society in Nigeria where families live patrilocally, inheritance is by primogeniture that is why property will be handed down from 1 to 4, 9, 20, 39 in five generations.