SOCI 222
Comparative Social Institutions

Session 13 – Social Change and Social Institutions

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Session Overview

- Society and its institutions are dynamic thus social change is of interest to sociologists. This session examines Ghanaian social institutions in the face of social change and how they have survived the effects of colonialism

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Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

- Topic one - Defining social change

- Topic two - The role of colonialism as a main factor of social change in Ghana

- Topic three - The effect of colonialism on the social institutions in Ghana

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Reading List

- Nukunya, G.K. (2003). *Tradition and Change in Ghana (2nd edition): An Introduction to Sociology* Accra: Ghana Universities Press (Pg 113 - 140)

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Topic One

DEFINING SOCIAL CHANGE

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Social change: Meaning and Scope

- Over the decades and at various times Ghanaian social institutions have come under different influences resulting in changes of some kind

- Some of these changes came about through internal factors such as civil wars, natural disasters, population growth and pressure on available resources etc.

- Colonial rule led to new and far-reaching changes

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Defining social change

- The significant alteration over time in human thought, behavior patterns, culture and institutions of society

- Any significant alteration in the structure or function of any or some of the parts leading to alterations in the shape of the whole society (Parsons, 1951)

- Can be subtle and non-dramatic thus giving the impression that society is stable

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Colonialism as the main factor of change

- The year 1900 - generally accepted as the baseline of change in Africa

- Why? It was roughly the time that effective colonial rule started to influence African institutions

- Colonial rule as the main event leading to change is _significant_ because changes in institutions started to occur only after this event

- Although African societies were not completely static, whatever changes existed were minor when compared to those coming in the wake of colonial rule.

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Effects of colonialism on African Institutions

- It has been accepted that, with all the factors of change, colonialism was the one with the greatest impact on our social institutions

- An important effect of colonialism was the support it gave to the other agents of change namely:
  - Christianity
  - Formal Class-Room Education
  - Money-Using Economy

- The effects of all these factors of change are *inter-related* and *reinforce* one another.

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Effects on Traditional Political Institutions

- The establishment of a government weakened the existing traditional political structures

- Chiefs lost their independence in almost every respect e.g. their power to wage war on their neighbors was taken away

- The office of the District Commissioner (D.C) took over the powers of the chiefs

- Lineage heads and other elders of the family also suffered as their authorities were taken away

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Effects on Traditional Political Institutions

- However, not everything changed - Chieftaincy as an institution is still in practice with traditional festivals held annually with pomp and pageantry

- Shows that social change brought by colonialism did not result in the complete elimination of the traditional chieftaincy institution

- Rather, there is a remarkable resilience of the chieftaincy institution leading to an *interplay* or *combination* of tradition and change

- The traditional chieftaincy institution has existed side by side with the modern democratic structures

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Effects of Christianity on Traditional Religion

- Christianity opposed many aspects of traditional life as its tenets run counter to almost every thing traditional religion stands for

- It opposed not only religious practices but anything traditional or African and considered them *pagan*
  - E.g. Dr. Ephraim Amu was sacked from the E.P. Church for wearing Kente to church;

- Also reduced the efficiency of the role of ancestors in the social control system and by this destroyed African culture and values.

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Effects of Christianity on Traditional Religion

- In spite of these, Ghanaians accepted Christianity without abandoning their traditional beliefs

- Rather, Christianity existed and operated side by side with traditional religion, accommodating each other

- According to Brokensha, (1966), most Larteh Christians accepted Christianity, whereas they seek the 'abosom' or their gods in times of difficulties

  – E.g. the case of a Presbytarian Church elder who wanted to dedicate his new house

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Effects of money-using economy on the Traditional Economy

- Currencies that existed in pre-colonial Africa included cowries, gold dust, iron and brass as well as barter trade

- The introduction of money brought radical changes in the commercial and economic lives of the people

- It encouraged inter-ethnic and inter-regional trade as well as migration

- In spite of money as the medium of exchange, barter trade and other traditional mechanisms still exist.

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Effects of formal classroom education

- Formal classroom education came with the missionaries to propagate the gospel
- Christianity and formal classroom education went hand in hand
- Establishment of second-cycle institutions e.g. Mfantsipim, Adisadel, Presec etc
- Formal education forced people to adopt European life-styles, dress, food habits, music, dance at the expense of traditional values and norms
- Traditional values and culture was not only absent from school curriculum, but attempts were made to prevent pupils from learning them.

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Effects of formal classroom education

- – E.g. participation in traditional dancing for a pupil was an offence requiring several lashes;

- Consequently, educated Africans did not know much about their own cultural values and rites of passage

- Traditional marriage and naming ceremonies, puberty and mortuary rites were considered pagan by Christian doctrines and educational curriculum

- However, these traditional rites of passage still exist and operate side by side with modern ones

  - – E.g. during church wedding, recognition is given to the traditional marriage which must come first

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Remarkable resilience of social institutions

- <u>N.B.</u>- traditional institutions and practices <u>no longer operate</u> with the *same force and intensity*

- Social Change brought by colonialism did not result in the complete replacement or elimination of traditional institutions with modern ones

- The two have combined to form the end result which contains elements of both

- Despite the influences of colonialism (and other factors of change) on Ghana, the country has traces of European life whiles retaining and exhibiting much of her traditional flavor

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Remarkable resilience of social institutions

- Thus social change in Ghana, (and Africa as a whole), involves an interplay of traditional indigenous elements on one hand and the factors of colonialism etc. on the other

- In this process, the end result is a combination of the two (*tradition and change*)

- In other words, in the process of social change, traditional institutions show a remarkable resilience in the face of external factors

- Traditional institutions have accommodated factors of change as they both exist side by side

Sample Question

- Social Change in Africa resulted in the replacement or elimination of traditional institutions. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

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References

- Brokensha, D. (1966) Social Change in Larteh, Ghana. Oxford: Clarendon Press

- Nukunya, G.K. (2003). *Tradition and Change in Ghana (2nd edition): An Introduction to Sociology* Accra: Ghana Universities Press