

The Strength of African Culture in Managing Family Crisis in a Globalized World

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Abstract

We live in a world that is overrun with family problems. It is important to find out how family members perceive such problems culturally and how we perceive them in the modern sense. Through modern changes in this globalized world, the African traditional setting or ways of managing crisis cannot remain intact, but they are by no means extinct. In times of crisis they often come to surface or people revert to them in secret. The question is what are the coping strategies which families adopt while facing social problems which needed to be overcome? Scholars of the family know that traditional values in Africa are primarily not for the individual but for his family and community of which he is part. In other words there are no persons that are without a family. Members live in kinship adhering strictly to the norms and values of their family and the society at large. To be regarded in high esteem among Babur-Bura, one must share in the beliefs and participate in cultural practices such as ceremonies, rituals, festivals of joy or suffering. For these reasons, one cannot afford to exist without the family/community. A person cannot detach himself from the beliefs of his/her culture.

By implication, to do so, is to sever from his/her roots, his/her foundation, his/her context of security, his/her kinship and the entire group of those who make him/her aware of his/her own existence. Unfortunately, today there are many sources of severe trauma or dislocations for the African families. Some of the sources could be attributed to incessant conflicts, drought, flood, rural-urban migration, urbanization, industrialization, death, divorce, famine, epidemics, locust invasion and western education attainment among others. The Babur-Bura families are not immune to these challenges. As a result of this interference many families and individuals become detached from their traditional setting/environment. In these circumstances, modernity does not seem to remove the sense of frustrations and uprootedness in the life of the African. What people do in such a situation of disenchantment is motivated by what they believe, and what they believe springs from what they do and experience. So then beliefs and actions in Babur-Bura traditional families cannot be separated, but they belong to a single whole. This paper looked at the real ingredients how African families cling to or embrace cultural practices for survival during adversities. The type of catastrophe mentioned often evokes a revival of their religious activities or innovation of new ones. Specifically, this paper identified and examined the Babur-Bura cultural coping strategies such as fellowship, Lineage marriage, Religion, Story-telling and Group-co-operative farming. These values are strongly influenced by the power of culture and they may or may not be in conformity with the western beliefs which are dominated by a linear perspective linked to the theory of modernization. African traditional beliefs on the other hand are characterized by a circular viewpoint and moral values for fellowship. Our approach is chiefly descriptive and interpretive, bringing together in a comparative way those elements which are representative of traditional coping strategies the Babur-Bura ethnic group.

Keywords: Coping Strategy; Family; Culture; Globalized World; Crisis

Introduction

The family in every human society has often been regarded as the cornerstone of society both in pre-modern and modern societies. It has also been seen as the most basic unit of social organization and one that carries out vital tasks especially those that have direct bearing with human basic needs. Murdock [1] in his work "Social Structure" examined the family in the wide range of society as he sampled 250 societies ranging from small hunting and gathering bands to large scale industrial societies, and concluded that the family is universal. He therefore defined family as 'a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and production. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, owned or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults. Most important to know is the fact that all family members are related by blood.

The major functions of the family centered on four major issues which are sexual, reproduction, economic, and education. The family has always served as the base for the development of human personality

and culture through socialization. The fact that the family is universal and, has origin in marriage, the issue of family crises should never be seen as peculiar to African family but all families the world over [2]. This paper examines the beliefs, customs, traditions social and religious values of the Babur-Bura ethnic group in the North Eastern part of Nigeria to corroborate the subject under discussion. Assessing the impact of globalization on the African culture with particular reference to the Babur-Bura ethnic group, one would agree to some extent that

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globalization has impact on the political, economic, education and religious structures of the Babur-Bura. Many scholars and opinion leaders have express divergent views as to whether such impacts are positive or negative. Some see it as negative, to some is positive while others see it as being both positive and negative [3]. In this paper, with focus on the strength of the African culture in managing crisis in the globalised world, the nature and extent of cultural norms and values of the Babur-Bura have slightly been modified or rather diffused with western culture. However, the term globalization may mean different things to different people. To Ogoko [4], the term globalization refers to the aggregation of compliant nation of the world into a community wherein their territorial boundaries are dissolved into ideological insignificance, while retaining their political sovereignty as independent nations. Nsibambi [5] defined globalization as a process of advancement and increase in interaction among the world countries and people, facilitated by progressive technological changes in locomotion, communication, political and military power, knowledge and skills, as well as interfacing of cultural values systems and practices. Globalization in this paper refers to a process of cultural diffusion. In other words, diffusion is a language that qualifies globalization which its seeds were sown in the desire of man to seek knowledge which is typical to what people like Christopher Columbus, Mungo Park, Richard Lander and Vasco Dagama did to discover that there are other lands occupied by people of different cultures. New inventions such as the use of satellite, mobile telephone and television have fasten cultural diffusion among cultures of the world [6].

The Babur-Bura Ethnic Group

The Babur-Bura ethnic group, occupies the rich savannah of preset day southern Borno, part of Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe States, Nigeria [7]. It has variety of climate that is among the better climate in Nigeria. The economy of the region is viable because the vegetation is favorable for the growth of many cash crops such as cotton, pepper, groundnuts and staple food like rice beans, fruits and vegetables. Since pre-modern times, the economic activities of the area have mainly been agriculture. The economy has equally been stable and strong. This earns the Babur-Bura area a special name known as "The food basket of Borno." Although the economy is purely based on agriculture, there are other professional skills like black smiting, hunting, weaving and pottery which the area is also well known for [8]. The family system is still the extended type in spite of their early contact with the Christian missionaries. Consequently this contact with the missions exposed the Babur-Bura to western education earlier compared to other ethnic groups in the area where they cohabit. Perhaps, that informed the reason why the Babur-Bura constituted the larger number of skilled workers in the state civil service, particularly Borno State where majority of the Babur-Bura are found. In spite of their educational attainment, the family unit has not suffered much trauma of family dislocation. The family still remains united in terms of economic and social activities. Likewise, the political and social crises which are inevitable threats to developing societies did not erode away the traditional family value system of the Babur-Bura. Hence the traditional African values which are primarily not individualistic still remain very much intact to some extent both at the family and community levels. In other words, there is no person that is without a family. People are born and live in kinship adhering strictly to the norms and values which are demonstrated by moral behaviour in their families and the society at large. Morality in the Babur-Bura culture is strictly traced to the Supernatural Being (God). What constitute moral behavior among the Babur-Bura cannot be divorced from religion. There are agents of moral implementation which police the responses

of man to the values of the society. Any behaviour that is of standard with the norms and values of the Babur-Bura culture is moral. On the other hand, behaviours that are not in conformity with the Babur-Bura culture are regarded as immoral. The respect which one earns brings dignity to the family and the entire community. Such honours, requires effective participation and involvement in beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, festivals of joy and sufferings. As a result, every individual in Babur-Bura community strive to earn a good name and legacies for the family. Thus, a person cannot detach him/her self from the family as his/her context of welfare, security, economy and education would be at stake. Therefore, socialization depends largely on ones kinship and the entire group(s) of those who make him/her aware of his/ her own existence. This could as well be explained by looking at Taylor's famous work "Primitive Culture" who defined culture as; "That Complex Whole which include knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs and all other capabilities and habit acquired by man as a member of a society". Similarly, Mair shared a common view and defined culture as "the common possession of a body of people who share the same tradition" While, culture according to Ralph [9] is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation". Culture is a complex term to define, perhaps because of its diversity in scope and nature. However, culture could be a compound word that includes norms and values defined by people which makes them live together in a common geographical boundary. Culture is a learned aspect of behaviour that is acquired through natural inheritance. Not only that, it take place by a process of absorption from the social environment with deliberate instruction or through socialization. One simple fact about culture is its dynamic nature. Just as human being changes so also culture changes. Culture according to Fridah [10], is a continuous process of change but in spite of the changes, culture gives a community sense of identity, dignity continuity, security and it binds society together. It is based on these definitions of culture that the Babur-Bura ethnic group has been coping with crises within the family and the wider society for its continuity and survival. In the traditional society women do not run the administration of a family nor live independently but as subordinate to men [11]. All traditional rituals regarding family can only be performed by men and not women [12]. Although the issue of marrying more than one wife contradicts the Christian religion, all aspects and practices of the Christian religion were taught within the African context because there is fellowships in the traditional beliefs [11].

The African Family Experience

Africa is known as a home of cultures, and the beauty of the African cultures is its strength in resolving and managing crises. The rich cultural norms and values that are learnt, absorbed and accepted by members of the society is what kept the society together because without shared norms and values, social life would have ceased. The continuity and survival of the African family in today's globalized world is as a result of some basic coping strategies which they adopted. Africa has so many diverse cultures and traditions, so also coping strategies are used in different ways among the diverse ethnic groups. In view of this, the paper looked at some of the major coping strategies adopted by the Babur-Bura ethnic group which have helped them to survive in this globalized world. The globalized society in which we live has exposed the African family generally to modern changes through education, industrialization, urbanization, wars, conquest, migration, divorce, famine, epidemics, other issues include drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, locust invasion, flood, drought and major changes in weather. According to Ajayi [13], globalization is not a new concept

to Africa. Scholars believed that, there have been three major phases of globalization from 1870-1914, 1945-1980 and 1980 –date. A cursory look at the Babur-Bura cultural practices during the 18th and 19th centuries one would know that in spite of the globalization that brought about cultural diffusion, not much negative changes have been impacted into their cultural practices. However, one cannot deny the fact that the Babur-Bura culture has been diffused with other cultures of the world. To maintain the family unit, some of the major coping strategies includes; fellowship of sharing joy and suffering, faith and hopes that are built on common religious beliefs. These could also include storytelling that share past memories and experiences that provide bundles of knowledge and skills for children as they learn from the stories weakness and strength of others.

The dynamic nature of human society has made changes inevitable, because no society has ever remained static. As such, whenever there is a change, all patterns of human life also change to meet the challenges that come with such changes [14]. What is certain is the fact that human beings finds it difficult to adjust to new changes until over a long period of time. The old pattern of life erodes away slowly as the older people die out. Yet, not all cultural values are eroded by changes because, some society have strong ties with their cultural values just as the Babur-Bura cultural group. In Nigeria for instance, during the 1970s oil boom, the prevalence of poverty, hunger, unemployment ethnicity and corruption were less visible compared to what is obtained today. Education was relatively free, drugs were available in all hospitals, and the spirit of oneness rules the heart of Nigerians. Nigerians were well respected at national and international levels, due to their exhibition of dignity, honesty and other co-family virtues which they were inculcated through socialization.

In spite of the increase in rate of rural-urban migration, jobs were available for those who seek them. The family does not suffer much economic trauma as a result of rural-urban movement by the youth. However, today corruption, poverty, diseases and hunger is ravaging African families (The Babur-Bura inclusive). To curb these problems, Nigeria who is a member of the 189 countries that endorsed the United Nations Millennium Declaration made concerted efforts to achieve this very goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in Africa as stated by the Millennium Development Goals End Point Report of 2015. In 2012, it was reduced by 66% [15]. The impact of economic crises has posed a great threat to all nations of the world, even the greatest economies in the world, America. However, the question still remains that, “how is the family being the basic unit of social organization coping with such crises”? As we search for answers to this question, we look at some of the coping strategies of the Babur-Bura Ethnic group.

Babur-Bura Coping Strategies

The following are some of the coping strategies employed by the Babur-Bura group.

- * Fellowship of sharing joy and suffering,
- * Lineage marriage,
- * Religion
- * Story-telling,
- * Group-co-operative farming

Fellowship of sharing joy and suffering

The coping strategy of fellowship of sharing joy and suffering is best exemplified in the death of a member of the family. The fact that

poverty and hunger has posed a great threat to the African family, death of a family member, particularly head of the family or one that has been economically supportive to the family is counted as a double loss. The death of such a person also means the absence of food in the house. Therefore, death creates a situation of panic and social insecurity among family members.

In the typical Babur-Bura community, when such a thing happens people gather around the bereaved, and cry together because it is not only a loss to that particular family but a loss to the entire community. Under normal circumstances a funeral ceremony last for seven days. Throughout the seven days, neighbors, in-laws, friends and sympathisers take care of the bereaved family by providing food, drinks and other needs. The presence of people around the bereaved signifies the spirit of oneness and concern. The presence of the extended family members also reduces the stress and anxiety of the immediate bereaved family. As people also come from far and near and the immediate neighbors assist by providing accommodation and food. In some societies, the presence of many people in the compound or house of the bereaved is viewed or considered as nuisance, but in the Babur-Bura society, the more the number of people staying around the family for a period of seven days the stronger the ties of fellowship. Some of the dominant statements used in condoling bereaved families are expressed this way; *“Take courage he/she has gone to rest forever from the suffering of this world”, “It is his/her time”. “One day, we shall meet again in heaven”. “Our days on earth are numbered by God”, so no one can exceed his/her time”, No one has come to stay but must definitely return to his/her creator” (God) and so on.* It is common to see people sitting in groups according to gender or age where people share stories of different kinds that are pregnant with wisdom and experiences of others which people can learn from for strength during such moments. However, such practice is not common with other cultures. Among other cultures, may only send condolence letter or text messages to the bereaved family. The fellowship of sharing in sufferings is a cultural obligation that comes alive as a civic duty, and it is extended to the sick. In the case of sickness, the Babur-Bura people hardly visit a sick person without bringing something, such as money to support the purchase of drugs needed or fruits, like orange, banana, mango or cooked food which might be the patient’s favorite. A parallel can be found in the Christian belief as it is written that on the “Day of Judgment the Lord Jesus will tell those who failed to visit the sick that “I do not know you” because “I was sick you did not visit me, I was hungry you did not give me food”. Such caring and togetherness expresses how important fellowship is among the Babur-Bura ethnic group, and this has served as one of the special ingredients for helping family members to cope during hard times.

Lineage marriage

Marriage is a union between a husband and a wife, and the family is fundamental to the socialization and development of members within the context of social and moral values. Marriage becomes the basic institution for the establishment of a family. Marriage in all societies has its social and moral code that qualifies its name [16].

When contracting marriage in the Babur-Bura community it usually attract a lot of people. Although it’s a situation of joy, the demands associated with marriage ceremonies places a heavy burden on both the groom’s and the bride’s families as tradition demands certain rituals and obligations from both sides. As people gather to witness the event, so also they extend a hand of fellowship by assisting in areas where it became necessary. For example, all the family members share the responsibilities associated with marriage so that the burden

will not be too much for host family. In most cases, all the family members do contribute raw food items and drinks and the like before the wedding day. By so doing it strengthens the unity of the family. Occasions like this give both men and women the opportunity to interact among themselves and share their personal experiences. These experiences as well help members in their individual coping strategies. At ceremonies or parties couples don't usually sit or stay together. The man joins his fellow men while the woman joins the women's group. The spirit behind this social behavior is simply to expose one's spouse to all kinds of situations so that he/she can prepare him/herself against any unfortunate circumstance like death of a spouse.

Lineage marriage is also known as "wife inheritance" this is commonly practiced among the Babur-Bura people. The practice of lineage marriage is a practice whereby the eldest son inherits his father's younger wife/wives, a younger brother inherits his senior brother's wife/wives, a senior can also inherit the younger brother's wife/wives or any man within the lineage group can inherit the wife/wives of a deceased. The word lineage in this context means a consanguineous unilateral descent group whose members trace themselves from a known common ancestor. A lineage is based on more precise and specific genealogy than a clan, of which it may be a sub-group. A lineage can be patrilineal or matrilineal depending on the society, but for the Babur-Bura people, they are patrilineal because they descend from the father, therefore, the family is ruled with patriarch ideology. Some of the reasons which allow the Babur-Bura to practice lineage marriage are as follows:

- I. Lineage marriage provides adequate social security in the absence of insurance cover for wives and children [17].
- II. Lineage marriage promotes unity among kinship members.
- III. Lineage marriage helps the Babur-Bura ethnic group from disintegrating.

Religion

Religion in the African context refers to the beliefs system of a particular group of people upon which members build common faith and hope. Religion performs a lot of functions in all human society whether traditional or modern as it serves both the individual and the society. Yinger [18] defined religion as "a system of beliefs and practices by which group of people struggle with the ultimate problems of human life". With the above definition, most people see religion in terms of supernatural belief, and this is why Robertson [19] defined religion as "the existence of supernatural being that has the Governing effects on life". In the traditional sense, Durkheim [20] defined religion as a "system of beliefs and practice that worship the spirit of the dead" In Comte's [21] analysis of the three stages of intellectual development in the history of society, the traditional religion could easily be associated to the theological or fictive stage, where natural phenomenon were interpreted in terms of powers exercised by spirits or gods. Parsons [22] argued that religion is the norm provided by the social system that directs human action and controls them. To Karl Marx [23], religion is "The Opium of the Masses". From this point of view, religion is meant to address particular problems that occur in human society, hence the belief that without problems, religion would certainly not be significant in the life of people. Therefore, one cannot underscore the place of religion in all human aspects of the Babur-Bura social settings. For example, let us consider the issue of naming for illustrations purposes. Religion plays a significant role in naming ceremonies such that names are given to portray religious beliefs in God. The meaning attached to names is usually associated with the group's religious belief which is also seen as coping strategy among

the Babur-Bura. It could as well be viewed as reflection and convection among Babur-Bura about the centrality of God in their lives. However, it is against this backdrop that this paper explores some of the popular names that portray this assertion. The name *Hyel* which means "God" is used in many Babur-Bura names to portray God's image and His presence with the bearer of such a name. For example names like "*Hyeladi*" means "there is God", "*Hyelapa-mdahwa*" means "God is not like man", "*Zharakahyel*" means "leave it for God", "*Usakahyel*" means "thanks to God", "*Hyelni*" means "God gave me" and so many names with such roots. When such names are called, the bearer of the name or the people feel much satisfied in their spirit as it gives inner strength. Furthermore, the attributes of God in Babur-Bura buttress that it portrays God Almighty as the maker, the sustainer, the healer, provider, Omniscience, Omnipotent and Omnipresence Super being (*Hyel*). Popular among this, is the acknowledgement when performing incantations/worship of God by regarding Him as *Hyel-Thampram*, meaning, indescribable. *Hyel-Nakapeka* meaning, the living God and what have you. One unique practice which distinguished the Babur-Bura coping strategies among some families is the appointment of a priest in a clan who is vested with the responsibilities of maintaining the clan's oracle. (Oracle in Babur-Bura language is called 'Haptu')

Thus, such oracle becomes the rallying point of a particular clan in the events of distress or even for livelihood.

Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the oldest art forms of stimulating imagination among people who share a common belief, tradition and language. It can come in form of folk tales or riddles but, it all depends on the purpose for which the story is meant for. People of different culture, ages, gender and social background lived and share experiences through storytelling. Oral storytelling is found in civilization, they predate the printed or online. Storytelling is used to explain natural phenomena such as "creation [24]. In the olden days, natural disasters often occur in form of locust invasion, caterpillar, flood and draught which usually resulted in food shortage. Such situations are further exacerbated by insecurity and poor transportation thereby making it difficult to access supplements. To cope with situations, families do resort to storytelling. Storytelling usually comes as folktales or riddles which build a sense of community between the teller and the audience. A typical example is during extreme hunger/severe famine where children hardly understand why food is not available at the time of need. It then becomes necessary for parents to devise coping strategies by reducing the quantity of food served to individual members in the family and the number of times for meals. For example, assuming the family eats three times a day, it will be reduced to one square meal. The breakfast will be delayed till afternoon and the dinner will as well be substituted deliberately with storytelling. In this regard, to create an impression that evening meal is in the process of cooking, parents will put some ordinary stones into a cooking pot unknown to the children and put it on the fire. At this point, the parents will gather the children together and be telling them different stories. This is to divert their attention from expecting the evening meal. As they waited endlessly for the meal, eventually all of them will sleep off till the following morning. This has been a very effective psychological strategy among the Babur-Bura people.

Another storytelling coping strategy that prepares individuals against unforeseen circumstances are also coded and built into stories. A good example of this is a story that portrays Hyena (Hyena is called Mwabul in Babur-Bura language) as a fool while Squirrel (Shar in Babur-Bura language) as a wise animal. Stories that involve Hyena and

Squirrel are common among the Babur-Bura people simply because it has a lot of lessons to learn from. In one of the stories, Hyena is described as an extravagant, lazy, a fool, greedy and ingrate. Because of these traits it is derogatory to be likened to personality of Hyena. People are proud to role-playing squirrel in their dealings with their fellow beings. This storytelling among the Babur-Bura people equips individuals morally, socially, economically, educationally and politically. Indeed, the significance of storytelling among the Babur-Bura people cannot be underscored.

Group cooperative farming

One thing that has remained dominant among the Babur-Bura people for the continuity and as a coping strategy for survival today is "group cooperative farming. The Babur-Bura people are known to be great farmers right from the pre-modern society and what makes it so special is the way farming is being practiced among the youths and young women. They organized themselves into smaller groups called "Young farmers clubs" and "Fellowship of women farmers associations". This cooperative farming has attracted a lot of young graduates who could not lay their hands on any white collar jobs to join them. This has reduced the rate of unemployment among the Babur-Bura youths generally. Making farming as a competitive business, the youths have now expanded their farm lands and introduced new farming methods with improved varieties of crops. Securing loan from the Government and Non-governmental Organizations to boost their productivities remains one of the greatest challenges facing the Babur-Bura farmers. Yet, they keep working hard to sustain both their families and the society at large.

Conclusion

This paper has touched some of the coping strategies found within the Babur-Bura ethnic group namely: fellowship of sharing, lineage marriage, religion, storytelling and group cooperative farming. Our approach is chiefly descriptive and interpretive, bringing together in a comparative way those elements which are representative of traditional coping strategies. This is an area of study which calls for interdisciplinary co-operation between historians, sociologist, anthropologist, and theologians. This paper shares the experiences of one of the ethnic groups of northern Nigeria their coping strategies with other scholars of the family from the African continent, and other international scholars of other continent who might find this data useful for comparative studies of interdisciplinary nature.

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