

A STUDY OF CULTURAL VALUES AND REPORTED CRIME AMONG ETHNICITIES IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study compared cultural values and reported crime among five indigenous ethnic nationalities in Delta state of Nigeria. Values, such as orderliness, hard work, and obedience, facilitate or defacilitate criminality among five indigenous peoples of Delta State. The method of research was ex-post facto, through the technique of content analysis using police, prison records and in-depth interviews with divisional crime officers from the three politically designated senatorial zones in the state. The significant finding showed, among others, that more crimes were committed in the Central and South Senatorial Zones, where the marriage type is polygamous, and much less in the North, where the marriage type is monogamous. This finding and others were situated in the Social Learning Theory through the concept of socialization process by learning and internalizing cultural values of conformity and ritualism in low crime North Senatorial Zone in contrast to innovation, retreatism and rebellion in high crime Delta Central and South Senatorial Zones. Studies reviewed corroborated these findings. It was recommended that mass media campaign to reconstruct thoughts, attitude and behaviour be embarked on. In bringing up children, parents should be mindful of emerging negative effects of urbanization and economic competitions.

Introduction

Values can be defined as elements of shared symbolic system which serve as criteria of standard for selection among the alternatives of orientation which are intrinsically open (Parsons, 1964). Generally, a cultural value may be defined as a widely held belief or sentiment that some activities, relationships, feelings or goals are important to the community's identity or well being (Broom and Seltznick, 1968).

Values are held unconsciously, and the values of a particular community and people may not be immediately apparent. They vary from place to place, and may change over time. The Nigerian society is currently undergoing rapid social changes in the economy, polity, health, cultural and religious spheres of life. These changes are bound to affect the *status quo* of the existing cultural value system in the country. The objective of this study, therefore, is to assess comparatively the cultural values and reported crime committals among ethnicities in Delta State of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Hardly does a day pass without reported cases of armed robbery or some other crimes, especially in the large cities (Osinowo, 1999). More often than not, these cases feature in the media, though official statistics only report crimes known to the police. Is it that values or norms have been lost?

Societal values are propagated and sustained over time through the family and many other social groups, through the process of socialization. Propagation of values is achieved through socialization, which starts from the family. The family is said to be the bedrock of any society where the ultimate goal is the maintenance of social order and stable health physically and emotionally (Allport, 1961, Wallerstein, 1985). In order to maintain societal order and individual stability, conflicts must be minimized. Cooperation for peace must be maximized (Ode, 2002). Consequently, Rotimi (2006), posited that certain prescribed standards of behaviour must be demonstrated by the

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members of the society. These standards must be patterned by norms and cultural values of the society.

For instance, crime, according to Clinard (1974), refers to “those activities that break the law of the land and are subject to punishment after conviction”. It follows, therefore, that whatever is criminal is determined by the state. But offences against the state or among individuals may not be incidented with law enforcement agencies, and therefore, may never come to the notice of the authorities.

In the Nigerian society, changes in values can be observed over time. For example, not much value is placed again over having many children or desire for marrying many women. This is due to harsh economic conditions, which have made it difficult for families to support large number of members (Rotimi, 2006). Generally, the Nigerian societal values have undergone almost complete metamorphosis, particularly in Delta State, where emphasis have now shifted from strong communal relationship, desire for large family size, desire to be polygamous to emphasis and orientation towards material wealth as a measure of achievement. These changes in values are observed in crime committals (Owumi, 1994; Ode, 2002). As Muo (2007) sums it up, “Values help to simplify life complexities and provide the guide, that is, road map to navigate through life. Our whole lives are controlled by the values we hold”.

Social Learning Theory

This theory as applicable to understanding crime (Bandura, 1973a; Akers *et al*, 1979; Merton, 1968), involves the family unit of society as its bedrock for learning societal norms and internalizing values to avoid criminality. For instance, observational learning or socialization process begins primarily in the family which is a union or product of marriage. Therefore, crime can be learnt through the actions and inactions within the family and other agents of the socialization process.

What is said about crime and criminals is based on people who are caught and convicted (Merton, 1957), not in line with definition of deviant behaviour as conduct that departs significantly from the norms set for people in their social statuses.

Method

Although, various factors are associated with criminality, this study limited itself to marriage type and cultural values, using police and prison records and in-depth interviews with senior police officers.

Area of Study

Delta State of Nigeria was created in 1991 with a total area of 16,475 square kilometers. The State is bounded on the North by Edo State, on the East and North-East by Anambra and Kogi States respectively, and on the South by the Atlantic Ocean. The 2006 census figures put the population of the State at 4,098,391 (2,074,306 males and 2,024,085 females) out of Nigeria's 140,003,542 population (Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2007).

Delta State is inhabited by five main indigenous ethnic groups, spread across three politically designated senatorial districts, namely; Delta Central, occupied by Urhobo ethnic group; Delta South, inhabited by Itsekiri, Isoko, Izon and some Urhobo people; and Delta North, inhabited by the Igbo and Ukwuani peoples. Presently, the State has 25 Local Government Areas, with the capital at Asaba (North Senatorial Zone) and the commercial seat at Warri (South Senatorial Zone).

The people of the State are farmers, fishermen, traders and also engage in some white collar jobs, particularly in the oil producing and complementary oil servicing companies that abound in the South and Central Senatorial Zones. They have identical customs, beliefs and cultures. But, the nature of family is basically patriarchal and polygynous in the South and Central Senatorial Zones, and mainly patriarchal and monogamous in the Delta North Senatorial Zone. There are numerous Police Stations across the State, and four Federal Prisons

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in the State at Warri in Delta South, Sapele in Delta Central, Agbor and Ogwashi-Uku in Delta North Senatorial Zone.

Sample Size and Sampling technique

Data were collected from the four Federal Government designated prisons at Warri, Sapele, Agbor and Ogwashi-Uku, occupied by four hundred and fifty inmates (Tables 2.1 & 2.2). In addition to this primary data, the multi-stage sampling technique was used to select six Police Divisional Crime Officers (DCOs) from two divisional police stations each in the three Senatorial Zones. These two DCOs were interviewed, one each from an urban and rural community in the three Senatorial Zones of the State, namely Sapele and Agbarho in Delta Central; Warri and Burutu in Delta South; and Agbor and Obeti in Delta North.

Instrument

The instrument used was an interview schedule containing ten questions. They were simple items pertaining to what crime is, nature and causes of crime, prosecution process, suggestions to curb crime, choice of posting and reasons for posting. The interviews were conducted with a micro cassette recorder.

Procedure

In-depth interviews with the DCOs were conducted after several attempts, particularly with those in the urban areas. This is because of their busy schedule. The researchers sat with each of these six DCOs for between 30 minutes and 45 minutes for the interviews. The DCOs were very co-operative.

Results and Discussion

Table 2.1: *Prison Inmates by Sex as at August 2008 in Delta State Prisons*

<i>Prisons</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
Warri	105	10	115
Sapele	105	5	110
Agbor	105	15	120
Ogwashi-Uku	105	-	105
Total	420	30	450

Source: Esiri, 2009

Table 2.2: *Prison Inmates in Delta State by Ethnic Groups as at August 2008*

<i>Ethnic group</i>	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	No	%	No	%
Urhobo	45		11	36.66
Isoko	10	2.38	2	6.67
Itsekiri	60	4.29	3	10.00
Ijaw	68	16.19	2	6.67
Ibo/Ukwuani	83	9.79	12	40.00
Others	10	2.38	-	-
Total	420	100%	30	100.00%

Source: Esiri, 2009

Table 2.1 shows the number of prisoners by sex as at August 2008 in the four Federal prisons in Delta State. Since they are federal prisons, the number of prisoners does not represent senatorial or ethnic distribution; prisoners from any ethnic group or senatorial district or any other State can be kept there. Table 2.2 classified prison inmates according to ethnic groups in Delta State. Among the 450 inmates of Delta State origin, 420 or 93.33% are males, and 30 or 6.67% are females. Among the 420 males, 189 or 45% are from the Urhobo ethnic group in Delta Central Senatorial Zone, the combined Isoko,

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Itsekiri and Ijaw ethnic groups in Delta South had 138 males or 32.86% and Igbo/Ukwuani ethnic groups indigenes of Delta North had 83 males or 22.14%. The female statistics differ, as there are more female inmates, 12 (40.00%) from Delta North (Ibo /Ukwuani ethnic groups) than 11 or 36.66% from Delta Central (Urhobo ethnic group).

This finding portrays Delta South and Delta Central as having more crime rate than Delta North. Reasons for these differentials were ascertained from in-depth interviews with divisional crime police officers in the different senatorial zones because figures in these tables are not clearly distinct and reasons for crime committals are numerous. The interviewees supported abandonment of cultural values, irrespective of contemporary economic woes, as prime reason for committing crimes. For instance, the DCO 'A' from an urban town in Delta Central stated:

My friend, I have not been posted to a place like this in all my years in the police force. Urhobo people like trouble too much. Their appetite for crime is very high, infact they see trouble... abi (or) crime as business. When they are arrested, they go bring a chief to take the person on bail. I pray, I leave this division alive, because they will do everything, anything to free a criminal.

When asked why this high appetite for crime or trouble, DCO 'A' went on:

You know, they marry many wives, born many children. Meanwhile, they don't have work. The children grow with their mothers with little care and they believe that you must hustle (fend) for yourself. So any work, including stealing, wayo (obtaining by tricks) is work. My friend, it's terrible!

This supports studies of children upbringing and deviant behaviour (Bandura, 1973a; Akers *et al*, 1979; Osinowo and Folarin, 1989; Osinowo and Taiwo, 1998; Owumi, 1994; Ode, 2002; Wallerstein, 1985; Owumi. 1994; Ode, 2002; Ewhrudjakpor and Ogege, 2008). From a rural community, another DCO 'B' in the same Delta Central Senatorial Zone put the blame on parents and polygamous marriage, thus:

Oga (Mr) Lecturer, your people (Urhobo people) marry too many wives they cannot care for, and so when they have children from all the wives, they cannot feed them, not to talk of educating them, so they drive away (divorce) them at the slightest excuse, so who cares for these children?

We told him we don't know, and he said we should know, since we were Sociologists. We told him we actually came to learn from him, hence he responded:

Hustling! Hustling!! Hustling!!! I pray God save this community from hands of criminals. Here, in this village, people only respect who have money or political power. In fact, money wealth is their God, just like our brothers from across the Niger Bridge.

In Delta South Senatorial Zone, the story is the same, but with more vicious lamentations. Interviewees there claimed that the visible use of the oil wealth by few from their environment aggravates criminality. But, to these DCOs, collapse of our cultural values facilitates criminality through rebellion and innovation as posited Merton (1957 and 1968). Here, DCO 'C' from oil city in Delta South Senatorial Zone:

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The society has collapsed. People don't bother about rules or their conscience anymore. It is money wealth. Anyhow they get it, and they don't care. Even pastors know no values on earth - even biblical values. There is money. The crime rate is very high. This town, oil city, people have no respect for elders, don't care for their children, because they are angry with wealth gotten from their backyard, carted away to other states. Their children must do anything to get some slice of the oil wealth by bunkering, obtaining money under false pretense, armed robbery, etc. People here have no more conscience, despite churches everywhere. It's for money, our values are gone. Maybe the 'rebrand Nigeria' will restore it. But the destruction of our values here in oil city is deep, both old and small, girl or boy, man or woman. It's very serious oh!

This statement corroborates the argument and suggestion for reengineering social values made by Muo (2007) for improved performance in Nigeria. Also, it gives credence to Obama (2009) inaugural speech as President of the United States of America.

The story is, however, comparatively different for the Igbo and Ukwuani areas of the Delta State (Delta North). The statistics contradict the DCOs interviewed, because both tend to submit that crime rate in this zone is low compared to the South and Central Zones. Moreover, reasons for crime in this zone are different and not wholly tied to cultural values as in the South and Central zones. The DCO 'D' submitted:

I fought for transfer from town (urban area in Delta Central) to this place (Delta North). I am safe and free to sleep well now. The criminals in that place many more than (outnumber) mosquitoes. Every hour, armed robbery cases, assault, fighting, may be because crude

oil is not found here, but they respect elders and their Okpala-Uku or Obi (traditional rulers).

In the same north zone, in urban town, the story is same. When interviewed, one of the DCOs 'E', put it thus:

In Ika, like this town, crime rate is not too high like towns in south and central zones because the traditional rulers here are respected, the people fear juju (traditional gods/ancestors). Their values are still strong, like respect, hard work, and they don't have many wives and uncountable children. See Lecturer, too many women bring too many expenses and too many problems which can force one or the children into criminality.

This corroborates studies (Allport, 1961; Owumi, 1994; Osinowo, 1999; Babatunde, 1998; Ode, 2002; Ewhrudjakpor and Ogege, 2009; Esiri, 2009), that behaviour of criminals or deviants are rooted in familial and environment dysfunctionalities. That crime committed by individuals is individualistic, rooted in disorientation of cultural values pertaining to marriage and child rearing (Bandura, 1973a; Akers *et al*, 1979; Clinard, 1974; Ewhrudjakpor and Ogege, 2008) coupled and facilitated by an 'anomieic' society (Merton, 1957), like the disorganization in the Nigeria contemporary social environment (Rotimi, 2006).

It is pertinent to mention that crime rate is a function of multiple independent variables, as multi-sectoral nature of a society. But, this study attempted to identify a root cause in marriage structure (Eruvbetere, 2005; Ewhrudjakpor and Ogege, 2009) as facilitating crime and undermining contemporary cultural values due to social change from large family size and due to a desire to be monogamous in pursuant of materialism in this economically competitive world.

Conclusion

This study attempted to explain empirically the relationship between gradual destruction of our values, such as (i) honesty (ii) orderliness (iii) desire to be contented (iv) desire for hard work, and (v) desire for obedience and sincerity as they are associated with facilitating or defacilitating crime rate in Delta State of Nigeria. The study was conducted against the backdrop of social change and increased crime rate in Delta State. This is due to changes in the economy which inevitably bring about a corresponding change in one or other segments of the society, such as the family, therefore, invariably affecting the well being of individuals, due to the functional interdependence of social institutions: the economy, polity, social and cultural organizations, educational institutions, religious organizations and the judiciary (Allport, 1961; Parsons, 1964; Broom and Selznick, 1967.) Hence a change in the economy, affects substantially the other segments of society. This interdependency of function and dysfunction, whether manifest or latent, was the basis of discussion of the study's significant findings, which, using prison and police records, showed that more crimes were committed in Delta Central and Delta South than in Delta North Senatorial Zone of Delta state.

Although, crime can be caused by multifarious reasons, this comparative study of cultural values and criminality among five ethnic groups in Delta State showed that the root cause of crime is collapsed values as a result of multiple marriages and numerous children in these times of economic difficulties and rapid urbanization. Extracts from interviews with DCOs showed that marriage type and many children were significant reasons for abandonment of cultural values and increased criminality. The findings are in tune with the social learning theory of socialization process through faulty learning values and corroborated earlier studies. In the final analysis, one will want to side with the President of the United States of America (Obama, 2009) in his inaugural speech challenging Americans, indeed the world to retrace their traditional values, thus (*ThisDay*, 2009):

Our challenges may be new. The instrument with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends, hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism, these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quick force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to those truths.

These truths embedded in honesty, dignity of labour, respect for constituted authorities, contentment and sanctity of life are universal indices of proper socialization (social learning) through healthy and functional families.

Recommendations

Criminal acts destroy individuals and society. In order to stem this tide, the mass media must engage the populace in enlightenment programmes on value re-orientation. Old habits of multiplicity of women and planless reproduction of children should be broken. This can be encouraged by legislation on family planning, such as the Nigerian population policy of four children per woman (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1988). The government will also do well to compel its officials to lead by example through hard work, honesty, incorruptibility and justice. This is how to return to our cherished cultural values of old.

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