Chapter 17
Toward a Normative Ethical Claims of Ibibio Social Norms, Values, and Beliefs

Essien D. Essien

University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This study examined the normative ethical claims, social norms and values laden in Ibibio social system and culture. These claims institutes avowal about ethical considerations and make moral judgments. This study presents a socio-cultural description of Ibibio norms which are an integral part of the culture, social custom, rituals and beliefs governing social coexistence. It argues that though norm is a cultural production with emphasis on prohibitions, Ibibio norms dictates behavioral and/or conversational re-orientation which determines how basic moral standards are arrived at and justified. The findings of this study however have a significant implication for cumulative research on the ethical elements of Ibibio norms and social beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the importance of social norms in contemporary societies and their impact on human behaviour, little research has been conducted on the diversity and power of social norms on the ethical orientation of individuals and the well-being of communities in many African societies especially the Ibibio of southern Nigeria. Most accounts describe this phenomenon simply as a mere cultural product prescribing behavioural and conversational prohibitions without a perusal of the sacred or magical nature of norms (Ouidade, 2010). As a result, they have some difficulty explaining both the moral aspect of the occurrence as well as the tremendous expansion of its ideology. This study therefore aims at filling this gap by analyzing to what extent the concept of norms helps understand, clarify and solve plethora of moral issues ravaging our society.

In Ibibio societies, like many other societies of the world, several activities are characterized by externally sanctioned prohibitions, and human behavior is not governed solitary through rational decision making. Somewhat, societies often have shared values and standards of acceptable behavior that members of the society are encouraged to follow; specifically, though a cultural norm or a societal value guides and regulates the behavioral pattern and thoughts of their members by agreed upon expectations and rules. These rules constitute the list of behavioural guidelines which is typically referred to as societal norms, customs and norms (Esema, 2002). These include not only illegal or criminal behaviors sanctioned by law, but also norms of conduct enforced through social sanctions. However, the customs and norms governing interactions between people and their environment in Ibibio society are complex and dynamic. They translate to what can appropriately be described as indigenous knowledge (IK), otherwise known as traditional knowledge (TK), or local knowledge.

Although conventional wisdom shows that an important part of the characterization of every society hinges on the different social norms and values that govern their members' behavior. Ibibio norms go further to provide the moral sanctions against transgressions which are associated with individuals' emotional ambivalence and likely to provoke the wrath of the spirit/gods. This is however due to the contagious nature of the norms, in determining (desirable values) in the human community (Ouidade, 2010). It is through the process of inculcation and articulation of these values that proper behavior is ensconced among the youths and adult Ibibio society. The specific objectives of the study are to critically review the phenomenon of norms as it affects what governs individual and social acceptable conduct to the benefit of the well-being of the community, identify its causes and areas of manifestation, highlight its current trend, propose a sustainable and pragmatic solution toward averting the negative expression of the phenomenon. This study adopted a conceptual and theoretical perspective governing the application of norms regarding the state of affairs in Ibibio. The study is of the opinion that norms whether viewed as laws, custom, or personal beliefs of a people specify situations in which behaviors or actions should not be performed. In that regard, it communicates moral messages for the benefit of all. The fundamental hypothesis of this study, therefore, is to demonstrate that norms have the capacity to perform critical responsibility in the ethical life of the Ibibio people. In the perspective of this research, this constitutes the hidden dimension of the phenomenon.

Theoretical Framework

This scholarly discourse is founded on Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and Planned Behaviour (TPB) which posits that "a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior and that this intention is, in turn, a function of his/her attitude toward the behavior and his/her subjective norm" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179). According to this theory, the best predictor of behavior is intention. Intention is the cognitive representation of a person's readiness to perform a given behavior, and it is considered to be the immediate antecedent of behavior. This intention is determined by three things: their attitude toward the specific behavior, their subjective norms and their perceived behavioral control. The theory of planned behavior holds that only specific attitudes toward the behavior in question can be expected to predict that behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p. 180). In addition to measuring attitudes toward the behavior, we also need to measure people's subjective norms – their beliefs about how people they care about will view the behavior in question. This study also finds premise on Vygotskian's socio-cultural model which cogitates that superior order functions and develops out of every social interaction. According to this theory, "every function in an individual's cultural development becomes visible in

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