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THE MEDIA AND AFRICAN CHILD FORMATION: AN ETHICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract

The child occupies a very crucial place in every family, community and the entire human society. Among the cardinal African values, the child is highly ranked. Thus, offspring remains an essential aspect of African marriages. As the primary agent of socialization, the family plays a pivotal role in child formation. Apart from the general educational contents, African child formation importantly involves the inculcation of the effective African values that aid individual and societal integral developments. Within the platforms of both informal and formal education, the reality and place of the media in child formation is indubitable. As an important vehicle of information transmission, the media is pivotally positioned to provide platforms of exposures. Thus, with the activities of the media, the child is exposed to information that could add either positive or negative values to his/her process of formation. In the contemporary age of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the African child is faced with media realities that pose greater challenges to his/her human formation. The present piece approaches the place of the media in African child formation from the ethical perspective with a view to determining the moral problems and prospects therein. With the philosophical tools of exposition, critical analysis and appraisal, it could be submitted that African child formation is both advanced and hampered by the recent media activities, thereby eliciting measures towards promoting the advantages and disparaging the disadvantages.

Introduction

Theories surrounding child formation tend to be found mainly within the domain of psychology. Although child formation goes beyond the behavioural driven child development, child behavioural theories contribute significantly to any comprehensive thesis on the concept. A holistic approach to child formation should reflect the biological, rational, moral and sociological aspects of child development. The period of conception through gestation and birth, relates to a child's biological development into a human person with either of the sexes. An existentialist, Jean Paul Sartre conceives that, at birth, man is thrown into the world and by so doing is condemned to exist. The child is normally born into either a nuclear or extended family of parents, siblings and other relatives as the case may be. With the family, the child is thrown into the reality of socialization. As growth takes place, the child faces the demands of human formation.

African Child Formation

African child formation finds expression in the reality of child's growth and development within African setting. In Africa, a child is normally born into a cultural setting. Even in the modern time, child-birth cultural ceremonies are not obsolete. They are important aspects of child initiation into the community and enduring culture. Child formation begins with child rearing which entails guiding the child through the right paths towards responsible adulthood for the ultimate purpose of self actualization. Thus, African child formation assumes social, intellectual and moral dimensions.

Social

The initial instance of African child formation assumes a social dimension. The family in which a child is born is the primary agent of socialization. There, the child is immersed into the pool of family relationship. The mother-child bond is further strengthened during lactation. According to Elam, "The practice of carrying the infant on the mother's back, for example, provides for a most intimate child-mother relationship. It has been stated that the child needs close physical contact, tactile stimulation, and kinesthetic stimulation which are all a part of his progress as he proceeds through the various developmental phases." (Elam, 1968) The whips and spanks of the parents during infancy are intended for right social behaviors within the family and among peers. The child's social process of learning includes observation, instruction and training. Elam notes that:

In the process of socialization, the child learns of the authoritarian paternal control of the household. By further observation, he learns the social role of each member in the household group. By instruction, observation, and training the child learns the importance of roles of various members of the family; for example, the implication of the family meal particularly that no one eats until the father has been served and finished. In addition to this, he learns to be very quiet while waiting to be served. During the actual time of eating, the children are discouraged from talking (Elam, 1968).

Ultimately, the child family social orientation is preparatory for communal membership. Elam notes that, "The family is the medium through which the larger cultural heritage is transmitted to the child. It is from this group, that is, "the household unit" in which and through which the child receives his orientation into the social world" (Elam, 1968). The child is initiated into cultural norms that guide social behaviours like respect for elders. In Africa, children are not gifts to just parents or immediate families, rather to the entire

community. In Igbo society, the name Nwora (child of all) depicts this reality. As such, child rearing and the responsibility of initial child socialization extends to the kindred, clans and villages. Being a communal society, the social behaviours of the child affects the entire community. Social orientation assumes cultural dimensions. It includes children cultural initiations. African social relationships are culture bound. In this regard, Harry P. Elam notes that:

> Development is a continuum of actions between the biological organism and its social and physical environment. The biochemical process of the individual, as well as the nature of his cultural experiences contributes to the dynamics of growth and development. A child is born into an already on-going social environment which immediately begins to shape his development. Culture will, in many ways, influence what is done as a part of this maturational process. It will play a major role in determining the means which the child will assign to his development. The individual cannot be separated from his environment. The implications of the cultural setting and the social institution have a direct bearing and relationship on the total development of the child (Elam, 1968).

Every child is expected to be abreast with the custom and tradition of his community. Thus, African children are normally exposed to socio-cultural practices like masquerade cult practices, moonlight tales, peer plays, etc. These are the medium of social convention, "… which are the consensually determined standards of conduct particular to a given social group." (Nucci, 1997)

Intellectual

African child's intellectual formation takes place within the contexts of informal and formal education. Ezeani writes that, "Education, as a process, is a movement away from the base-level to the higher human level of development; growth in virtue and knowledge and growth in one's positive contribution to overall good of society" (Ezeani 2013, 77). The intellectual development of a child usually commences with the informal education of the child within the family. With parental instructions together with observations, the child begins to gain knowledge. Generally, child informal education refers to pre-school or non-academic forms of learning in infancy. The essence is for the child to acquire basic knowledge of life.

In a parallel, and not too dissimilar vein, interest in informal learning in childhood has traditionally dealt with how parents socialize their infants into culturally approved ways of behaving and, when they are older, fostering positive attitudes to school and the wider community, usually under the umbrella of parenting. (Collins, Harris & Susman, 1995).

At different pre-school ages, children exhibit certain tendencies in tune with informal learning. For instance, Stern-LaRosa (2013) posits that:

> Three- and 4-year-olds begin to expand observations of differences and seek explanations for those differences. They show a greater awareness of their own and other's appearances. They ask questions about where they got their own skin, hair, and eye color, or why certain groups of people are called names that reflect colors other than what they are.

Child's informal knowledge in African context takes the form of instructions from parents, relatives and sometimes other members the community. Through instructions, the child is disposed to home and local learning about the social, moral and religious aspects of African life. The child learns of things that add values to his/her own formation. Ezeani surmised that education in Africa cuts across two historic epochs. He noted that, "In discussing the notion of education within the African context, it is important to distinguish two eras, the pre-colonial era and the colonial era, which also embraces post-colonial period." Child education in pre-colonial Africa was entirely informal. Child's intellectual capacity were believed to be endowed by the gods but would be led through learning to acquire indigenous knowledge, cultivate discipline and good moral attitudes. Thus, a child's intellectual potentialities manifest in the level of astuteness in various aspects of indigenous knowledge. A father trains and expects his male child to exhibit masculinity and virility as a sign of strength to adequately cater for his family when he dies. In *Things Fall Apart,* Okonkwo's first son, Nwoye's reflected in his childhood, female characteristics which his father considered disappointing.

More than any other character, Nwoye encapsulates an innocent child who is very sensitive to his surroundings and is baffled by the seemingly arbitrary cruelties being committed around him. His dominant characteristic is his incredible ability to feel and sympathize, even more so than some of the female characters. Though considered positive traits by modern women looking for a "sensitive man," Okonkwo isn't impressed and aggressively tries to keep his son from acting like "a woman."

Child's formal education takes place in an academic terrain (school) where teachers are academic instructors. Once a child attains the school age, he/she is enrolled into formal education in a school. The intellectual formation of the child at that moment are enshrined in schools' academic curricula. In public schools from first through twelfth grade, much of the classroom routine is shaped by an emphasis on rote learning, a strict adherence to standardized textbooks and workbooks, and a curriculum that is often enforced with drill and practice. The methods and the curriculum are molded by the questions that appear on the standardized achievement tests administered to every child from the fourth grade on. Success no longer means being able to do. Success comes to mean "academic success," a matter of learning to function within the system, of learning the "correct" answer, and of doing well at multiple choice exams. Success also means, sadly, learning not to ask difficult questions. When we ask how our children are doing in school, we usually mean, "are they measuring up to the prevailing standards?" rather than, "are they having a good time and feeling excited about learning?"

The mission statement of UNESCO in its department on Early Childhood Care and Education(ECCE) has it that, "The foundations of human development are laid during the child's early years and thus early childhood requires an integrated approach to the child's care, development and learning." In essence, formal child education ensures learning directed mainly towards the cognitive formation of the child. The child's intellectual abilities and reasoning are better developed in the school. The curricula of learning are formulated to achieve this. African child formal education means a lot. Cardinally, it is a medium of cognitive development for several purposes. It can be viewed as a response against the imperialist notion of Africans' non possession of reason and rational

developmental inability.

For the African child, formal learning is meant to acquire western education. It is considered a medium of intellectual empowerment against poverty. Julius Nyerere posited in this regard that "Education is not a way to escape poverty, it is a way of fighting it. It is equally considered an essential tool for societal change." Julius Nyerere, former President of the Republic of Tanzania. It is equally considered an essential tool for societal change. For Nelson Mandela, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. To break the circle of poverty in Africa, child formal education is indispensable". Foundation for African Children Education (FACE), an international NGO that widely advocates for education for rural African children has its mission statement thus:

We believe that every child should have the opportunity to attend primary school as a starting point. We are convinced that education is the best way to break the cycle of poverty for children in rural areas of Africa. It is well understood that poor uneducated children grow up to be poor uneducated adults. Children of poor families are less likely to enroll in and complete schooling because of the associated costs of attending school.

So the education of the African child goes beyond mere literacy. It is an essential tool for understanding his personhood, his socio-political identity and the African existential situation. The African child is meant to embrace formal education as a veritable intellectual empowerment for his/her self actualization as an individual within a colonized society with all the reality pertaining to it. He/she is meant to pursue formal education as an avenue to be properly equipped to be an agent of social, economic and political liberation of the community.

The African child is meant to pursue formal education in order to be relevant in the modern globalized world.

Moral

Child moral formation has to do with guiding a child to appropriate disposition concerning the reality of choice as it relates to rightness or wrongness of actions. Among related issues, child moral formation has been a major concern of Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture. For this institute:

Child critics today discuss a wide array of problems that affect children, from the economic effects of divorce to the consequences of playing violent computer games to the health impacts of obesity. While these are undeniably important, concern centered on immediate and measurable consequences can also obscure other, less tangible but fundamental transformations in the moral lives of children. Recent social transformations have altered and destabilized the conditions of childhood with enduring consequences for questions of character, maturation, stability, moral coherence, self-knowledge, and identity. In short, youth today are faced with more choices, greater ambiguity, and greater instability than ever before, but also with less guidance and fewer encouragements to achieve maturity than ever before.

Child's moral formation takes the nature of molding a child's character to conform to norms of family, society and culture. Within the period of childhood nurture, the child is guided initially by the family members on right mode of behavior towards parents and siblings, the family behavioural dos and don'ts. As time passes, the child is initiated into the cultural ethics operative of the specific society.

African child's moral formation is a very essential aspect of his/her formation given the premium the Africans place on

the moral aspect of life. Apart from the general notion about morality, the child ought to imbibe African morality. The child is thought to say the truth, respect his/her seniors and elders. Peculiar to Africa, consequent upon its communalist constitution, the child learns that it wrong to discriminate against other children not of his/her immediate family. African child's moral education takes place both in the home and in the formal school setting, where moral education is included as a curriculum of studies.

The Media in Perspective
The media refers to the identified means of mass communication. Although there appear to be a disciplinary difference between the term and 'mass media', both have been used interchangeably to designate the concept of mass communication. In the traditional African locale, mass communication of news and information dissemination were the duties of 'town criers' with designated information instruments like iron and wooden gongs, drums, etc. The practice is not yet obsolete in Africa even in the wake of modern mass information dissemination mechanisms. Nevertheless, the media of the present reflection centre on the print and electronic media of the modern mass communication. The newspapers, books, billboards, pamphlets and magazines fall within the confines of the former, while the television, radio, internet relates to the latter. With its multi-functional features, the recent GSM performs a mass communication function and can thus be categorized under the electronic media. A summarized meaning of the media is captured thus:

People often mistake that only news providing channels and notes form media but it is only a myth. In reality, media

comprise of everything from music channels to movies and internet to books. There are various types of mass media available to the public including print and electronic media. Even the visual media forms like photographs can be categorized under the sub heading of media types. The wide accessibility of internet has presented the general public with high technology mass media. The users of World Wide Web can now enjoy the benefits of email, blogs and social networking websites which are the upcoming and important part of mass media.

What is Mass Media?
The media functions between the ends of information, communication and entertainment. It conveys information on all aspects of existence. For Meadows, "Media that is informative in nature is seen in current society most predominately through the news. We can read about the news in newspapers and can also watch and hear the news through radio and television."(Meadows, 2010) It presumes to be a medium of communication of fact, truth and reality of thoughts and events. The modern media thrives much on entertainment. The entertainment media communicates usually with audio-visuals that mainly appeal to human emotions. They are viewed and listened to on the television and radio as well as read in various magazines. Media information is necessary to keep the masses abreast of the happenings in and around their environment.

The notable feature of the media is its communicative powers and ability of influence. In its mass communicative stance, the media conveys both open and sometimes unclassified information to the masses. It possesses an unlimited audience with the reality of unlimited access to

information sometimes meant for a targeted populace. Media information stimulates divergent perceptions and as such is subject to multiple interpretations. The masses could be misinformed when information conveyed does not communicate fact. Meadows considers that, "Information in the media should be factual, researched, and delivered to the public. When reporters are attempting to inform their audience they should be sure to do research on the facts to be sure they are not pumping out false information"(Meadows, 2010). Viewed from any dimension, the media exerts enormous influence on the psyche, words and actions of the masses. What is its role in African child formation?

The Role of the Media in African Child Formation
Apart from the pre-colonial time, the African child currently grows in a modern environment that reflects the indispensability of the media for mass communication. The modern world has become a media world where information, communication and entertainment have been grossly media driven. Meadows writes that, " Media is all around us in today's society and communication is taking place at all times." Much theoretical tools of the child's intellectual, social and moral formation are media oriented. The child is thrown into this world; hence he/she undergoes initial life formation under such circumstance. But then, given the dynamics of the media, its influence on the formation of the African child is approached from the perspectives of advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages
The advancement in media has indubitable great positive impacts on African child formation. Apart from the import of the media on the social, moral and intellectual concerns of

African child formation, the media has been a veritable tool for canvassing the protection of African child rights. If all aspects of African child formation are to thrive, they must do so on a conducive cultural atmosphere, that is, on an atmosphere devoid of primitive anti-child customs in the instance of killing of twins. In view of the noted aspects of African child formation, the media has remained a veritable tool more in the intellectual aspect of African child formation. The media is known to be playing key role in advertizing the gains of formal education. If Africa is in any form resistant of western culture contact, the media is definitely breaking that resistance. Both print and electronic media have become indispensable tools for formal education in Africa. Many African schools are currently equipped with computers, as computer literacy is pivotal to contemporary learning process in Africa. Thus, every contemporary African child is pre-disposed to e-learning.

African media market is currently replete with child formation materials. The electronic media possess various child-based programs geared toward enhancing their social, moral and intellectual formation. After school academic lessons are taped in video cassettes usually played for children at homes. Television and radio stations have programs often organized specifically for children with a view to enhancing their formation. Thus, the media is adding inestimable values in the social, moral and intellectual formation of the African child. In the area of communication, the media has greatly changed the African view of communication. How the development affects the African child formation remains an important issue. The fact remains that media driven modern communication has very positively contributed to African child formation. In the area of parent/child, parent/teacher communication, whatever gap there could be has very much

been bridged by the use of telecoms, especially the mobile phones. Hence, observations of both parents and teachers on children are easily shared by both parties as partners in progress of African child formation. On a general note, the import of media on mass communication is captured by Aidan White (2002) thus:

Media has greatly changed mass communications and my social life tremendously. Communication began as one or more individuals speaking or gesturing face-to-face. Verbal and nonverbal communication was all people had as a means of socializing. The people began to learn to read and write. This brought about communication changes because people could then write letters, stories, poems, etc. and had discovered other means of expressing themselves. Soon after that devices came about such as phones and televisions that widened our perspective of communicating even more. The technology boom that has been felt around the world has forever changed communication how we know it. We now have Internet, cell phones, iPods, video game systems, etc. and the digital world is taking over faster that we all could possible imagine. With all of the new changes in technology enabling us quicker and easier global communication, we have also felt our social interactions shift. We now have the ability to not only communicate with those in our immediate geographic location, but can socialize with friends and family that are located all over the globe. This has led to the improvement of many of my own personal and professional relationships and has allowed me to build new ones with more comfort and ease than ever before.

Disadvantages

Despite the celebrated import of media on the entire human development especially in the contemporary time, it is not devoid of some negativity in relation to African child formation. The impact of the media on African child's socio-moral formation leaves much to be desired. Entertainment is indispensable in the life of any growing child. But such entertainment would add positive values to the child's formation which is culturally, socially and morally appropriate. It is rather very unfortunate that African media entertainment of the time is mainly profit driven. As such, it is propelled by the spirit of meeting up with the standard of Western entertainment industry. Driven by its own kind of imperial ethics of moral carelessness that is inconsiderate of African socio-moral values, African entertainment industries are simply becoming hampering agents of African child formation. It must be noted that the essence of the media is to convey information and ensure easier communication for the advancement of society. If any media is not working for the ultimate good of the society, taking into consideration the integral aspect of that goodness, it should leave more to be desired.

Nollywood and Ghanaian movies are currently at the frontiers of African entertainment industries. Together with African Magic Stations and other African cable media industries are replete with media scenes of violence, nudity and related sexual activities to which the children are unavoidably exposed. Their deep engrossment with these media visuals distracts them from the values and gains of academics. Consistent watching of scenes of violence by African growing children contributes to the observed violent oriented African youths and children of the present era, who vividly lack traditional values and indigenous knowledge. Reflecting on the place of entertainment in human development, Meadow submits that, "Entertainment is a necessary evil, but I believe

that it should have its place. In our world today it is hard to find anything that is wholesome and real, because it remains a fact that sex, drugs, and violence are what sell."

Apart from the aforementioned, this is the era of video games or computer game. According to Aidan White(2002):

> In common usage, a "computer game" or a "PC game" refers to a game that is played on a personal computer. "Console game" refers to one that is played on a device specifically designed for the use of such, while interfacing with a standard television set. "Arcade game" refers to a game designed to be played in an establishment in which patrons pay to play on a per-use basis. "Video game" (or "videogame") has evolved into a catchall phrase that encompasses the aforementioned along with any game made for any other device, including, but not limited to, mobile phones, PDAs, advanced calculators, etc (4).

It has been widely observed that many African male children who claim to go to school, leave their houses in the morning, some report in their schools for assembly, take part in the early period classes and sneak out before break for video games shops and never return to school for the rest of the day. Some do not report to schools at all but spend the school hours in such shops. Some even go home very late, after spending the rest of the day at those shops with all sorts of lies to their parents for returning late from "school". With the introit of the mobile cell phones, the situation is worse as many school children have unguarded access to the device. Even as academic lessons are on, they are rather busy right there in the classes busy with their

mobile handsets. Thus, with these media devices and programs, the African child is more exposed and inclined to all forms of vices that hinder adequate formation. Pecora et al (2008) decry the negative impact of media on integral child formation. Their submission:

> Media play an important role in raising public awareness of children's rights, but can be ambiguous partners. While journalists can uncover cases of abuse and raise awareness of children's rights, media also infiltrate the public with tolerant attitudes towards child pornography and prostitution or provide the means (for example through advertisements) by which children are exposed to abusers. On the one hand, news media tell the stories of abused and abuser, through news reports, photographs, documentaries, and drama. But on the other, they can themselves become the exploiter, by creating sexually provocative images of children in news or advertising, or, at worst, as the vehicle for child pornography, or a source of information for paedophile networks. The way the media portray children has a profound impact on society's attitude to children and childhood, which also affects the way adults behave. Moreover, the images of sex and violence that children see influence their own expectation of their role in life. There is increasing alarm in a number of countries that the way children are portrayed may increase the risks they face. There is concern about how far children's behaviour is influenced by what they see on television, particularly with regard to violence. Another crucial question is whether media encourage children to become, or seem to become, prematurely sexually active, especially though coverage of pop music and fashion.

Recommendations and Conclusion
The Role of Parents

Children are under normal circumstances in the care as well as under the guidance of parents. Parenthood does not strictly entail that a child is reared by a blood parent. Situations like divorce, marital separation, death of both or either of the parents and pre-marital birth could render a child either not directly parented or single parented. Whichever the case, parenthood in Africa is quite extensive. With African communal nature, no child lacks parental care since a child is a child not just of the direct parents, but of all. Hence, when a child is found in the instance of any of the situations above-mentioned, the members of the extended family or the community assume his/her parental responsibilities.

With regard to the media and African child formation, the parents of whichever nature have very crucial role. Children are drawn more to media visuals mainly found in their homes. Being the primary child formators, greater onus lies on the parents to ensure adequate regulation of the visual materials their wards watch at home. There are currently children channels and movies packaged with educational learning materials for children intellectual, social and moral formations. Recent visual technology has also provided parental guide software to enhance parental regulation of what their children watch.

In the present era, the use of computer for learning is simply indispensable. Thus every child ought to be computer literate to be properly formed. As such, parents ought to make enabling computer and e-learning provisions for their wards. Apart from computer and e-learning based education in schools, parents need to have computers in their homes for their children. Parents should ensure to supervise and regulate

their children's computer exposure at home. They should not be too hasty in exposing them to the internet in the early stages of their formation. E-learning is equally mobile cell-phone based. But children view cell-phone as very attractive toys especially in its audio and visual displays. Thus, children of the present time, especially of primary school ages, try to own cell-phone earlier in life not necessarily for communication purposes but out of curiosity and for excitement. They either demand such from their parents or acquire them anyhow at their parents' refusal or inability to purchase.

Through peer influence, they are exposed to its good, bad and ugly. Instead of benefitting from its academic provisions, children explore and engage in more of social networks that vigorously distract them from their more ad rem formation of a given time. Parents may not be doing their children any good in playing the 'loving parents' by providing them with cell-phones before their maturation for such device. They should rather channel their children's attention to those media materials that would add positive values to their formation.

Rethinking Imbibing Western Media Culture

It is suggested that it is high time African media outfits and practitioners begin to indulge in more of African oriented media practices in order to recapture and restore the African spirit within the African media. That will in turn assist to revive the eroding African values which are necessary contents of African child formation. The government and other lawful media regulatory agents have greater tasks in this direction. More committed efforts should be injected in media censorship.

It is sadly noteworthy that the greatest harm of western imperialism on Africa championed by the media is the gradual erosion of African identity. This ugly development can be

reversed at the resolution for a more African driven media practices. Such turning point is essential in order to evolve a more valuable media for African child formation.

This paper has attempted relative exposition and analysis of the key issues surrounding the place of the media in African child formation. The place of the media in societal development remains crucial. The development of any child is invariably the development of human society. Africa has to embrace the reality of the media driven present era more constructively in order to utilize its benefits for African child

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