THE YOUTH AND THE FAMILY IN TRANSITION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: Since the incorporation of the Nigerian economy into the World Capitalist System, the indigenous social structure was fundamentally restructured. This restructuring was (and is still) affecting the family institution in its performance of the most important task of youth socialization leading to cases of what have been described as child abuse, urban violence, working children and, even, sexually deteriorating/ transmitted infections as a result of irresponsible sexual behavior among the youth. If the situation persists, what are the implications for the future of the individual youth and the family? How can the transition being experienced by the family be controlled to positively influence the future of the youth and, by implication, the society as a whole? This paper attempts to provide answers to these questions.

Keywords: Youth, Family, Nigeria, Transition, SAP

INTRODUCTION

Families are groups related by kinship, residence, or close emotional attachments and they display four systemic features- intimate interdependence, selective boundary maintenance, ability to adapt to change and maintain their identity over time (Mattessich and Hill 1987). The family performs such tasks as physical maintenance, socialization and education, control of social and sexual behavior, maintenance of family morale and of motivation to perform roles inside and outside the family, the acquisition of mature family members by the formation of sexual partnerships, the acquisition of new family members through procreation and/or adoption and the launching of juvenile members from the family when mature. There is, however, the need to be cautious with this definition to maintain a variety of forms. Nonetheless, these are the expected roles of the family in almost all societies, in broad outline. As such, the family has been described as the basic unit of society (Burton and Dilworth-Anderson 1991; Kayongo-Male and Onyango 1984; Otite and Ogionwo 1979). It is seen as the micro-unit from which individuals are produced into the larger society. Consequently, the family takes a central role in the survival of the society as a

whole, both for biological and social reproductions. In these reproductions, the parents, and the extended family members in Africa play important roles since they are expected to know the requisite norms and values for the upbringing of the child. As the children grow up and acquire consciousness through interactions in their social and physical environments, they reach what is generally described as the 'youthful age'. This age is differently structured in different societies though it seems to range between 12–25 or 35 years or it may, as with the United Nations, begin at 18 and end at 24. This, according to Waswa (2002: 8), is the stage for "energy, creativity, and great expectation for the future". Indeed, as observed in the OUTLINE of the 'working tool' to guide the World Bank's WDR research team in its reflection, consultation and analysis of the theme of "Development and the Next Generation"' for the WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2007, it is of utmost importance to consider the well-being of the young people as the next generation of workers, entrepreneurs, household heads and community or national leaders both for their own future, for overall poverty reduction and growth, and the realization of about four of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which directly relate to the outcomes for young people. The document is also concerned about the possible negative consequences of the inability of the youth to realize their expectations. Ironically, however, the paper does not concern itself with the contributions of the family towards achieving these goals, perhaps, under the assumption that, "…as young people age, they begin to be affected by wider contexts, such as global trends, sub-national governments or peers" (*http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2007/Resources /WDR_2007_October_27_outline_3.pdf* accessed 6 February, 2006). Yet, it is clear that the socio-economic status of parents have direct influence on youth exposure.

Indeed, the pivotal roles played by the family over the years in the socialization of the young have changed as the Nigerian society transits from its communal nature to the modernist forms; this is not unconnected with the market economy based on the ultimate aim of profit maximization. With this, from the colonial period and the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Program in the 1980s, the ability of the family to perform its roles has been undermined. With knowledge, from the formal educational system being one of the new factors of production, preparing the young people for the market economy, informal education, championed by the indigenous/traditional family, is relegated to the background (Sgritta and Saporiti 1989). This is, perhaps, what informed why the above research document, the publication of results of which is expected in September 2006, is only interested in:

> The transition from school
> The transition to a healthy lifestyle
> The transition to work
> The transition to family formation
> The transition to citizenship.

Interestingly, the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations had shown, almost two decades ago, that there is a need to consider the link between the youth and the market, the family as it is faced, in developing countries, with poverty, low levels of education, poor health and nutrition, inadequate housing and sanitation, unsupervised and unwanted children and increasing

female-headed households among the poor. In other words, the socio-economic and health status of the family cannot be dissociated from the ability of the youth to transit to and from school to a healthy life, work, family formation and citizenship. Unfortunately, this dissociation has persisted as the family transits and the youth are negatively affected. This is further enunciated in the following sections of the paper with particular emphasis on Nigeria.

In doing this, the paper uses the structural dependency theory to explain how the Nigerian social structure was (and is still being) dislocated through the incorporation into the World Capitalist System. Within this theoretical framework, through a top-bottom change in the educational and economic institutions, other social institutions were (and are still being) modified to depend on imported ways of life, often described as modernization, and the resulting 'underdevelopment' of the indigenous social structure exacerbates what is now defined as 'social problems'. Ironically, the argument is always that such are the expected consequences of 'development'. What is further recommended is more dosage of structural dependencies for the underdeveloped nations to 'catch up' with the developed ones!

PRE-COLONIAL FAMILY AND CHILD SOCIALIZATION IN NIGERIA

Like most of its West African counterparts, the Nigerian family prominently featured the extended family network comprising of both the biological parents, the children and other members related to them through kinship, residence, or close emotional attachments. Though essentially patriarchal, with patrilocal residence pattern, the socialization of the child was the role of the eldest women either as grandmothers, mothers-in-law or the first wife. As such, age was central in delineating status position in pre-colonial Nigerian setting (Olutayo 1996). The 'head' woman, as described by Phillot-Almeida (2005), apportions domestic tasks, sets disciplinary standards and codes of behavior for the younger women's compliance as well as adjudicating in conflict situations among women of the household within which she resides. She assigns household chores such as cleaning for the children; running errands for boys; market purchasing for wives – in rotation – and teenage girls; child minding to grandmothers and elder sisters when mothers are out to work in subsistence farming. Food production was a collective responsibility for matured women and teenage daughters. Water and firewood fetching were almost exclusively the responsibility of women and their daughters. Boys, especially from about the age of seven, assist the father in his profession –mostly farming – and so comes under the direct control of the father to imbibe 'masculine' attributes. Though the females did some farming, the males were often the owners of the means of survival – land – held 'in trust' for the whole of the extended family who cultivate the land with women having 'indirect access' (Olutayo 2005). Since the land was cultivated with 'simple' means of labor, many hands were needed for maximal cultivation of land and this might have enhanced the prevalence of polygyny – which ensured the availability of labor – children and the wives (themselves considered as 'property') (Olutayo 1994).

In short, the participation of all on the farm and the household was part of the socialization process equipping would-be adult members of future families, as procreators, with the ability to provide for their families. The community survival for today and the future, therefore, rested on the adequate socialization of the child. It is, however, important to note that the female children were not only socialized to become 'housewives', but actively participated in the political and economic activities of the community (Raji 1998). Indeed, women took part in decision-making processes and settled disputes. They engaged in trade which was an important source of wealth creation and status enhancement. Nonetheless, such participations were often possible because there was, what Nnaemeka (1998) referred to as, "multiple and collective parenting". In other words, the upbringing of the child, being located in the center of communal life, was both the responsibility of the biological parents and the community.

In addition to the bond of unity and cooperation articulated in the extended family, the age grade groups also provided common fronts for the actualization of goals and expectations of societies and their members. Therefore, membership of age-grade was, more or less, compulsory for both old and young. Each group was homogenous on the basis of age and sex (often four-year interval), giving 'voice' to what obtained at the household level – as shown above. Each group had a specific task to perform for the sustenance of the society while they also served as pressure groups whose opinions could not be brushed aside by the political class (Okome 2000).

The youthful age groups were given the most assiduous tasks to accomplish ranging from policing, soldiering, clearing and maintenance of roads, and so on. The adult members, on the other hand, were considered the reservoir of knowledge and wisdom about societal norms. It is therefore their responsibility to ensure compliance to socially constructed expectations. Nonetheless, both the elders and /or the youth may deviate from performing their expected roles. They are also corrected by other groups, including women groups and religious authorities. Through these there were checks and balances, even for the eldest and the most powerful groups. It is important to observe, however, that compliance with norms and values was not 'perfect'. This explains the deviations from norms leading to conflicts that existed in these societies. Sometimes, such conflicts/wars resulted in dissociations and the formation of new settlements (Coutsoukis 2004). Even within such conflicts/wars were the creations of new social formations which were independent of 'foreign' influence. Conflicts/wars were, more or less, issues within the social and physical environment of the peoples. The resulting structural dependency from contact with the capitalist economy, foreign to the survival of these peoples, was (and is still being) created through colonial and neo-colonial policies manifesting as underdevelopment and social problems continue to escalate. We shall further discuss these processes in the next section to which we now turn.

COLONIAL AND NEO-COLONIAL FAMILY STRUCTURE
AND THE YOUTH

The popular *Scramble for Africa*, leading to the *Berlin Conference of 1885,* was a result of competition for space as areas of influence in Africa, among Europeans, within which they could institute their own rules regarding new ways of life peculiar to the colonizing nations. As a result of this competition and *scramble*, what was uppermost in the activities of the colonizers was not the recognition of the existing social structures and ways of life (Onu n.d.; Paracka 2001) but the necessity to acquire raw materials for their industries. Thus, the political institution that best suited each colonizing nation was established either as direct or indirect rule. This was inherited after independence in form of top-bottom approach to development. Central to these systems of governance was the economic necessity of ensuring the provision of labor to work on the farms and government establishments. Thus, a tax system was enforced – with the introduction of European (now national) currency – to ensure that the neo/colonized peoples produce for the market. Such productions for the market, though in its incipient stages in most of pre-colonial Nigeria (Olutayo 1999b), were to make raw materials available for the European industries. As such, the more the taxes levied, which has to be paid individually rather than communally, the more the farmer has to produce. Especially with the subordination of indigenous industries, farmers now have to rely on imported hoes and cutlasses, the prices of which were fixed by the European traders who control both the shipping and the money-market (Olutayo 1991). Increasingly, therefore, farmers (and former blacksmiths, iron miners and so on) have to farm more land and 'cash crops' thus de-emphasizing food production but also fundamentally destabilizing the family structure.

With 'cash-crops', the family farm was de-emphasized, especially with the introduction of new farming techniques, the knowledge of the application of which has to be acquired through the European form of education. Indeed, the acquisition of this education, since the colonial period, has become the most important means for status enhancement (Okrah n.d). And this was mainly promoted by the Christian missionaries, to the detriment of Islamic education, valuing western academic standards and Christian character. Consequently, African culture is alienated and the traditional and political elite ostracized. Indeed, the newly educated were (and, perhaps, still are) much more familiar with European and American ways of life than with the history and cultures of indigenous ethnic groups. Embedded within this new form of education is the fact that certificates acquired are only for the individual – even if the individual is communally sponsored. And salaries/wages equivalent to the certificate are limited to the valuations of the establishment. So, apart from the recommendation of one-man-one-wife by the Christian missionaries, the wages earned are, hardly enough for the man/woman and not for producing children who are no longer needed as 'helping hands' or the extended family members who may have contributed to the individual's education. From the mid-1980s, therefore, children have been seen as economic burden (Caldwell and Caldwell 2002). The acceptance of monogamy has been on the increase and, because of economic difficulties faced by many parents and the high rate of unemployment among young school leavers, there

are inhibitions on parents' control over daughters who choose to become prostitutes (Orubuloye et al. 1997). It is not therefore surprising that the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has continued to increase as school-girls now need to secure money for school fees from other sources rather than their parents (Caldwell et al. 1993).

The breakdown of the extended family structure within which all the members of the community were communally parented and the slow but gradual movement towards the 'western nuclear family model' (Babatunde 1992; Otite 1991) has largely contributed to the emerging trends of systemic source of working children (Olutayo 1994); the involvement of the youth in crime (both in rural and urban areas) (Olutayo and Okunola 1998; Olutayo 2006); and so many 'social problems' for which the nation is described as being 'underdeveloped' and unstable.

With the increasing sense of individuality, the ownership of the object of production has also become personalized. Against the earlier practice wherein families controlled land, privileged members of the society simply lay claim to land, due to their knowledge and access to government, in order to secure ready access to property. The wrangling that followed is simply referred to courts of law occupied by their co-elites. And with extensive resources to prosecute such cases, elites end up acquiring land at the expense of the original owners (Onoge 1990). Still, at other instances, local producers are simply bought off their land by the better-endowed elite resulting in landlessness and the inability to cater for family members but with great effect on child socialization.

For those who have to secure jobs in urban areas, either as a result of displacement or the need to acquire formal education and the attached urban employment – since development is urban-biased – it has become inevitable for women to be involved in urban employment. Even though women had been involved in trade in pre-colonial economy, the 'house-wifization' in the colonial economy limited their relevance (Olutayo 1999a). In the pre-colonial economy, however, the involvement of women in trade and politics was safeguarded by the fact that their roles in child socialization were undertaken by the other members of the family, including other wives. Indeed, women in long-distance trade even encourage their husbands to marry other wives or they marry the wives for the husbands. These women were (and still are) expected to take care of their children for them (Olutayo 2005). Women in formal employment and monogamy however need to employ house-helps who are now responsible for the socialization of the children. And it is the values of the house-helps that are transmitted to the children. Children are also made to start school as early as age three, even with the families' low-income, thus transferring the socialization of children to schools. At the schools, children are mainly taught 'imported' values and norms which the parents are, more or less, made to imbibe. These 'imported' values emphasize competition, technical skills, and individuality whereas the pre-colonial family relied on social skills and group collaboration.

The effects of increasing individuality, as earlier alluded to, has had untold effects on the family and its ability to perform its roles. The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), with its emphasis on liberalization and privatization; export-led growth; the efficiency of the free market; and deep cuts in education, health and social care

budgets; and the removal of subsidies designed to control prices of basics which the poor need most, the Nigerian family has had to cope under intolerable conditions in socializing the youth. The continuous encouragement of the farmers to produce and export primary products, such as cocoa, coffee, rubber, and so on, to earn foreign exchange has been mostly unpredictable so much that farmers cannot plan for future productions (The World Bank 2003). In so far as they cannot plan for future productions, their inability to cater for their children is further compounded with the decreasing allocations to educational and health institutions as well as lack of social infrastructures to, among others, transport their produce to the market. It is not therefore surprising that protests and demonstrations have been the main features in the Nigerian economy since the 1980s, undertaken mainly by workers and the youth. Indeed, the closures of tertiary institutions due to these demonstrations have been a major characteristic of these institutions in Nigeria. Not only have the infrastructures in these institutions deteriorated, less than 20% of those seeking admission are admitted (Jegede 2000) and the unemployment rate has been on the increase (*http://hdr.undp/reports/global/2002/en/pdf/cmplete.pdf* accessed 29th November, 2005; Olukoshi 1996).

The burden of ensuring the survival of the children has weighed heavily on the parents where their children cannot secure admission and those that do, if they complete successfully, are not sure or cannot even secure a job. There is, thus, a disjuncture not only between the educational and the economic institution – which the forthcoming World Development Report 2007 intends to examine – but, first, a disjuncture between the family and the educational institution. The form of education being offered has no relationship with the family/community and, unfortunately, the new economic institution grafted on the family and the educational institutions cannot be sustained. Due to the disjuncture between the family and the educational institutions, the socialization processes in the latter is equally unsustainable! In other words, as the family transits from polygynous, extended and its structurally necessitated socialization of the child based on the communal economy, to the monogamous, nuclear and individualized socialization practices located outside the family and conditioned by the capitalist economy, structural instabilities have emerged manifesting in form of what has been watered down and labeled 'social problems' – perceived as 'issues' that are inevitable in 'modernizing societies' – thus recommending palliative measures rather than a fundamental transformation of the existing social structure. The alienation of the system of education from the people's own cultural values and practices is what Okrah (n.d) referred to as 'academic colonialism' or what, one may assert, has led to, not just academic dependency, but structural dependency.

While it is true that the present Nigerian social structure is largely rural with agriculture occupying 70% of the population (CIA 2006), the breakdown of the communal arrangement is on the increase as rural-urban migration increases and the family becomes incapacitated increasingly. Even with the urban-rural remittances, the ability of families to cope is reducing significantly as their independence is being eroded, both through the remittances (Phillot-Almeida 2005) and increasing constraints to farm on small farm size. Women and the poor are most easily affected in

the 'survival of the fittest' imminent in the Structural Adjustment (Tsikata 1995). Consequently, the capacity to properly socialize the youth decreases. This further deteriorates as they also become independent of the family earlier than normal. The school now socializes them but the inability of the school to relate them to their environment and integrate them into the economic and political institutions has continued to negatively affect their welfare and that of the future generations. Future generations because adolescent pregnancy, unsafe abortions and drug use are on the increase. The increasing use of drugs may not be unconnected to Nigeria being a "transit point for heroin and cocaine intended for European, East Asian, and North American markets" (CIA 2006).

THE FAMILY AND YOUTH IN TRANSITION: WHICH WAY?

Truly, individualism, as reflected in a structurally dependent economy with large rural agricultural base, seems to pose great danger for the individual, the family and the whole society. It may, however, be practically impossible to revert to the communal system for as long as the free-market economy prevails. Nonetheless, there is a way through which the ills of capitalism may be brought to the barest minimum, even with socialization techniques relevant to the social structure.

It is the roles of the parents and the emergent social institutions either as educational, care centers or givers, to ensure the inculcation of social skills and group collaboration even within the competitive environment. In other words, the skills to be inculcated into the youth at both family and educational institutions should be that which take cognizance of the relevance of such skills to societal survival. As such, the environmental circumstances are taken into consideration, including the socio-cultural values of the community. Thus, the youth is taught to understand the immediate environment, exploit it and invent instruments of production required for survival within that environment. This is, therefore, a 'problem-solving approach' to development. It is within this process that independent development becomes feasible rather than the dependent development which Nigeria, and, indeed, most of the so-called 'developing' societies are implementing. Secondly, the development of such skills should encourage group collaboration within which pupils are encouraged to 'compete' in groups rather than as individuals. These 'competitions' can also be organized at community levels in solving environmental problems. As the youth grow to become leaders and policy makers in their respective societies, they will initiate and implement policies that would enhance the survival of the majority and the community as a whole.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The family, though it can be described as a universal institution, each society possesses its own varying features based on cultural norms and values. For this reason, different forms of family have evolved in response to the challenges posed by the

social and physical environments within which they have found themselves. Thus, due largely to industrialization, the European family evolved the nuclear family type and the consequent socialization practices developed from within this social formation. For the Nigerian societies, on the other hand, the communal family system seems to be an enduring feature, informed by the need to survive in a largely agrarian environment.

It was, in its pure form, a system which emphasized universal access to both the object and means of labor. Self-consciousness was towards working to produce surplus for oneself, members of one's immediate family, defined in broad terms thus including groups related by kinship, residence, or close emotional attachments displaying systemic features of intimate interdependence; selective boundary maintenance; ability to adapt to change and maintain their identity over time; and performance of family tasks such as physical maintenance, socialization and education, control of social and sexual behavior, maintenance of family morale and of motivation to perform roles inside and outside the family, the acquisition of mature family members by the formation of sexual partnerships, the acquisition of new family members through procreation or adoption, and the launching of juvenile members from the family when mature.

The incorporation into the World Capitalist Economy through imperialism, slave trade and, with increasing competition for new sources of raw materials in Europe, colonialism fundamentally affected the above arrangement without relevance to the social and environmental circumstances of the people. Colonialism is an economic system involving the exploitation of a weaker country or vulnerable group of people by a stronger power. The exploitation is effected through the subordination of the structures of the weaker country or peoples and the replacement with whatever the colonizing nation deems fit. The Nigerian experience, like its most African counterparts, was the subordination of the social structure to the colonial economy through a dependent economic institution into which access is gained mainly through the acquisition of 'western-styled' education. It is this education that is expected to integrate the individual into the economic and political institutions. In this process however, education dissociates the individual from the larger family thus creating a more or less individualistic person with technical skills and ways of life that can only subsist independent of the larger family. Unfortunately, the dependent nature of the economy and its unstable nature – being confined to the production of raw materials – is making it difficult for the individual who is, thus, torn between two 'worlds', especially because the education/knowledge for survival is, itself, foreign-dependent and thus unsustainable!

With the undermining of the indigenous family structure and the dissociation of the economy from family survival, through the creation of formal education, the socialization and other roles of the family, as described above, was transferred outside the family and to the increasingly nucleated family system. The inability of the latter to properly socialize the youth is informed by the inability to cope with the unstable and dependent economic and political dilemma within which it is located. Thus, the recurring social dislocations manifesting in various forms such as, in the main, the problems of transitions from the educational to economic and political institutions.

Empowering and strengthening the family, it is believed, is fundamental to societal survival. Yet, while it is almost impossible to instill the earlier communitarian values, the capitalist policies can be better implemented for positive effects where social skills and group cooperation are basic. Social skills can be created by encouraging, in both the educational and family institutions, the youth to engage in the studying of the environment within which they live. Through these studies, they would be able to understand their environment and create/invent instruments relevant for survival within such environments. Such studies are to be undertaken through group 'competitions'. This is to reduce the effects of the 'survival of the fittest' thesis. With this, all are interested in the survival of all.

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