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Rebuilding Global Community, Altered Family Structures and Social Relations using African Philosophy of Family: Criticisms, Impacts and Paradigms

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Abstract

The family is the smallest units of the society but its impacts on individuals' progress geometrically to immediate society, states and global community at large. The symbolism of the family in Africa cannot be overemphasized. Family systems have been distorted globally due to over-zealousness, negative reconciliatory dialectics, absurd social systems (same sex marriages and family), uncensored visual information, technologies and all they brought. Societal changes, such as industrialization and urbanization, shifted family dynamics, leading to more nuclear families and a gradual transformation of traditional roles. The modern era has brought about more diverse family arrangements, embracing various forms of relationships and acknowledging the importance of inclusivity and individual choices within families. The aim of this paper is to highlight Africa's achievement in maintaining great social community lives and relations despite the increased dwindling family life has faced in the wake of modernity, globalization, overzealous, freedom and technology. Part of the objective of this study is to show that African philosophy of family can be used as pristine ideology to address the negative dialectics of family experienced and accepted in the global west and Europe. The argument is that family lives, values, norms and structures have been distorted by ideologies emanating from modernism, fake visual consumption and weakened by today's technological advances, moral corruption, intolerance, democracy, migrations, changing patterns of socialization to mention but a few. These have weakened the strengths of family values and exposed the limitations of traditional family arrangements. The thesis of this paper is that individuals, citizens and social relations have been dislocated because of the changing family patterns. The significance of this study is to show in different ways negative family dialectics have manifested in human relations including high rate of divorce, gay motherhood, lesbian fathers, single parenting and the likes. The justification of this study comes from the need to tackle altered family ideologies and structures using African philosophy of family. This is because the distorted family ideologies, structures and patterns have been minimally experienced in Africa. The position of this study is that Africa still has constructive, realistic, pragmatic and viable family norms, ideas, virtues and values to sustain family culture, practices which emanated from their lived experiences, traditions and cultures that can be used to address modern changing family patterns experienced largely in the west and Europe. Africa has consolidated her philosophy of family; which has great impacts on personal, communal, social, national and global relations. Postmodernist phenomenology which allows us access to alternative lived-experiences of family lives across cultures is the methodology while the study will be built on a theoretical frame of inter-subjectivity. The study will end with an extensive discussion on the lessons from the existential pillars sustaining family life in Africa.

Keywords: African Philosophy of Family, Family, Postmodernism, Phenomenology, Dialectics.

1. Introduction

The symbolism of the family in Africa cannot be over-emphasized. The family in Nigeria (and Africa in general) is seen as an important, sacred institution. The family is conceived as a group of people who are relationally connected and who live together and function as a household.¹ It is characterized by paternal authority, maternal cares, absolute domestic authority which the feebleness of children renders necessary with their interest as well as the father's incontestable authority warrants. **Family**, a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood, or adopted, constituting a single household and interacting with each other in their respective social positions, usually those of spouses, parents, children, and siblings. The family group should be distinguished from a household, which may include boarders and roomers sharing a common residence. It should also be differentiated from a kindred (which also concerns blood lines),

because a kindred may be divided into several households.² Frequently the family is not differentiated from the marriage pair, but the essence of the family group is the parent-child relationship, which may be absent from many marriage pairs.³ The family is an institution given by God for the well being and strength of society. The family provides the basis for a nation's strength. If the families are weak then the nation is weak and vulnerable to moral decay.⁴ The family is a central organising principles among humans around the world; as a result, the status and role of women and men in families not only is dependent of everyone's access to power in society generally, but also is related to the status of families with a society, including access to economic resources. The family at the level of experience fulfils basic human needs and provides most of us with our first experience of love, relationship, power and conflict. Families are part of kinship system.⁵ Kinship systems vary wildly

¹ Grace O. Alofun and Christopher O. Agulanna. "Familyhood and Social Order among the Yoruba of Nigeria" in *Culture, Philosophy, Science and Technology*, Marcel I. Onyeabor, Tayo R.E. Egunlusi and Moses O. Aderibigbe (eds.) **Akure**: FUTA Printing Press, 2021, 207.

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/family-kinship>

⁴ <https://hickmanchurch.org/philosophy-of-ministries/philosophy-of-family>

⁵ The social scientists perspectives refer family as patterns of relationship that define family forms. See Laura Wildermann Kane "What is a family? Considerations on purpose, biology and Sociality" in *Public Affairs Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (2019), 65 -88. accessed from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26910010> on July 3, 2023.

around the world, though they tend to have similar features such as patterns of marriages,⁶ norms about marriageability, determination of decent and distribution of property.

Scholarship on the family has demonstrated that family forms are historically and culturally constructed and that family is a place for the reproduction of powers relation in the society. The family is both a major societal institution and a place where individual experiences intimate relationships. The family is an institution because it is established using patterns of behaviour organized around particular purposes. This is because the family constituted through general patterns of behaviour that emerge because of the specific needs and desires of human beings as well as the condition of our lives. Thus the family maintains at institutional⁷ levels patterns of privilege and inequality as well as intimately connected to the other institutions in the wider society such as economy, political systems and structures,

religion and education. Revitalization of the neo-conceptions of archetype African philosophy of family is a normative tool for addressing the corruption of social and moral life in this century.

2. The Paradoxes and Polarities in Contemporary Conception of Family

Obviously, the contemporary conception of the family is altered. Human relations have been devalued. The experiences of abuses, dignity, teenage crimes, child abuses, trafficking⁸ and lots more has drawn up this critical question: what is a family? Can family be at once a treasured value and troubled institution? The ideal family scarcely reflects the realities of modern life. The ambiguities and rising rate of divorce, separation, custody battle within families and those of their parents and siblings never cease to look like non-entertaining drama. Statistics on divorce rate seems alarming and increasing day by day. The climbing rate of single-parent household is alarming. The numbers of births out of wedlock among all ethnic groups continue to climb

⁶ The number of marriage patterns permitted at a time: monogamy involves one husband and one wife, and polygamy is multiple spouses, the most common being polygamy or multiple wives.

⁷ In this same way, the family is a primary social unit that maintains other institution and reinforces existing patterns of dominations: the family networks provide support systems that can reduce

the indignities and / or challenge the inequalities produced by various systems of inequality in the society.

⁸ Ucheoma C. Osuji "Trafficking in Persons: Existential and Moral Paradoxes, in *South Eastern Journal of Research and Sustainable Development*, (2022) Vol. 9, No.2, 62 - 83

daily. The impact of re-marriages is seen in the vast way it complicated family relationship. The stress of modern life are fast transforming the family and challenging our myths about the value of family life. The idea of perfect marriages, great homes, and wonderful family is fast becoming a paradox and mythology.

The family is most vulnerable institution in this modern world. It is vulnerable to confusion, between truth and illusion and in tacking the realities of life faced by its members and growing needs of daily living. Again, this is a visual age where visual images on internet, social media, television, movies have extraordinary power to determine human person demands upon reality. The family has become a media event where various family types (rich and poor, royal and normal, glamorous and local, ordinary and sophisticated, tradition and modern, cultural and contemporary) are screened daily on television. This has brain washed the young people planning family life. People now want to choose from these screened kinds of family without considering the 'ideal' and 'real' about those shows and movies on family. Again the problem with these shows are that they failed to reflect the precept of family, the

conventions of etiquette, the ideal, virtual of all sort, no proper human values and important norms being human and living are mere illusions in these shows. The proliferation of reality TV shows, social media and other forms of self- presentation contribute to the blurring of these boundaries, transforming life into a spectacle that is consumed by others. It suggests the influence of consumer culture, technology and media on family dynamics is also acknowledged with the postmodern framework. Postmodernism has had a profound impact on the understanding and conceptualizations of family. It challenges the traditional notions of family structure, gender roles, stability and continuity. Postmodernism recognize the diversity and complexity of family arrangements, allowing for the inclusion of non-traditional and non-normative forms of families. It emphasizes individual subjectivity, experiences and the multiplicity of narratives within the cultural context. However, it is important to note that postmodernism is a broad and multifaceted movement, and there is no single, definitive view on the family within this framework. Different scholars and thinkers within postmodernism may hold varying perspectives and interpretations on the

subjects. In the hyperreal society of postmodernism, the concept of family becomes a simulation, constructed and mediated through signs and images. The idealized representations of family in media and advertising create a spectacle that bears little resemblance to the complexities of real family life. As the boundaries between the public and private sphere erode, intimate aspects of family existence are commodities and exposed to public scrutiny.⁹ Baudrillard believes that traditional structures and roles of the family are dissolved, leading to a loss of meaning and sense of disillusion within familial relationship. Though, Baudrillard's ideas on family in the context of postmodernism may not reflect his precise wording. Baudrillard claimed that in a hyper-real society, the boundaries between the public and private sphere are eroded. The public and personal aspects of family life are increasingly exposed to public scrutiny and commodotification. It is important to note that Baudrillard's ideas on family are not extensively developed in his works, and his theories have been subject to various interpretations. However, his broader concepts of hyper-reality, simulation, and

the influence of media and consumer culture can be applied to understand how the notion and experience era.

The idea of family now is faced with contradiction: family ideals, values, virtues and realities are in constant state of flux: Webs of attitude and nostrum is daily unfolding. Today we experience youth rebellion of all kinds, domestic rivalry, new sexual revolution, radical feminism, the emergence of two worker family reflecting new patterns of family life that are emerging from technology, media, and old pattern of living. The family now is reflected by family systems that we cannot but imagine the signification of family.

It is worthy to note that family is history, policy –oriented and present minded: these should be the content of familiar shows while familiar depressing indicators like marriage, divorce, illegitimacy should be portrayed with caution and positivity. Aristotle and Hegel offer contrasting views on the role of the family as the foundation of political rule. Aristotle sees the family as a crucial unit that shapes individuals and contributes to the stability of the state. In contrast, Hegel places more emphasis on

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *"Hyperreality to Disappearance"*. Richard G. Smith and David B.

Clarke (ed.) (Routledge: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 150.

the state as the primary determinant of governance, considering the family as a subjective and private realm. Despite their differences, both philosophers acknowledge the family's significance in society. Next is a philosophical exposition on the idea of the family.

3. Family: A Philosophical Overview

The idea of the family is seen in various societies since the onset of humanity. The word family is seen as the smallest unit of the state. The idea of family has occupied lower place in modern literacy discourses. The stand of this work is that critical work on family could be used to address sociological dynamics, ethical considerations, existential aspects and historical development of the human society. Philosophical insights provide valuable insight into the nature and significance of the family as a fundamental social institution. Discourse on family was given a higher place in ancient philosophy unlike every other epoch..

Thus Aristotle, Plato and other ancient philosophers contributed to the idea, role and interconnectivity of family to other human endeavours. From an Aristotelian perspective, the family holds a crucial role as a moral institution, dealing with essential aspects of ethics, responsibility, and human

virtue. As a multigenerational entity, the family fosters mutual responsibility, shaped in part by narratives that are created and passed down by its members. Its primary focus lies in cultivating virtues in its members and guiding them collectively and individually towards the conception of the good. An Aristotelian inquiry into the family commences by exploring the ideals of good or ethical behaviour that family members aspire to or believe they should uphold. This investigation delves into the narratives that define the family and its members, understanding how these stories connect with people's real-life experiences. Additionally, it examines how individuals develop moral virtues and practical wisdom throughout their own lives and across generations within the family setting.

(iii) Philosophical Works on Family

This study will explore some of the key philosophical works on family, including those of Aristotle, Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, and Judith Butler by exploring their philosophical pre-suppositions on how it's relate to family. In the *Laws*, however, where the function of the philosopher kings is strongly reduced, normal, non-communist family relations based on an individual commitment of the spouses is an explicit topic; indeed,

marriage laws are regarded as the basic laws. However, also here it is explicitly stated that the choice of the partner should aim not at what is agreeable for oneself but good for the state. Even if it is more tiresome to live together with someone with a different character, such a bond prevents a polarization of society into different groups homogenous in themselves but incompatible with each other. Plato recognizes that a legal obligation cannot work in such a case but he hopes for what today would be called moral suasion. However, there is a legal duty to marry in general, and after the age of 35 men are fined and deprived of honors if they refuse to do so. This is explicitly understood as a religious duty – one has to partake in the eternal essence and preserve new servants for the god, who can replace oneself.

Aristotle's approach to the family is, as is well known, radically different from Plato's. Not only does he reject communism of wives and property with excellent arguments in the second book of the *Politics*; in its first book he develops his own theory of the *qualitative* differences between the various social institutions. His central idea is that, household and city-

state, do not only differ quantitatively; for if their difference were only in the number of the members of the social institution, then there would be no difference between a big household and a small city-state. But in reality their difference is not based on size but, on their essence. Certainly the introduction of an intermediate social institution, the village, between and somehow obfuscates his argument; for this seems to be a step necessary only in order to account for the *genesis* of the city-state, since the village does not play any role whatsoever in the actual workings of the already existing city-state.¹⁰ One can imagine a city-state without surrounding villages. But according to Aristotle one cannot conceive a city-state without households – and one cannot imagine households in which people live well without the surrounding frame of the city-state. The basis of the biological need for reproduction. It would be, however, misleading to interpret here as mere mating, a meaning which it has in the biological writings. The use of the term in the great treatise on friendship within the *Nicomachean Ethics*. shows that a bonding of friendship is meant that

¹⁰Aristotles, *Politik*, Buch1, ...übersetzt und erläutert von EckartSchtrumpf, Darmstadt 1991, 200.

transcends the mating act and forges a dual relationship of particular intensity. Still, this relation is deeply asymmetrical. Thus, Aristotle describes:

The family is the association established by nature for the supply of man's everyday wants... But when several families are united and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village.¹¹

Aristotle maintains that since every family is ruled by the eldest, the colony of the family is the kindly form of government. Furthermore, when villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be or quite self-sufficing, order of things. Aristotle believed that family provided individuals with a sense of belonging and identity. Aristotle is also of the opinion with Julius Nyerere, that Family as a community of people who share a common household and who are related by blood, marriage or adoption.

This is partly rooted in Aristotle's developmental biology;¹² and in the context of the *Politics* it becomes manifest when the inequality between man and woman is

compared with that between masters and slave. Certainly, the two inequalities are not the same; for nature does not use the same object for different purposes, and it is only barbarians who treat women and slaves in the same way, thus giving the Greeks the right to treat barbarians as slaves. But the specific difference between the two inequalities does not change the fact that the household, unlike the city-state, is the realm of asymmetric relations, albeit in very different degrees. This holds for all three relations that constitute it – the one between husband and wife, the one between parents and children, and the one between master and slaves, without which the household would not be complete. Certainly the relation between master and slave which Aristotle discusses most extensively, defending the doctrine that there are slaves by nature, is the most asymmetric – it is a form of despotic rule. The rule of the father of the children, on the other hand, is called “royal” for the father rules like the king with friendship and based on the authority of age. But does not the characterization of the relation between the spouses as “political” point to symmetry between husband and wife? Not really, for even if

¹¹ Aristotle, “*Politics*” Benjamin Jowett (trans.), (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 1999), 278.

¹² For a balanced view, see Devin Henry, “How Sexist Is Aristotle's Developmental Biology?”, in: *Phronesis* 52 (2007), 251.

Aristotle clearly conceives it as the least asymmetric relation within the household, he still calls the form of rule in a household monarchical, he asserts the superiority of the man over the woman, whenever their relation is not against nature, and he insists on the fact that, unlike in the alternation of rulers and ruled citizens in a polity, the superiority of the husband always holds.

The asymmetry of the relations within the household does not challenge at all its natural place among social institutions. In fact, the critique of Plato's communism in the second book of the *Politics* also contains a sharp rejection of the communism of wives. First of all, Aristotle rightly teaches that the unity of a state is not the supreme goal; for in this case, the city state should become a household, and the household an individual. A maximal unity of the city-state would thus abolish its being a city-state. Furthermore, a city-state does not only presuppose a plurality of subjects, but also their being different, because only by division of labor can a city-state achieve self-sufficiency. But even if we granted the goal, the communism of wives would not be the right means to achieve it. For the abrogation of the family would not increase the identification with the state. The meaning of "mine" would change; instead

of extending the normal love for one's own children to others, the love granted to the thousands who would now be called "one's own children" in a collective, not a separate sense, would be completely diluted. It is better to be one's private nephew than a son in this collectivist sense. The heterosexual ideology is what Aristotle uses as an occasion to reproach Plato for his condoning homoerotic love (despite his prohibition of homosexual acts), which would be particularly inappropriate between brothers and fathers and sons. Since the community of wives could not prevent people from trying to find out who really is their child, it would create only animosities; and it should be favored only among the lower classes, if the purpose were to dominate them more easily due to their quarrels among themselves. Aristotle, however, considers it a political error to stoke conflicts in some parts of the population. And he foresees many conflicts in the transfer from children from one class to the other, as it is planned by Plato. However, Aristotle's views on the family have been criticized for being limited and narrow-minded, particularly in regards to the roles of women and children. His belief in the natural hierarchy of the family has been seen as lay down order though family

was a source of emotional support and companionship, he believed that it provided individual (s) with a sense of belonging and identity.

The religious commitment to the institution of marriage characteristic of Christianity, the new evaluation of the role of women brought forth by the new religion, the discovery of an autonomous erotic realm already in the Roman poetry of the 1st century BC and the reception of Ovid in the 12th century in France, all led to momentous changes in the philosophical theories of marriage. No longer has the institutional frame for reproduction but the individual relation between man and woman become the focus of the interest. Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* forcefully expresses the idea that marriages should be based on love, not on economic or class considerations. In Kant's philosophical work, particularly in his *Metaphysics of Morals*, he explores the concept of marriage and the family structure in a manner that is distinct from some other philosophical traditions, like the Aristotelian perspective. He advocated for elimination of erotic romanticism, and

emphasizing on rational and contractual aspects. He discusses the family within the framework of natural law. This suggests that Kant's view of the family is more focused on legal and contractual relationships.

Kant believed that the family should serve as safe and nurturing environment for the development of children and that parents have a duty to raise their children in a manner that cultivates their rational and moral capacities.¹³ Like in the doctrine of the Catholic Church, also in Kant's theory the marriage becomes valid not simply through the marriage contract but through its consummation.¹⁴ Secondly, the procreation of children (which according to Kant occurs with conception) engenders an absolute duty to raise and educate them, both pragmatically and morally, until their emancipation. No infant exposure, infanticide, or abortion is permitted, whatever social utility may be expected from such an act. Since, however, there can be no contract between parents and children, the latter have only a moral, not a duty according to natural law to return the benefits they enjoyed from their parents.

¹³ Mark Timmon (ed.) "Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals: Interpretative Essays*" 120.

¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Supplementum q. 46.

Hegel's doctrine of the family is the richest and philosophically most complex one among the classical theories. Even if Johann Gottlieb Fichte follows Kant's bipartition of practical philosophy into philosophy of natural law and ethics, already he insists in the *Grundlage des Naturrechts nach Principien der Wissenschaftslehre* (Foundations of Natural Law according to the Principles of the Doctrine of Science) that marriage is not simply a juridical society like the state; it is a natural and moral society as well.¹⁵ Hegel's views on family are scattered throughout his works, some of the key concepts can be found in his seminal work. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*; 'The family is the first natural ethical community, and in fact it is the ethical root of society. The ethical duties begin with the family, but they do not end there.'¹⁶

Hegel's philosophical perspective emphasizes the foundational significance of the family within the ethical and social framework. He views the family as the primary and fundamental unit of society, serving as the starting point for ethical development. According to Hegel, the

ethical duties that individuals learn and practice within the family extend to the broader societal context. Additionally, the family is seen as a place for cultivating personal relationships and virtues, such as love, trust, and loyalty. Hegel attaches great importance to the parent-child relationship, considering it essential for passing on ethical values from one generation to the next. He argues that parents have a duty to educate and nurture their children in a manner that prepares them for their future roles as ethical and responsible members of society. Furthermore, Hegel acknowledges the significance of gender roles within the family. He holds a traditional view, asserting that men and women have distinct but complementary roles. In his view, men primarily engage in public life, which involves work and political participation, while women predominantly fulfill domestic roles, focusing on nurturing and caring for the family.

It is crucial to note that Hegel's views on the family were influenced by the social and cultural norms of his time, reflecting the values prevalent in 19th-century Europe. While his ideas may not align with

¹⁵Fichte's Werke, hg.von Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Reprint Berlin 1971, III 304.

¹⁶ Allen W. Wood. "Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right". (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48.

contemporary perspectives on gender and family, his philosophical works continue to be studied for their contributions to ethical and social thought. Sophocles' *Antigone* presents family piety as a sublime virtue, particularly associated with women. It embodies a subjective and emotional dimension of life that remains unfulfilled. The play portrays it as the law of the ancient gods, particularly the gods of the underworld, which is characterized as eternal and enigmatic, its origins shrouded in mystery. This divine law is set in direct opposition to societal laws and regulations. The ensuing ethical and tragic conflict is intensified through the contrasting perspectives and roles of men and women in the narrative. Hegel discussed the idea of the family in the part three of "the ethical life" in *Philosophy of Right*. He argued that the family can be discussed in three parts, marriage, family capital and children and dissolution. He defined the family as;

the family, as the immediate substantiality of mind, is specifically characterized by love, which is mind's feeling of its own unity. Hence in a family, one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's

individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself, with the result that one is in it not as an independent person but as a member.¹⁷

The individual's entitlement to rights, derived from the strength of family unity, primarily encompasses their life within this unity. However, this right assumes a distinct form, namely as a specific aspect of determinate individuality, when the family starts to break apart. At this stage, individuals who should ideally be members of the family, both in their inclination and in reality, begin to assert themselves as self-sufficient individuals. Previously, they constituted a unified entity within the family, but now they receive their respective portions separately and only in an external manner, such as through financial support, provisions, educational expenses, and similar means. Sophocles' *Antigone* presents family piety as a sublime virtue, particularly associated with women. It embodies a subjective and emotional dimension of life that remains unfulfilled. The play portrays it as the law of the ancient gods, particularly the gods of the underworld, which is characterized as

¹⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*,
<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/prfamily.htm>

eternal and enigmatic, its origins shrouded in mystery. This divine law is set in direct opposition to societal laws and regulations. The ensuing ethical and tragic conflict is intensified through the contrasting perspectives and roles of men and women in the narrative.¹⁸

From feminist argument of family, gender performativity¹⁹ challenges the prevailing notion that gender is a fixed, inherent characteristic. Gender is not a noun: It is not a fixed identity or category, but a verb -a doing, a performance, a becoming.²⁰ Butler's central argument is that gender is not an inherent or static characteristic but rather a social construct that is actively performed and enacted through various cultural and linguistic practices. Gender intersects with family, ethics, power, violence and identity, which often challenges traditional binary categories eventually disrupt, and deconstruct²¹ overriding systems power and knowledge. Within the realm of family, Derrida's ideas can be applied to challenge the idea of a

fixed, essentialist understanding of family relationships which critiques the notion of a universal definition of family socially constructed and subject to change overtime: this highlights his perspective on the complexities of inheritance, tradition and cultural affiliations.²² While not directly addressing family in postmodernism, it suggests the idea that the concept of family is never fixed or simple, but rather a product of complex interplay between past and future, tradition and innovation, and the multiplicity of identities and affiliations. The idea of the fake and artificial family patterns comes to be more definitive of the real.

4. A Post modernist Critique of Family

Influence of Democracy on the Family:

The fact is that transitions in government, policies and new frontiers affect the family in many ways; economically, behavioural patterns attitudes and more. Where government new policy affects the family income and means of lively hood, the family re-adjust; which impacts on the

¹⁸ Hegel § 166

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge Publisher, 1999), 120.

²⁰ Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble* 120.

²¹ Gender deconstruction involves analyzing and questioning the assumptions and hierarchies that underline philosophical, literary, and cultural

texts. Deconstruction is a method of analysis that seeks to uncover any binary opposition that structure language, discourse and systems of thought.

²² Jacques Derrida, *"The Law of Genre"* Avital Ronel (trans.) (Chicago: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), 55.

individual members in different ways (accept, tolerate and reject). Democracy affected family living patterns, traditions, parenting and exercises of authority. Several members of the family stand upon an entirely new footing toward each other, that the distance which formerly separated a father from his sons has been lessened, and that paternal authority, if not destroyed, is at least impaired. The practice and understanding of family is different within cultures countries and civilizations. The practice and understanding of family in African is different from America Rome even different from Aristotle's and Hegel's signification of the word. Studies²³ have shown that what remains in American's conception of a family are a few vestiges in the first year of childhood, when the father exerts without opposition, the absolute domestic authority which the feebleness of his children renders necessary, and which their interest as well as his own incontestable superiority warrants. However, as soon as young Americans approach manhood, the ties of filial obedience are relaxed day by day. He

becomes the master of his thought and conduct.

In Nigeria, changes in the family relations are closely connected with the social and political revolutions which are approaching its consummation in our daily experiences.²⁴ There exist certain great social principles which a people either introduces everywhere or tolerates nowhere, in aristocratically constituted nations, social institutions' recognized in truth, no one in the family but the father. Children are received by the society at his hands; society governs him, he governs them. Thus the parent has not only the natural right but he acquires a political right to command them. He is the author and the supporter of his family, as well as the constituted ruler. In democracies, where the government picks out every individual singly from the masses to make him subservient to the general laws of the community, no such intermediate person is required. A father is there in the eye of the law only a member of the community, older and richer than his sons. It is worthy to note that when most of the conditions of life are

²³ Alexis De Tocqueville, "Influence of Democracy on the Family" in *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*, Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, Bonnie Lisle (eds.), New York/; St. Martins Press, 1989, 341-46.

²⁴ I may argue here that the society loses by change, but people individually are a gainer of it. I think as manners and laws become more democratic, the relations and authorities are less talked about because as in propositions, as manners and laws become more democratic.

extremely unequal and inequality of these conditions is permanent, the notion of a superior grows upon the imagination of men: if the law invested him with no privileges, customs and public opinions would concede them. When on the contrary, men differ but little to each other and do not always remain in dissimilar conditions of life, the general notion of a superior becomes weaker and less distinct. It is in vain for legislation to strive to place him who obeys very much beneath him who commands: the manners of the time brings the two men nearer to one another, and draw them daily towards the same level.

Although the legislation of an Aristocratic people should grant no peculiar privilege over the heads of familiar; but their powers are more respected and more extensive than in democracy: whatever the law may be, superiors always appear higher in aristocracies and inferiors lower in democratic nations.

When men live more for the remembrance of what has been than for the care of what is and when they are more given to attend to what their ancestors thought than to think

themselves, the father is the natural and necessary the between the past and present-the link by which the ends of these two chains are connected²⁵

In aristocracies, the father is not only the civil head of the family but the organ of its traditions, the expounder of its customs, the arbiter of its manners. He is listened to with difference, addressed with respect, the love with is left with him is always tempered with fear. When societies become democratic, the general principles adopted the power which the opinions of the father exercises over those by his sons diminish as well as his legal power. It changes the relations existing between father and children. Democracy forces a sort of familiar intimacy which its inevitable consequences is that it renders authority less absolute and respect is externalized only, addressing parents with perfect colloquial equality. In as much as the powers of aristocracy is declining, a species of equality prevails around democratic hearth,²⁶ the language addresses by a son to his father is always marked by mingled freedom, familiarity, affection, and springs up new pattern of familiar relations where

²⁵ Alexis De Tocqueville, *Influence of Democracy on the Family*, 343

²⁶ The relation of father and son becomes more intimate and affectionate, rules and authority are

less talked about, confidence and tenderness increases, natural bond is now drawn closer to social bound.

familiar authority and hierarchy is diminished. The privilege of age, experiences vanishes. The chain of democracy is that it brings equality of all and unites familiar relations. The familiar feeling is natural to humankind, democracy robs it off by using law to tutor those feelings in particular manner, it robs them some of the elements, for they are never stronger than when left to themselves.

A Postmodernist Critique of Traditional

Family patterns: The traditional family patterns have their strengths and limitations. African families are usually polygamous in pattern this is a result of their traditional thought systems where wives and children are valued for many purposes. It is important to note that African have practice alternative²⁷ family patterns which they alien to support patriarchy and maintain social order in the society. They also operate extended family systems where collective efforts and familiar bounds are utilized to build strong influences, wealth and communal living. Nuclear families arouse as a result of western industrialization that separated the home from productive activities. In the pre

and early industrial times, the family was relatively self-sufficient in producing goods for family consumption and exchange with other families. As industrial capitalism developed, family members increasingly worked outside the home for wages that were spent on goods for family consumption. In the era of global expansion, production, consumption, family labour is both utilized and central to maintain corporate profits.

The distinguishing characteristic of nuclear and extended family is its found privacy. The extended family system in Nigeria live people unnoticed, neighbour and relatives directly intervened in family affairs, to help or chastise. The purpose here is to censure community members from taboos and familiar transgression such as unusual sexual behaviour, household disorder; family and community are joined in a relation to perform reciprocity. Thus, there is no boundary between the home and society. The family is a little community where as the home was a larger community. With the nostalgia for the extended family, the notion of family becomes instrumental and expressive bring harsh realities of the

²⁷ See Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006). Also. See Ucheoma C. Osuji,

“A Feminist Analysis of woman-husband and Male-Daughter in Igbo Thought, in *Culture and Dialogue*, (2023) UK: Brill.com/ cad, 11. 104 - 121.

outside world into traditional differentiation. The idea of the family becomes sentimental and the paradox of perfection troubled. The challenges of nuclear family are tearing apart the nuclear patterns of familiar living. These include domestic bliss, keeping up with family standard such as new definition for demands of perfection such as love, warmth, good orgasm. In traditional society, marriage is not based on love but love is one of the outcomes of it.

Alternative and non-traditional patterns of family (Gay and lesbian families): Many lesbians are in long term partnership. The legal backing starts in 1989 Massachusetts recognized gay marriage and the Vermont Supreme court ruled that denying lesbian and gay couples benefits of marriages was unconstitutional and ordered the legislature to develop a form of civil union to allow lesbian and gay partnership the same right and responsibilities as married couples in Vermont.²⁸ The American Association estimates that at least six million American children have lesbian or gay parent. Many

lesbian have children from previous heterosexual²⁹ relationship before they come out. Others have children through artificial insemination while others adopt.³⁰ In Africa, stereotypes of same sex marriage affect families that are heterosexual and it is not socially and culturally accepted as marriage.

5. Rebuilding Global Community, Altered Family Structures and Social Relations using African Philosophy of Family

5.1 On African Philosophy of Family:

One important question here is what is African Philosophy of Family? From the word, African philosophy of family is a need trend in African philosophy if understood from a strictest sense. From a broader perspective, African philosophy of family are the ways, patterns of familiar relations which the African have practice from pre-history day till now. The ways of familiar living varies from one region to another, and they have different ways of organizing their families. This means that there are varieties of indigenous familiar systems which have their origins in the

²⁸ Shaw M. Susan and Lee Janet, "Myths and facts about Lesbian Families" in *Women's voices; Feminist Vision: Classical and contemporary Readings*, Boston: Mc Graw Hill, 2007, 374.

²⁹ Unfortunately the court may believe stereotypes about lesbian; lesbian mothers often

loose custody of their children in divorce. Shaw and Lee, 374.

³⁰ In many States of US, adoption is difficult for lesbian, and rarely can both partners in lesbian relationship legally adopt a child together.

enormous ethnic, cultural linguistic and historical diversity within Africa. The African philosophy of family encapsulates the ways traditional and cultural African peoples have pattern their society along family lines. African conception of the family is diverse in nature. It sustains many vital principles, traditions, beliefs, rites, rituals, laws, rules, spirituality and customs to keep the family as an important institution. The ideas of the family in Africa are defined as people united by blood ties, who maintain common ancestry, identified by common name, lineage, place (indigene) and common behavioural patterns.

The conception of family in Africa Philosophy is of three types. First family is an institution, second family as a core value and the third is family as ideology (is espoused by Ujamaa). Family is a traditional African value and communalism of traditional African societies was built on the principle of familyhood.

Family as an ideology found its height in Nyerere's philosophy which promoted the interconnectedness of economy, family, and state. On this basis, Nyerere founded

his philosophy of development on familyhood (*Ujamaa*). *Ujamaa* being a philosophy of development was based on three essential concept; freedom, equality and unity.³¹ This is because socialism must have a human face. This foundation and objective of African socialism regards all men as his brethren as members of his ever-extending family. Nyerere's philosophy of *ujamaa* was rooted in traditional values and had as its core the emphasis on familyhood and communalism of traditional socialism of African societies. *Ujamaa* socialism means love extended to the individuals in the state as members of the same family aimed completely at the progress and well-being of humanity.³² This affirms African's originality, distinctiveness and personality. It also affirms Africa's independence ideologically as well as politically.

The nature of family is usually sustained by blood tier. African conception of the family is build around maintaining marriage bond and children as the product of the union. This is why a man who marries more than one wife mains his polygamous home because he is the father of those children

³¹ Munyaradzi Mawere and Tapuwa R. Mubaya, *African Philosophy and Thought Systems, A Search for a Culture and Philosophy of Belonging*, Cameroon: Langaa Publishes, 2016, 144.

³² Munyaradzi Mawere and Tapuwa R. Mubaya, *African Philosophy and Thought Systems, A Search for a Culture and Philosophy of Belonging*, Cameroon: Langaa Publishes, 2016, 159.

from different mothers. These children see themselves as step-siblings. Another form of blood tie is a woman who gives birth to children from different men; those children regard themselves as siblings as well. Africa value marriage which must be validate by culture and accepted by both families. This is because, marriage well contradiction forms the foundation and structure of the family which imparts greatly on societal development and sustenance of values. For example in Yoruba, marriage rites are some of the most cardinal customs of the people. Marriage is treasured among the Yoruba people for the important reason of procreation, so the people strongly believe in taking the proper steps to establish a good home and family structure within which such a sacred task of parenting might be carried out.³³ The lived-experiences of Africans suggest that family patterns in African are diverse. It is not strictly patriarchal, there are elements of matriarchy, all sexes have their unique places, it is not sustained by difference but mutuality.

5.2 Theories and Principles of African Philosophy of Family

Natural Right: there is this traditional justified belief system that humans are naturally created male and female, the purpose of this is to support co-habitation, reproduce humans and companionship. Several folklores expressed this by showing how the creator made them male and female in order to reproduce humans. This is why traditional African social systems do not support gay marriage and lesbian marriage; they are seen as abominations within the society. This natural right perspective support several perspective of people familiar lives, for instance, a man or woman within the marital age is advised and given support to marry whoever he or she pleases to marry, because it is a natural right given to everyone. In most Igbo cultures, any unmarried man is seen as *efulefu* (worthless) and unmarried women are pitied and disrespected.

Contract: African belief that marriage is a form of natural contract between the families. This is expressed in the marriage rites is performed and the relationship created and continue to exist between the two families. The Igbos of southeast Nigeria has a step to step guide of marriage rites of which both families, extended

³³ Olanike Lawore, "Diaspora and Syncretism: Marriage Rites in Yoruba Homeland and

Abroad" in *Yoruba Studies Review*, Volume 4, number 1, 2019, 37.

families and the entire kindred performs in order to fulfil a marriage custom. The parents of both families call themselves *ogom* (in-laws) while the couples accept each other's siblings as brothers and sisters-in-laws. This relationship metamorphoses into a life time

Duality: African philosophy of family operates on duality. Duality means that there are two opposites but none is more important than the other. The interaction between family members are not hampered by differences rather differences sustains the interaction and cooperation among members. Duality implies inclusivity within cognition not only because of African strong sense of kinship but with whatever is found in nature.³⁴ This means members of the family belong together, becomes one with the other. Family members become one. Seeks common goal, objective and together becomes the principle of daily living. It harmonizes the opposite's sexes as aspects of the same family. This means duality in African theory of the family implies harmony of opposites; they co-exist in the same realities. It operates at sociological levels. It

is dynamic. Duality is operational in families and foundational in their affairs.

Complementarity: this theory see sexes are complementing the other in the family. The sexes compliment the other in terms of roles, duties, responsibilities and the general ideas of human social organization. It is seen as two sexes that cannot do without each exist. What one cannot do another will; this confers complementarity in daily life meaning that one cannot live alone in the world. This applies to marriage, meaning that marriage is a complimentary union. Thus marriage creates opportunity for people to come together and compliment their effort and ideas.

Communalism: this is one of the ancient African modes of human society build around the family. Communalism was the first stable experience of organized society, a post-wandering bands system.³⁵

Identity: families serve as models for identity. Identity connotes culture, behavioural patterns, values, belief, and nationalism. The family form the root of identity. The family brings out the foundation of cultural identity. In this case,

³⁴ Augustine Obi, *Being as Duality and African Hermenetics of Foundation*, Enugu: Snaap Press, 2017, 85.

³⁵ Oladele Idowu, "Contemporary African Politics: A Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity" in *LAJOP, Lasu Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 2(1) October, 2019, 19.

social integration, social belonging and cherished human capacities are grown in families. This is why the family is seen as the smallest yet basic unit of the society. Again familiar identity provides grounds for negotiation, rights, equality, and justice. Family is the place where ideological content and value are grown, this impacts on personality building and behavioural patterns, which has both its external and internal dimensions. The significance of familiar identity has long protracted influence in national and regional peculiarities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind.³⁶ Family identity validates origin of the indigenous people as well as conceptualizations of human rights. This means the idea of a home and the process of home-making is derived from a sense of cultural identification. The inter-subjective nature of family values, habits, norms values and more form the conglomeration of the wilder societal cultures and institutions . This is so because the assemblage of the idea of family comes to terms with the idea of the self as what

inhabits the home and personalizes it for identity construction. Thus

A man's self is the sum of all that he calls his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but also his cloths and his wife, his wife and children his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works... all these gives him the same emotion. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant, if they dwindle and die always, he feels cast down, not necessarily same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all³⁷

Socialism: This idea got its peak in the philosophy of Nkrumah on the basis that it is the only suitable developmental framework that can accelerate the economic growth of Africa without destroying social justice, freedom and equality, which are central features of African traditional life, where wealth, ownership, means of production are championed along family lines. The head of the family was the guidance of the family. African socialism was the only practical and equitable system that perceives as capable of promoting positive development within African framework in comparism with other

³⁶ Temisanren Ebijuwa, *Confluence of Ideas: Philosophy, Tradition and the Challenges of Universal Values*, (Inaugural Lecture series), Ogbomoso: Ladoke Akintola University of Technology press, 2021

³⁷ William James, *The Principle of Psychology* Vol.1, Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 1981, 292-293

individualistic and exploitative ideologies such as capitalism.³⁸ Nyerere advocated for African socialism on the basis that it benefits all members of the society this was lumped under the name *Ujamaa* which means familyhood. *Ujamaa* is to help restore the cooperative spirit which was in African people before the colonizer introduced the ideas of individualism. African values include, self-esteem, cooperation and family is a rational choice for African to regain themselves after colonialism.

Ideological: the meaning of family has become ideological. Family in African connotes oneness, bond, cooperation, togetherness team-spirit, unity and love. These themes are existential and uphold human prosperity. This is why in churches we now see themselves as family of god. Expressions such as let us work as family, team –spirit has become ideological expression obtain from the conception, practice and modelling of familiar lives. This shows that familiar tiers and bond has gone beyond blood tiers, and has entered into human ideological and sociological usage to ensure that people with difference

(gender, background, academic, skills and many more) can become productive and contribute to humanity when they work as family.

6. Evaluations

The increased divorce rates, the rise of the single parent household, the impact of remarriage, traumas of step father, step mother and step children, the stress of modernized and technological life- style are fast transforming the value and challenging our myths about the value of family life. This has raised social issues such as violence, gang, crimes that are one begins to suppose that childhood in families is preceded by a sort of domestic struggles. The ties of filial stage have collapsed into direct manhood. Teenagers are now master of their thoughts, masters of their conducts and they begin to trace their own paths. Thus moral violence becomes inevitable. It seems that teens have obtained a liberty earlier refused by father and family, independence becomes the climax of youthful appeal and incontestable right. It is worthy to note that the usefulness of family relations' transformation shows huge changes that are closely connected to the

³⁸ Munyaradzi Mawere and Tapuwa R. Mubaya, *African Philosophy and Thought Systems, A Search for a Culture and Philosophy of*

Belonging, Cameroon: Langaa Publishes, 2016, 142.

social and political revolution experienced today. There are certain great social principles which people either introduces everywhere or tolerates nowhere. This shows that there is need to re-affirm the role of family in our society. Leaving family values to be corroded by modernization, technology, and western overzealousness will geometrically impact negatively in all human transaction, and detoriate the values upon which humanity is build. Thus rebuilding global communities, altered family structures and social relations is a necessity. This is in part the significant of this paper.

the family is a better way to ensure socio-political order and peaceful co-existence in our modern society.

7. Conclusion

A healthy family is a place where everyone is loved and respected for who he or she is. Familyhood has been applied and practiced among voluntary association of friends turned family as well as extended family relations. The conception of family brings about understanding and practice of mutual rights, respect for person, duties and privileges for each member. This is why the aim of this research is to redirect the conception of family from an African perspective; this will help save the corrupting family values from its postmodern and hyper-real conceptions. The need to return to the original notion of