

Anthropological Theories of Functionalism and Structuralism: Application to the Traditional Marriage Rites of the Annang

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Abstract

The task of this paper is to discuss functionalism and Structuralism as aspects of cultural anthropology and to apply same to the understanding of traditional marriage in Annangland as a rite of passage. The work highlights the meaning of functionalism as a theory which sees the society as existing to meet the biological needs of the individuals within it and the self stability of the society. Structuralism is understood to mean the giving of interpretations to the minds which guide the directions of the society. The Annang nation is briefly looked at and the Annang marriage rites are exposed in relation to the theories of anthropological functionalism and structuralism. The Malinowski theory of kula ring of exchange is used in discussing the marriage rites in Annangland as social exchange and exchange of wealth. The conclusion of the research is that society, stabilized and strengthened, will promote continuity and will enable individual's attainment of goals.

Key words: Functionalism, Structuralism, Rite of passage, Marriage.

Introduction

Humanity is one and universal yet unique in its cultural expressions and values. Cultural similarities abound as well as variations within every human culture. The one stock of origin shared by all humanity defines the universality of humanity while the environment, language and interpretations of the mind, actions and events provide the ground for the peculiarities of every culture. The duty of the human society, is the integration and presentation of humanity as well as the upholding of the institutions that strengthen the human society with its values.

Anthropology in its task does the scientific study of humanity, human behaviour, human biology and societies, in both present and past. While social anthropology studies patterns of behaviour, the cultural anthropology is occupied with identifying cultural meaning, norms and values within the human society. It belongs to cultural anthropology the definition of the functions of the human institutions using the functionalism theory and the use of anthropological structuralism to provide interpretation to the actions and cultural expressions within each culture. Structuralism enables the uniqueness of every culture. The concern of this paper therefore is to discuss the anthropological theories of functionalism and structuralism while applying them to traditional marriage as a rite of passage in Annang Cultural Milieu.

Functionalism

Functionalism is a theory which sees society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individual in that society. It is also a

theory which emphasizes the maintenance of the social system. The theory believes with Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903) that there are similarities between the society and the human body – just as the various organs of the body work together to keep the body functioning. These parts of society are the social institutions, or patterns of beliefs and behaviours focused on meeting society needs, such as government, education, family, healthcare, religion and economy.

In line with Spencer's theory, Emile Durkheim explained how societies change and survive overtime. He believed that society is a complex system of inter-related and independent parts that work together to maintain stability and that society is tied together by shared values, languages and symbols (www.courses.lumenlearning.com = Retrieved on 12/12/2020).

Functionalism considers the society as a macro organism and addresses it as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. "It emphasizes the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system" (Urry, 2020). It is further said to be "a framework for building theory that sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability" (Macionics, 2016).

Structuralism

Structuralism is a general theory of culture and methodology that implies that elements of human culture must be understood by way of their relationship to a broader system (Calhoun, 2002). Structuralism aims to highlight the structures that underlie all the things that humans do, think perceive and feel. It is said to be "the belief that phenomena of human are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract structure (Blackburn, 2008).

Structuralism developed in Europe in the early 20th century, mainly in France and the Russian empires, in the structural linguistic of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent Prague, Moscow and Copenhagen Schools of linguistics. As an intellectual movement, structuralism was first thought to be an offshoot of existentialism. In the late 1950's when structural linguistics came to be challenged by thinkers as Noam Chomsky and faded in importance, an array of scholars in the humanities borrowed Saussure's concept for use in their respective fields. French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Straus, was arguably the first of such scholar, sparking a widespread interest in Structuralism (Blackburn, 2008).

Rite of Passage

The daily interaction of man with one another and the society produces a change and transition from one level to another. The transitional effect of these interactions is referred to as "Rite of Passage". "Rite of Passage include life crisis rituals which mark transition into different phases of human life like birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher social class, occupational specialization and death. Other "Rites of Passage" celebrate the passage of time or event such as New Year, new moon, Planting season, harvest festivals and national liberation or independence (Ikenga-Metuh, 1999). The whole of man existence is surrounded by Rite of Passage. In another sense, "the Rite of Passage refers to the initiatory rituals appertaining to the Traditional African Society which constitute cultural tools and

indispensable organs by which the community is created and recreated by means of organized rejuvenation of its members and thereby ensuring its continuity and well being” (Umoh, 2016). It must be noted that, rites of passage are not private acts but community acts and they link the present with the original roots: “Rites of Passage refer to a body of traditionally prescribed acts or behavior which engender and celebrate a radical modification in the religious and social status of the individual and consequently in the community as well. Such acts do not emerge from the moon or from the arbitrary formulation of the society. They are ceremonies bequeathed to the society by the divine beings and mythical ancestors. They are therefore primordial acts, evoked and re-enacted each time these body of rites are performed” (Umoh, 2016). Every Rites of Passage is characterized by three Major phases; separation, transition and incorporation.

Marriage

Marriage is a legally or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship (historically and in some jurisdictions specifically a union between a man and a woman). It is one of the important institutions to the human race, culture and religious affiliations (Oko, 2016:154). In the African Society, marriage is seen as a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (www.britannica.com retrieved on 12/12/2020). The universality of marriage within different societies and cultures is certain and is attributed to the many basic social and personal functions for which it provides structure, such as sexual gratification and regulation, division of labour between the sexes, economic production and consumption and satisfaction of personal needs for affection, status and companionship. Perhaps its strongest function concerns procreation, the care of children and their education and socialization and regulation of lives of descent. Though a universal phenomenon, marriage has its uniqueness within each culture and society. The rites of marriage within each society accounts for the uniqueness of marriage in various clan.

Anthropological functionalism Theory

Functionalism is a complex subtopic of cultural anthropology encompassing many broad terms and definitions. It was promulgated by two most prominent anthropologist in Great Britain: Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred R. Radcliffe– Brown between 1910 and 1930. Functionalism served to correct the “empty evolutionary theories that dominated nineteenth century anthropology and the historicism of the twentieth century” (Levinson & Ember, 1996). Above the tenets that institutions and customs are instruments in the service of society, the formulations of Malinowski and Radcliffe – Brown were different in construction.

Bronislaw Malinowski’s Functionalism

Malinowski used the term need functionalism; believing that “humans had set of universal biological needs and that customs developed to fulfill these needs” (Moore, 2009). His form of functionalism focused on the individual and satisfying the basic seven needs of humans which include nutrition, reproduction, bodily comforts, safety, movement, health and growth. His theory “insists...upon the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom,

material object, idea and belief fulfils some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole” (Barnard & Spencer, 1996). He held that it is only understanding such functions and their inter-relations can an anthropologist understand a culture. Malinowski stressed that society is filled of individuals operating in their own way to have a fully functional society. Therefore, functionalism studies societies at one time which is known as synchronic, rather than diachronic or across time. Borrowing from Durkheim’s organic solidarity, Malinowski saw the society as an organism that functions as one with each part of the system operating on its own performing its own special role (Moore, 2009).

Malinowski’s Method of Functionalism

Malinowski’s is considered as the “father of field work” due to his in-depth description of how to properly go about participant- observation and ethnography in his work *Argonauts of the western pacific*. He moved against outsider’s points of view (etic approach) in cultural study and settled for the emic approach- the indigenous and internal perspective of individual within the culture.

He emphasized that for an objective research to be pursued, that the principles to be adopted are;

1. Conducting field work with scientific goals and values
2. The best and perhaps only way to competently study another culture is to actually live in it
3. A researcher must “apply a number of special method of collecting, manipulating and fixing his evidence (*Argonauts*, p.6) ”

Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown’s Functionalism Theory

Drawing from Auguste Comte’s that social constituted a separate “level” of reality distinct from those of biological and inert matter, with the further tenet that explanations of social phenomena had to be constructed within the social level, Radcliffe-Brown held that culture is meant to serve the needs of society. He maintained that society is not merely the sum of individuals but a system, and that human nature provides the conditions for, but not the explanation of, social forms (Levinson & Ember, 1996). He rejected all biological considerations as being reductionist; individuals as replaceable, transient occupants of social roles and therefore irrelevant. He thus emphasized the strengthening of the social structures for stability and sustainability. The society he opined can be maintained through cybernetic feedback. Institutions are orderly sets of relationship whose function is to maintain the society as system.

Anthropological Structuralism

Structural theory in anthropology holds that meaning is produced and reproduced within a cultural through various practices, phenomena and activities that serves as system of significations.

A structuralism approach may study activities as diverse as food-preparation and serving rituals, religious rites, games, literary and non-literary texts and other forms of

entertainment to discover the deep structures by which meaning is produced and reproduced within the culture.

Levi-strauss in his search for the fundamental structures of the human mind argued that the structures that form the “deep grammar” of the society originate in the mind and operate in people unconsciously (Dosse, 1997). The proper focus of anthropological investigation is on the underlying pattern of human thoughts that produce the cultural categories that organize worldviews hitherto studied (Mcgee & Warms, 2004). He emphasized that what makes one culture unique and different from one another are the hidden rules participants understand but are unable to articulate; thus, the goal of structural anthropology is to identify these rules.

Methodological means of discovering these rules is through the identification of binary opposition. Structuralist’s aim is to understand the underlying meaning involved in human thought as culturally expressed. The theoretical approach offered by structuralism emphasizes that elements of culture must be understood in terms of their relationship to the entire system (Rubel & Rosman, 1996). Structuralism provides principles for studying the mental super structure.

Functionalism and the Notion of Marriage in Annang Land

Annang is one of the ethnic groups of the south southern Nigeria. It is the second largest tribe in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria after the Ibibios. Annang land sits on a total area of 850 square miles and it is divided into eight grassroots political entities called Local Government Areas. These include, Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun Local Government Areas found within the Cross River basin, between latitudes 4⁰.25” and 7⁰ North and longitudes 7⁰.15 and 9⁰.30” East, Annang land is bounded on the north and West by the Igbo while the Ibibio make up its eastern and southern neighbors (Ekanem, 2006).

The population of Annang people was put by Udondata in 2006 to be about four million and the people is said to have originated “from Ibom near Aro, northwest and east of Cross River, along the highland of Cameron thousands of years ago”...They had already existed as a people by 7000 BC. As the Annang multiplied, they started moving to different batches from the highlands of Cross River and Ibom by land and sea into different directions, particularly into the western side of the Cross River where some groups temporary settled along the coastal part of the Cross River and the Eastern part of the Niger Delta. After many years of settlement... the Annang decided to migrate and this time along the coastal part of Eket from where the majority of them moved south west till they arrived at the present homeland” (Ekanem, 2006).

The outstanding peculiarity of the Annang people is their language and their environment determines and interprets their occupation. The green vegetation found within Annang land makes agricultural practice prominent among them. The land boasts of hectares of oil palm owned by the Community and individual: “The agricultural staples are palm products, root crops... as the Annang Country has the densest plantation of Oil Palm trees in Nigeria, a man’s wealth is measured by the number of stands of Oil Palm trees that he has” (Ekanem, 2006).

The Annang believe in a supreme being, whom they *Abasi odung onyong* or *Awasi* (Oko, 2019:69). This being is said to be the creator and controller of the universe. Names in Annang convey messages surrounding the birth of the child or the state of the mother while pregnant. Markets in Annang provide the opportunity for social interactions and exchange as well as expression of freedom. Every action of the Annang person is ritualized and conveys meaning beyond the physical, leading to the past. The Annang believe so much in justice, thus the mbiam diety very popular in Ika Area. Annang man is courageous and hardworking. The uniqueness of the Annang people is expressed in their ritual celebration as in the traditional marriage rites.

Notion of Marriage in Annang Land

Marriage in Annangland is a Rite of passage from adolescent to adulthood, it is a rite geared to recreation and renewing of the community. Marriage is a community affair as it links the present with the past with greater hope for the future. Marriage in Annang is a transition from a stage to another. Every Rite of passage is a transition and is characterized by separation and incorporation. There is the separation from one family and the incorporation into a new family. There is the separation from one group to a new group of married people. This incorporation places on the married a new role of stability and continuity of the lineage.

Marriage in Annang land enjoys the freedom of endogamy – marriage within one’s clan or tribe and exogamy-marriage between clans and tribes. The marriage contract is usually facilitated by the elders in Annang land and it is marriage that maintains the bond of people and unity between families, tribes and clans, thus “Ukot Inyiehe Adanga”. The Ukot (in-laws) are sacred and should be honoured, as harm done to an in-law could spell doom for the community.

The Christian monogamy is alien to the Annang culture. In Annang traditional Marriage celebration there is the exchange of wealth. The groom’s family pay the bride price while the bride’s family equips their daughter and inlaw with items with which to live. These gifts items are usually very symbolic. It belongs therefore to anthropological structuralist to give meaning to the gifts as presented at Annang traditional marriage.

The rite of marriage is marked by the expression of intention by the groom’s parents, then the presentation of the bride, the declaration of consent, not necessarily by words alone but with signs and gestures, the exchange of price, the celebrations and merriments. However, it is pertinent to note that no daughter is presented for marriage who has not first been taught and groomed by an elderly woman and this is the reason Nkuho in Annang land.

The whole idea of marriage rite in Annang Land is summed up here: “My daughter’s suitor is coming today and I hope we will clinch the matter of the bride price”. I want you to be there. The suitor was a young man of about twenty five and with him were his father and uncle. On Obierika’s side were his two elder brothers and Maduka, his sixteen year old son... followed by Akueke carrying a wooden dish with the Kola nuts and alligators pepper. She gave the dish to her father’s eldest brother and then shook hands, very shyly, with her suitor and his relatives. She was about sixteen and just ripe for marriage. Her suitor and his relatives surveyed her young body with expert eyes as if to assure themselves that she was beautiful and ripe... she wore a coiffure which done up to a crest in the middle of the heart. Cam wood was rubbed lightly into her skin, and all over her body were black patterns drawn with Uli. She wore a

black necklace which hug down in three coils above her full succulent breast. On her arms were red and yellow bangles... she returned to her mother's hut to help with the cooking" (Achebe, 1958). The religious rite conferring blessings of fertility and fortune on the couple forms part of the marriage rite in Annangland.

The function of marriage within the Annang cultural milieu is both biological and societal. It seeks to take care of the biological need of reproduction, affection, sexual gratification and the recreation and continuity of the community. "The rituals and ceremonies surrounding marriage are associated primarily with fecundity and validate the importance of marriage for the continuation of a clan, people or society" (www.britannica.com – retrieved 21/12/2020). Annang Society is founded on marriage and marriage is a complex affair and a religious obligation by means of which the individual must prevent the flow of life from terminating in him. Since life is a gift from Awasi, procreation is a duty which everybody who received life from him must perform. Everybody therefore must marry and bear children: that is the greatest hope and expectation of the individual. Bareness is therefore considered the greatest punishment upon a married couple. This may partially explain the reason for the engagement of another wife by many Annang, if the first wife remains childless. Thus polygyny is a recognized and venerable form of traditional marriage. Levirate marriage is a common practice among the Annang. The brother of the deceased can take the wife of the deceased to raise children on his behalf. This is very similar to that of the Jews in the Old Testament (Ekanem 2006).

The point stressed above is that the functionality of marriage in Annang culture lies in procreation, recreation and continuation of the Community. Thus for the Annang the Community is important and must be protected.

Structuralism and the Exchange of Wealth in the Annang Traditional Marriage Rites

Having highlighted the fact that marriage rites in Annang Land is not devoid of exchange of wealth and the fact that structuralism in anthropology seeks to understand the underlying meaning involved in human thoughts and actions, this section is aimed at highlighting the various gifts exchanged for bride price and marriage of one's daughter in Annang. The items include, female goat, plantain suckers, mortar and pestle, tripod cooking stand, wrappers, water pot, mat, cooking pots, coconut seedlings.

Interpretations

Every gift represents the giver and his wishes for the receiver. Therefore, in Annang traditional marriage rite, the gifts shared to the newly married depict the wishes of the Community for the new family.

Plantain suckers: Symbolize continuity, fertility and Community. The Annang say, "mmiyong ake abak itie ikpong ndien adaka akono njen: meaning 'The plantain not wanting to stay alone decided to come along with the suckers.'"

The female goat: This is equally a wish for procreation and continuation of life and the Community.

The Mortar and Pestle: The Mortar is carved in the form of a woman body that is open to accept whatever the man symbolized by the Pestle puts in. Procreation is made possible by

continuous mating just as whatever the mortar and pestle pounds comes out grounded after much effort. The pestle is never a symbol of fight and destruction but that of life and togetherness thus the saying in Annang “njen ulung ase ana nte eka ana” the pestle is always found where the mortar is. This places emphasis on the unity of husband and wife.

The tripod Cooking Stand - “Eliok Ukwak”: The stability of the cooking stand lies on the tripod. The family is made up of the father, mother and children. The happiness and stability of marriage is the presence of the three. The Annang wish in marriage rite exchange of gifts that life of the two United in marriage should bring forth the “third” in order for the family to stay stable and the Community be sustained.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Marriage is a Universal phenomenon but its rite of celebration differs from culture to culture. It is not selfish affairs but seeks the continuity of life. As a rite of passage it is a transition from singlehood to companionship and it is geared towards the communal strengthening and sustainability. The candidates, for marriage should be effectively trained and be prepared to carry on the task of recreating a new and sustaining the human society. An ill preparation for marriage breeds the community no good but ills.

In Annang setting, marriage rite enacts the Malinowski’s Kula ring – the rite of exchange and peaceful living and sharing. The Radcliffe – Brown’s functionalist theory is a call to our society today to work towards strengthening the institution of the society rather than building the society around people, as man is transient. The institution should endeavor to serve the interest of all not that of a set of people. The marriage rite in Annang cultural milieu gives chance for collaboration between the elders and the young, therefore, the youth should give priority of honour to the elderly while the elders should allowed the youth listen and learn from them just as in Chinua “Achebe’s things fall apart”.

No two cultures are the same. Therefore, no culture should be judged from the experience of another rather each culture should be studied, understood in order to be correctly interpreted. Language defines a people thought, therefore, need for organized pronouncement and expressions.

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