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CHAPTER FOUR

THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY, MARRIAGE, KINSHIP AND DESCENT SYSTEMS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Man is a gregarious animal; in other words man lives in social groupings. Understanding man and society implies appreciating and understanding the very nature of man and the structural organization of human society. This very nature of man not wanting to live in isolation but instead in association with fellow humans necessitated the need for man to create the institutions of the family and marriage, kinship and decent systems through which every individual in the social group develops an identity and a distinctive origin. The institutions of the family, marriage, kinship and decent systems are the basic social building blocks in any society linking otherwise separate groups in a common social unit (Kottak 2004: 487). Kin groups, such as families and decent groups are social units whose members can be identified and whose resident patterns and activities can be observed (ibid.).

These institutions are a cultural universal i.e. they are operational and obtainable in every society around the world be it traditional or modern. However, both the organization of the family unit, marriage, decent systems and the structure of kinship relations vary from society to society and through time (Ingiabuna et al. 2003).

4.1 The Family

The most basic institution in any society is the family and it is the social context into which members of a society derive their primary identity. Sociologists have come up with different definitions of the family and this is owing to the fact that the family has various manifestations, organization and structures in various societies. One can then talk of various types or forms of family, including primary, secondary, single parent, nuclear, and extended

(Knuttila 2005). In this sense hence, Mair (1972 cf. Okodudu 2010) defines the family as a domestic group in which parents and children live together, and in its elementary form consists of a couple and their children. Duberman and Hartjen (1979 cf. Ingiabuna et al. 2003) define a family as a universal institution whose most important functions are to socialise and nurture the younger generation. To Farly (1994) the family is a group of people related by ancestry, marriage or other committed sexual relationship, or adopted and live together, form an economic unit, and rear their children (if any). Similarly, Smith and Preston (1982) defined the family as a social group whose members are related either through common ancestry or marriage and are bound by moral and economic rights and duties.

From the foregoing, the various definitions emphasized different ideas about what the family is, however what is striking and cross-cutting in all is that:

- i. The family is a group of people related or connected by bloodline, marriage rite or adoption
- ii. They share common residency. They live together.
- iii. They share sentiments of oneness. They view themselves as a unit.
- iv. They share values and responsibilities. Perform caretaking services for others especially the very young.

4.1.1 Forms of Family

Sociologists and anthropologists have identified various forms and kinds of families with regards to the cultural peculiarities as obtainable in various societies over time. However, according to Ingiabuna and Obaro (2009) families are categorized based on the number and generations of people involved in the family groups and the leadership or power/authority holders in the group.

Nuclear Family: The nuclear family refers to a couple along with any dependent, unmarried children who share a residence and form a social unit. In other words it is made up of a husband, wife and dependent children living together in a single dwelling. The nuclear family is the smallest unit of society and it is also called the '*elementary family* (Kottak 2004)'. The typical household units in many modern societies are the nuclear family.

Sociologists and anthropologists have distinguished the nuclear family into two broad categories i.e. the *family of orientation or natal family* - the family in which one is born and

grows up; and the *family of procreation or conjugal family* - the family formed when one marries and has children (Ingiabuna, *ibid*; Kottak 2004).

One or Single Parent Family: This consists of one parent and his or her children. One-parent families may be formed through widowhood, divorce, or separation. They may also be formed when an unmarried person, usually a woman, raises children on her own.

Extended Family: Units larger than the nuclear family are usually known as the extended families; they are extended nuclear units (Haralambos and Holborn 2008). An extended family according to Knuttila (2005) is when three or more generations connected by blood or marriage relationships form a social unit and live together. Extension of nuclear units can either be vertical or horizontal. It is vertical if for example, the addition is from members of a third generation such as the spouses' parents and horizontal if for instance, the addition of members of the same generation as the spouses, such as the husband's brother or an additional wife etc. Hence an extended family is a constituent of several related persons by descent, marriage or adoption such as a husband and a wife and their children and at least one of their sets of parents, aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews all living together in a single dwelling or in close proximity (Kottak 2004, Knuttila 2005).

Blended Families: This is a family made up of a couple and children either or both raised in an earlier marriage, and children they raised together (if any). Most people who divorce eventually get remarried. A good number of such persons often times divorce leaving behind children. Remarriage frequently result in step families, also called '*reconstituted*', '*reorganizing*' or '*blended*' families. Because a good number of those who remarry are parents, their new partners become stepparents. This form of nuclear family has become very common in modern times (Ingiabuna, 2012).

Compound Family: This form of family organization can be seen as an overlapping set of nuclear families, each with the same man as family head. It consists of a man (head of households); his wives and concubines who live in different homestead with their children. In this case, the wives become head of their own respective household while the man rules and runs all households. This kind of family is mostly popular amongst traditional West African societies.

4.1.2 Types of Family According to Authority and Power Structure

Authority and decision making in the family varies from society to society and as earlier mentioned authority structure is one of the parameters to categorize families. The following kinds of families have been identified based on authority and power structure:

Patriarchal Family: In this kind of family structure, decision making authority and power lies in the hands of the man whether be it a nuclear family, single family or an extended family. Male headed households are obtainable in most societies; and in absence of the man, the eldest son becomes the leader of the household.

Matriarchal Family: This is a female headed family. Matriarchal family is sometimes called '*matrifocal*' family (Haralambos and Holborns 2008). Here authority is vested on the woman, resulting especially where the man or husband of a woman has died, or when the men desert their wives. Female headed households are very common in the West Indies and Nayar in India.

Egalitarian Family: This describes an arrangement in the family where power and decision-making authority are equally distributed between the husband and wife. Due to Western education, skills, paid employment for women, women emancipation programmes in recent times, women now share equal authorities with men in the family as they jointly contribute to the family welfare etc.

4.1.3 Functions of the Family

The family as stated earlier is the smallest and most basic social unit of the society and in whatever form it expresses itself, it is found in every society. This implies that the family as the basic social institution is playing a vital role central to the survival of any society and some of these functions are considered here:

- a. **Nurture:** Every child is born into a family and every child is expected to be fed, clothed, educated and cared for. This responsibility lies in the hands of the family; hence the family ensures providing for the welfare needs of the children thereby ensuring the survival of the next generation of society.
- b. **Regulation of Sexual Relationships:** One of the paramount biological needs of man in all society is sexual relationship. Such relationship is often protected with rules and regulations in all societies and it is the family that helps and enforce such rules. This is done to prevent incestuous relationships for example the need for one not to

have sexual relationship with a close relative or kin etc. The family also screens and approves sexual partners and spouses for members.

- c. **Procreation:** The family through the regulation of sexual relationship function fulfils the biological need of reproduction and perpetuation of both the immediate family and the society as a whole (Okodudu 2010).
- d. **Social placement:** As earlier mentioned, the family is the basic unit of identity for every individual. An individual acquires his identity and place in society through his family. The family ascribes many statuses to its members such as; race, ethnic affiliation, nationality, religion, royalty etc.
- e. **Material and Emotional Security:** It is the function of the family to ensure that the material and psychological needs of its members are satisfied by providing necessary economic, social and psychological supports.
- f. **Affection and companionship:** The family is expected to provide affection and companionship for its members. Children are given warm affection within the family to develop a positive self-image, and adults in the family need intimate companionship to cope with life. This breeds a sense of belonging, (Ingiabuna and Obaro 2009).
- g. **Protection:** The family in almost all societies of the world offers some degree of physical, social, economic and psychological protection to its members. Nevertheless, the government through its apparatus like the police, social welfare department now shares this function with the family (Ingiabuna et al 2003).
- h. **Socialization:** Every society has its norms, values, customs and approved behavioural codes of conduct which is passed on from generation to generation. The family performs the function of socialization, teaching the young ones the values and norms of the society. Indeed the earliest and continuous form of education and socialization takes place within the family.
- i. **Legitimizing Inheritance:** The family often confers inheritance rights on the members. It does this by identifying relationships through kinship. In most Nigerian communities, except one is able to trace relationship to a family, he or she could be denied of land rights (Okodudu 2010).

4.2 Marriage

The beginning of a legitimate family is marked by a socially and culturally acceptable legally consummated union called marriage. The marriage institution is a common phenomenon

present in every society; however there are difficulties defining the concept marriage. This difficulty largely arises from the variations of marriage arrangements that have been witnessed in different societies (Okodudu 2010). In view of this, Farley (1994) defined marriage as a socially approved arrangement, usually between a male and a female that involves an economic and sexual relationship. Beattie (1980), defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman such that the children to the woman are the recognized legitimate offspring of both partners. Smith and Preston (1982) on their part conceptualized marriage to be an enduring socially approved sexual and economic relationship between at least two persons. A more acceptable definition of marriage was by Mike Murdock (1949 cf Ingiabuna et al. 2003) who defined marriage as the socially approved union of a sexual cohabiting pair called husband and wife through which the offsprings derive their legitimacy.

From the foregoing, it is deducible that the conventional definition of marriage is that it is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized as legitimate offspring of both parents. However, Okodudu (2010) assert that the idea of marriage has changed in recent times. In much of the Western European countries, marriage has been conceptualized as a union between two consenting adults irrespective of their sexes with or without approval from their parents of family; hence same sex marriages are being contracted today without the possibility of having children, except that it is a relationship between two consenting adults that has been recognised by law.

However, in Nigeria, marriage remains a union of two consenting adults (male and female) but largely with the express support and approval of the immediate families of the individuals involved in the relationship. Marriage also confers upon a man various rights over a woman. These rights are in two classes: rights to a woman's sexual and domestic services, which is right in *uxorem* and rights to a woman as a mother i.e. rights over her offspring which is called rights in *genetricem* (Igbo 2003 cf Okodudu op cit.)

Ingiabuna et al. (2003) stated that in most of Nigerian societies, marriage must meet the following basic prerequisites for it to be a valid marriage:

1. Involvement of the parents of couples – sexual regulation and rules of incest
2. Transfer of Bridewealth or Progency transfer – symbol of marriage contract.
3. Religious factor – obtaining supernatural blessings from the church, mosque or shrines etc.

4.2.1 Forms of Mate Selection

In selecting a marriage partner, certain social dimensions are considered; some prefer a mate of their status, class, ethnic group, race etc. Some of these forms of mate selection include:

- a. **Endogamy:** This is a marriage practice of selecting mates only from within one's own social group, especially from one's own ethnic group.
- b. **Exogamy:** This is mate selection outside one's social group or ethnic group.
- c. **Hypergamy:** A marriage between a high class man and a low class woman in society.
- d. **Hypogamy:** Marriage between a high class woman and a low class man.
- e. **Homogamy:** Mate selection based on similar characteristics between couple such as; educational, religious and race affiliation.

4.2.2 Types of Marriages

1. **Monogamy:** This is a form of marriage between one man and a woman. This implies that a man can have only one wife at a time. Should any reason arise for the man to marry another wife, the first marriage must be dissolved through divorce or death of a spouse. A man whose wife dies could marry another one in what is called serial monogamy.
2. **Polygamy:** Polygamy is a form of marriage in which a person has more than one mate. It is a plural marriage which involves one man having many wives or one woman having many husbands. Polygamy has two sub-divisions:
 - i. **Polygyny** which has to do a man having more than one wife. Most traditional Nigerian societies practice this kind of marriage.
 - ii. **Polyandry** which involves a woman having more than one husband. This practice was dominant in parts of India and Tibet; Lele of central Africa. However, Atemie (1994, 1999) reported that this practice is also common among the Irigwe in Plateau State of Nigeria.

Polyandrous marriages involving siblings is referred to as '*Fraternal*' or '*Adelphic*' polyandry. On the other hand, there is another variant called '*matriarchal polyandry*' where the woman stays at her house and her various husbands come to live with her in turns Goldthorpe (1981).
3. **Group Marriage:** As the name suggests, in this type of marriage all men share marital relations with a group of women. This implies that a group of men and women

are married to one another. They all share reciprocal obligations, as it is required in all marriages jointly. No one particular man owns a wife and vice versa (Okodudu 2010). Schultz and Lavenda (1995 cf Ingiabuna 2012) posits that group marriages are often encouraged by fraternities or what they refer to as ‘solidarities’ or special groupings. The philosophy may be not to discriminate but to share everything in common including belongings, aspirations, and sex and marriage partners. Charles (2008) notes that the Oneida community of the 1960s in New York is often cited as one of such extreme fraternities that practiced group marriage, and who frowned at individual or single marriage partnership. To them single marriage thrives in selfishness and possessiveness, which were seen as sinful.

4. **Levirate Marriage:** This is a type of marriage where a widow is expected to marry her late husband’s brother. The brother is then expected to extend all support to her as if she was his in the first place. Okodudu (2010) notes that there are different reasons for this kind of marriage arrangement; for example if the man had no child before dying, the younger brother can now raise children for him by marrying the widow. The children from such a union belong to the dead brother. In other words, the dead brother is the ‘*Pater*’ or ‘*Social Father*’, while the living brother (the wife’s new husband) is the ‘*Genitor*’ or the ‘*Biological Father*’. Another important reason for this marriage arrangement is to forestall the situation where the woman could possibly move out with or without children to another family through remarriage. This kind of marriage is found among the Nuer of Southern Sudan and the Zulu of South Africa (Charles 2008), and also among the Ogonis and Igbos of Nigeria.
5. **Widow Inheritance:** In widow inheritance, the brother, son or close relative of the deceased husband inherits the wife for the same reasons as highlighted in levirate marriage. In this case however, the widow is often requested to name the next-of-kin among the late husband’s kinsmen whom she would want to live with as her husband. Nevertheless, children gotten from such a union belong to the new husband and not the dead husband, (Charles 2005 in Ingiabuna 2012; Okodudu 2010). Among the Ijos of the Niger Delta, this kind of marriage is called “*Duere*” (Ingiabuna 2003). This marriage type is also common among the Ibos, and Fulanis of Nigeria and some African and Asian societies.
6. **Ghost Marriage:** This is a marriage arrangement whereby in order to perpetuate the name of a dead male member of a family, a living brother gets married to a woman on behalf of the dead brother who died a bachelor hence never had an opportunity to get

married or raise a family. In this case the wife is socially married to the dead man whom she probably never knew and the children born belongs to the dead man who is the *Pater* (Social Father), while the living brother happens to be the *Genitor* (Biological Father). This kind of marriage existed among the Nuer of Sudan studied by Evans-Pyrrichard in 1940 (see Ingiabuna 2003; Okodudu 2010).

7. **Woman-to-Woman Marriage:** In this kind of marriage, a wealthy barren woman acquires a wife by performing all traditional rites and pay appropriate bride wealth. The woman becomes the husband while the lady being married becomes the wife. The female husband determines the manner of allocation of her sexual favours by screening and approving her sexual partners (Ingiabuna 2012). Children born belong to the woman-husband who is the *Pater* (social father) while the man she arranged to raise children with the woman-wife is the *Genitor* (Biological father). This kind of marriage is sometimes practiced among the Efiks and Kalabaris of the Niger Delta. Ibibio women also practice this kind of marriage to secure their place in the husband's house among co-wives.
8. **Gift or Charity Marriage:** In this kind of marriage, parents give out one of their young daughters as a gift to their friends or patrons without any consideration as a demonstration of friendship, honour and total loyalty. In some African societies, the chiefs or kings enjoyed this honour and prerogative among subjects. Among the Hausa people, a girl might be given away to her father's friends or chiefs if she abuses her virginity. Similarly, among the Kanuri of Nigeria, a charity marriage could be contracted between a virgin girl and a Mallam in appreciation to a religious functionary who performed religious role to benefit the family members in areas like; medicine, prayers, divination. This practice has also been reported by Otite and Ogonwo (2005) to have been found among the Urhobos.
9. **Child-to-Child Marriage:** In this kind of marriage, parents of betrothed children make perfect the marriage pact as soon as the boy was of school age between 5-7 years. The children are formally married by their parents and allowed to grow under the watch for eyes of the parents. This practice was found to have existed among the Oron people of Akwa Ibom State by Charles (2008).
10. **Pawn Marriage:** This is a situation where a man cannot readily pay his creditor may give out his daughter as payment for debt owned. Okaba (2005) reported that among the Ijos, there was the practice of pawning girls maturing into puberty; she is espoused to the pawnbroker or his closest kin. In this situation there would be no

payment of bride wealth and acceptance by the creditor relieves the debtor of his debts. However Ingiabuna (2004) stated that among the Ijos, a father could not pawn away his daughter without the approval of the girl's maternal uncle, except in cases of high bridal transfer (Opu-ekiye) marriage systems.

11. **Wife Capture/Elopement:** This is a situation when a young suitor captures or elopes with a girl he intends to marry. Ingiabuna and Obara (2009), stated that among the Ijos, a suitor may capture a daughter if the parents of the girl refuse him marriage to the girl. The suitor however, comes back later to properly marry the girl. Similarly, as observed by Ewuruigwe (1994), among the Ezamgbo (Igbo), a man may capture a maiden on her way from or to the town market for her last marriage rites to her new home. If the usurper succeeds, he fires a gun shot into the air as he reaches home with the captive wife. This act makes her a legitimate wife to the usurper and no new bridal payments are made. Still, among the pre-colonial Tiv of Benue, a form of elopement has been reported where a suitor may successfully elope with a man's daughter if the man refuses the suitor to marry his daughter.

12. **Cross Cousin/Parallel Cousin Marriage:** Cross and parallel cousin marriage are types of preferential and prescribed marriages; in *preferential marriage*, the societal law stipulates that a partner or close relative ought to marry another close relative in a particular generation or relationship, though it is not compulsory. On the other hand, marriage partners could be rigidly fixed by the culture for a man to take his spouse from among relatives in a given society. This is called *prescribed marriage*.

In cross cousin marriage, the marriage is simply between children of siblings of opposite sex. Therefore this type of marriage could involve children of brothers and those of their sisters, vice versa. When a man marries a daughter of his mother's brother he is said to have married his matrilineal cross cousin. If he is married to a daughter of his father's sister, he is having patrilineal cross cousin. In either of these marriages, the partners in marriage do not share the same patrilineage and they do not share inheritance.

On the other hand, parallel cousin marriage involves children of siblings of same sex. That is a man marries his father's brother's daughter. All partners in this case belong to the same patrilineage or matrilineage as the case may be, Charles (2005 op cit.). Cross and parallel cousin marriages have been found to have existed among the Fulani and Kanuri in Nigeria.

13. **Sororate and Sororal Polygyny:** Sororate marriage is culturally opposite to levirate marriage. According to Gluckman (1975), in sororate, the sister of the dead wife is culturally required to marry the late sister's husband, (serial monogamy). While in sororate polygyny, one husband is free to choose many sisters in marriage, as in the case in the Bible when Jacob married Leah and Racheal. This marriage system is also found among the Zulus of Southern Africa. This they do because they assume that the jealousy which generally engulfs plural wife marriage is neutralized by sisters who share same parents and presumably common aspirations.

4.3 Kinship

Kinship is one of the main organizing principles of human societies which have its roots in the predominant extended family. Kinship describes and establishes a network of enduring relationships between individuals and groups on the model of biological relationships between parents and children, between siblings and between marital partners.

Radcliffe-Brown (1952) define kinship as a social construct that expresses the social relationship between an ego, his parents and siblings. Onwujeogwu (1995) sees kinship as a socially recognized relationship traced through the parent-child relationship. To Mair Lucy (1972) kinship is the expression of social relationships in a biological idiom. Generally, kinship is a network of relations expressed in ties of obligations, claims to resources, statutes, property rights, duties, power, privileges, authority and obedience, social security, mutual assistance and sexual behavior (Ewuruigwe, 1994:85).

From the foregoing, blood ties happen to be the basis for kinship, however kinship goes beyond actual biological ties or a common ancestry; but they are socially constructed by people within a culture. This position was confirmed by Ewuruigwe (1994) when he asserted that kinship is a socially recognized fact based on the assumption of genealogical connection between a person and his forebears, real or putative. This is so because apart from the nuclear and extended biological links, Africans have what social anthropologists usually refer to as fictional or pseudo-kinship which includes; ritual kinship, fictive kinship and comprado kinship, (Schusky, cited in Charles 2005 op cit.). It is on this basis that Ewuruigwe (1994) established that kinship could be derived from four principles;

- a. Blood or consanguinity
- b. Marriage or affinity
- c. Adoption and

d. Ritual or fiction e.g. Godfather

Thus, Ingiabuna (2012) posited that a kin could be one's biological relation, or affinals – people related through marriage and similarly, those adopted into one's family or groups are kins as well as one's Godparents in church baptism or political life etc.

4.4 Descent Systems

Decent group which is closely related to kinship is any social group which membership depends on common descent from a real or mythical ancestor (Kottak 2004). In other words descent groups are kin groups who are lineal descendants of a common ancestor. Hicks and Gwynne (1994) defined the decent group as all those who trace their connection to an ancestor common to all of them. Charles (2005 op cit.) defined it as an important expression of kinship by a defined connection to an ancestor through series of parent-child-links. He further conceptualized it to be an ordering principle in which individuals hierarchically trace their genealogy to a common ancestor. It is pertinent to state here that descent group membership is determined at birth and is life-long. In this case, it is an ascribed status (Ingiabuna 2012). Descent groups may be lineages or clan who traces genealogy to one apical ancestor who stands at the apex of the common genealogy (Kottak 2004).

Onwujeogwu (1995) opined that there are four categories of decent system which emerged from two broad categories;

- a. The cognate decent system which consist of bilateral and double decent system where an ego traces his/her decent from more than one ancestor and
 - b. The unilineal (agnate) decent system which comprises of patrilineal and matrilineal in which case an ego traces his/her genealogy to a single line of either father or mother.
-
1. **Matrilineal Decent System:** This descent system also known as 'Matriclan', individuals traces their genealogy through their mother's ancestry. In this system people join the mother's group automatically at birth and stay members throughout life. Matrilineal descent groups therefore include only the children of the group's women (Kottak 2004). However, in matrilineal societies, figures of authorities are usually men such as; mother's father or elder brother. Property inheritance in matrilineal societies is maternal i.e. children could inherit their mothers father or uncles properties. Some examples of societies that practice matrilineal decent system

include; the Nembe of Bayelsa state of Nigeria, Ohafia clan among the Igbos, Kanuri of Nigeria, Ashanti and Akan of Ghana, several West Indies societies, Bemba (Zambia), Ovambo (Namibia), and most societies in Central Africa, (Modo 2004).

2. **Patrilineal Decent System:** In patrilineal decent system also known as 'Patriclan', people automatically have a lifetime membership in the father's group. The children of the group's men join the group, but the children of the female members of that group are excluded (Kottak 2004). Hence an individual traces his or her genealogy through male ancestry i.e. from father, to grandfather, to the great grandfather, to great great-grandfather and then to other very great ancestors up to the eponymous ancestor. All male ancestors who ever lived are recognized when tracing one's root in this way and inheritance in patrilineal decent system passes through a man to his sons. Examples of patrilineal societies include the Igbos, Ikwerre, Urhobo, Bini, Yorubas etc. (Okaba 2005).
3. **Double Decent:** In the double descent system, ego acquires membership from both the matrilineal and patrilineal lineages according to certain culturally defined rules (Ingiabuna 2012). In this system an individual affiliates for some definite purpose with a group of matrilineal kinsmen and for some other definite purposes him or her affiliates with a group of patrilineal kinsmen (Modo 2004). Examples of double decent societies include Yako of Nigerian, Ijos of Niger Delta, Lowili of Northern Nigeria, Hutu of Rwanda etc. According to Okaba (2005), among the Ijos, where double decent kinship is adopted, ego is free to inherit property from both patrilineal and matrilineal lineages, yet residence is patrilocal. Ego could inherit immovable properties of his father (e.g. houses, farmlands etc.), and movable properties of his maternal uncle, such as; clothing, and titles, medical secrets, etc. In situations where ego's uncle owed debts before his death, the ego, the children of the dead and matrikin are responsible to repay such debts.
4. **Bilateral Decent:** Ingiabuna (2012) asserts that bilateral system properly describes a pattern of property inheritance system in which the ego inherits property and positions from any of the kins so recognized by him. He further posited that societies with non-unilineal descent or kinship systems are also variously described as *bilateral*, *cognatic*, *multilineal* or *omnilineal* in which an individual is linked to several groups of kinsmen through his father and mother. Kinship ties in non-unilineal systems are generally ego-centred and an individual has potential rights to, and choice to live in, a number of overlapping kin groups which are linked to different ancestors on his

father's and mother's side. Kinship can be traced or reckoned either through the male or female and one may inherit equally from either father or mother. That is a child though belongs to the two parents is free to choose which parent he would want to identify with. The one identified with is the one he will live with take part in communal life and gain access to land and other properties. Here people can also change their descent group membership; belong to two or more at the same time (Kottak, 2004). The ambilineal system describes achieved status (Ingiabuna 2012). Examples of bilateral groups include; Iban of Bornea, the Hapu of Moari, the Lozi of Zambia etc. (Charles 2005 op cit.).

4.4.1 Significance of Kinship and Descent Systems in Africa

Otite and Ogionwo (2001 cited in Ingiabuna 2012) identified the significance of kinship and descent in Africa.

- (a) The first is the allocation of rights such as those of residence, group membership and citizenship, succession to office, and inheritance of property which are transmissible from one generation to the other. There are some exceptions to a person's eligibility to succeed to an office or to inherit property.
- (b) Descent and kinship enjoin certain social obligations such as moral support and material dependence or assistance when needed. There is normally a high degree of trust amongst kinsmen.
- (c) Descent and kinship regulate sexual relations, for instance, through marriage which, according to the society concerned, includes or excludes certain categories of kinsmen.
- (d) Kinship terms such as father and mother, are a shorthand form of expressing relationships; they contribute to social order and to the prediction of behaviour in society.
- (e) Descent groups, such as the Yoruba, Hausa or Ashante royal lineages (or "Houses") are corporate groups; they perform political and economic functions in their various societies. This is equally evident of the Eastern Ijo 'War Canoe House' or 'Wari' system where several houses in the community represents an economic and political unit. Also, both descent and kinship provide a vital context for the analysis of other institutions, such as the political, economic and religious institutions in African societies.

4.5 Marital Residence Pattern

Patterns of residence among newly married couples are very important in perpetuating the structure of the particular group's descent system. Different marital residence patterns are adopted by different societies and communities depending on the needs and social organization of such societies. Ingiabuna (2012) identified eight of such marital residence patterns which shall be discussed here:

- i. **Patrilocal or Virilocal Residence:** In this form of marital residence married couples are required to live in or near the husband's family or lineage. Here, the authority of the lineage head rests with the father, or in his absence, the eldest son who settles disputes, arranges marriages and other ceremonies and in some cases decides the bride-wealth payable on daughters of the lineage. Virilocal is a Latin word meaning residence in the locality of the husband (Ingiabuna et al 2003).
- ii. **Matrilocal or Uxorilocal Residence:** This is a residence system where married couples are expected to live with or near the wife's family. Here the man is subject to the rule and authority of his wife's kinsmen. Uxorilocal means residence in the wife's place. This kind of residence pattern is mainly popular in matriarchal/ matrilineal societies and societies where dowry payment is predominant. Among the Yao and Cewa of Malawi, a man lives in his wife's home but he is later allowed to remove her to a village of his own matrilineal kin, (Modo 2004). This practice is also seen among the people of Trobriand Island, which is a predominantly matrilineal society.
- iii. **Bilocal Residence:** In this kind of residence, couples can reside either with the man's relatives or the wife's relatives. According to Elman Service (cited in Ingiabuna 2003), this residence pattern became popular with the emergence of infectious diseases brought about by European travellers who contracted such diseases, which eventually caused mass death thereby completely erasing some families. Therefore people began to live with whichever parents or relatives that was alive. Another reason given by Ingiabuna (2012), for the existence of this residence style is that couple often needed the material support of one set of parents before setting up a home of theirs.
- iv. **Avunculocal Residence:** This refers to a marital residence pattern in which a man and his wife settle down with his mother's people after marriage. Among the Yao and Cewa of Malawi in Central Africa, a man lives in his wife's home after marriage.

Later he moves to settle with his mother's kinsmen. Similarly, in Trobiand Island, which is predominantly matrilineal, a man must grow up in his father's house. But when he marries, he then transfers to his mother's brother's village where he expects land. Avunculus is a Latin word meaning mother's brother (Ingiabuna 2003).

- v. **Neolocal Residence:** This is a system of residence where married couples leave home for an independent residence after marriage. This refers to residency pattern in which the couple is expected to live separately outside of the husband's or the wife's kinsmen. This means that on marriage they are not expected to live with either family but relocate to a new location. Ingiabuna (2003) posits that where international marriage is involved they are expected to move to a third country, state or community to settle down.
- vi. **Duolocal or Natolocal:** In this marital residence pattern, couples are required to reside separately. This means that both husband and wife stay in their families of orientation or in their different apartments and only visit each other. Duolocal means residence in two places, while natolocal refers to residence in where one was raised (Ingiabuna and Obaro 2009).
- vii. **Amitilocal Residence:** Amitilocal is derived from a Latin word, 'amita' meaning father's sister. Here a girl child is expected to live with her father's sister until she is married out. Similarly, a boy child remains with his parents, but moves to live with his father's sister with his wife as soon as he is married, Ingiabuna and Obaro (ibid).
- viii. **Uxori-Virilocal Residence:** In this residence pattern, the couple lives with the wife's family and later with the man's family after the man must have proved himself a good provider through hunting and providing game meat for the bride's family. As noted earlier Ingiabuna (2003) revealed that among the Yao and Cewa of Malawi in Central Africa, a man lives with his wife's people after marriage, and later moves to settle with his matrikin. The situation where he must provide this "bridal service" to his in-laws for a period before relocating to his own territory may be described as uxori-local.

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