UNMITIGATED GLOBALIZATION AND ITS EFFECT ON PERCEPTION, RECEPTION AND TREATMENT OF CHILDREN IN KENYA TODAY[i]

Peter Njenga Njoroge[ii]
Academics and Research Affairs Division,
Mount Kenya University,
Nakuru Town Campus,
Kipchoge Keino Road,
Nakuru City, Kenya

Abstract:

Since independence, Kenyan has had to contend with a couple of social evils among them corruption and ruinous negative ethnicisation of national politics. The resolve and effort to fight and eradicate them has not borne any fruit. Today, sexual abuse occasioned by unmannerly pursuit of sexual pleasure by imprudent young and elderly men alike, has been on the increase and has given rise to another potentially devastating malevolence, that is, widespread underage pregnancies culminating in abortions or arduous teenage motherhood. The latest report by the National Council on Population and Development exposes the magnitude of the crisis of teenage pregnancies in Kenya: a nation that boasts of numerous child protection laws, improved access to education and a vibrant economic growth. Cruelties ranging from raping to murdering of girls have hit the ceiling. Although certain brutalities against the girl child may not have been completely unknown in the traditional African times, they were certainly not of the nature and magnitude they are today when civilization has permeated almost every corner of the globe. This paper seeks to juxtapose the portrait of an African child of the gone days against that of the current times with regard to the perception, reception and treatment before birth, up to the time of exiting childhood. The writer argues that, today's untold cruelty the Kenyan girl child is going through is attributable to the erosion, adulteration and abdication of particular traditional African values through unmitigated globalization and an unwillingness of the current generation to visit the past to reclaim that which was valuable, but which was demonized and wittingly pushed aside at the time of colonization. The author invites the reader to draw justification from his argument for

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[i] GLOBALIZACIÓN SIN PALIANCIA Y SU EFECTO SOBRE PERCEPCIÓN, RECEPCIÓN Y TRATAMIENTO DE NIÑOS EN KENIA HOY
LA MONDIALISATION SANS RELÂCHE ET SES EFFETS SUR LA PERCEPTION, LA RÉCEPTION ET LE TRAITEMENT DES ENFANTS AU KENYA AUJOURD'HUI
非限制的全球化及其影響 關於感知、接收和治療今天在肯亞的兒童
[ii] Correspondence: email njeshpen@yahoo.ca, pnjenga@mku.ac.ke

participation in every noble campaign that may seek justice for the besieged child in a bid to secure the future, cognizant of the fact that globalization is an irreversible 'tsunami' bearing both merits and demerits.

Keywords: child, concept, African context, perception, reception, implications

Abstracto:
Desde la independencia, Kenia ha tenido que lidiar con un par de males sociales entre ellos la corrupción y la etnicización negativa ruinosa de la política nacional. La determinación y el esfuerzo para combatirlos y erradicarlos no ha dado fruto. Hoy en día, el abuso sexual ocasionado por la persecución no tripulada del placer sexual por jóvenes imprudentes y ancianos por igual, ha ido en aumento y ha dado lugar a otra malevolencia potencialmente devastadora, es decir, embarazos generalizados de menores de edad que culminan en abortos o ardua maternidad adolescente. El último informe del Consejo Nacional de Población y Desarrollo pone de lado la magnitud de la crisis de los embarazos adolescentes en Kenia: una nación que cuenta con numerosas leyes de protección de la infancia, un mejor acceso a la educación y un crecimiento económico vibrante. Las crueldades que van desde violar hasta asesinar chicas han llegado al techo. Aunque ciertas brutalidades contra la niña pueden no haber sido completamente desconocidas en los tiempos tradicionales africanos, ciertamente no eran de la naturaleza y magnitud que son hoy en día cuando la civilización ha permeado casi todos los rincones del mundo. Este artículo busca yuxtaponer el retrato de un niño africano de los días pasados en contra del de los tiempos actuales con respecto a la percepción, recepción y tratamiento antes del nacimiento, hasta el momento de salir de la infancia. El escritor sostiene que, la crueldad incalculable de hoy por la que está pasando la niña keniana es atribuible a la erosión, la adulteración y la abdicación de valores africanos tradicionales particulares a través de la globalización sin paliativa y la falta de voluntad de la generación actual de visitar el pasado para reclamar lo que era valioso pero que fue demonizado y empujado a un lado en el momento de la colonización. El autor invita al lector a obtener la justificación de su argumento para participar en cada campaña noble que pueda buscar justicia para el niño sitiado en un intento de asegurar el futuro, consciente del hecho de que la globalización es un "tsunami" irreversible que tiene tanto méritos como deméritos.

Palabras clave: niño, concepto, contexto africano, percepción, recepción, implicaciones

Abstrait:
Depuis l'indépendance, le Kenya a dû faire face à quelques maux sociaux parmi eux la corruption et l'ethnicisation négative ruineuse de la politique nationale. La détermination et les efforts déployés pour les combattre et les éradiquer n'ont porté aucun fruit. Aujourd'hui, les abus sexuels provoqués par la poursuite sans pilote du plaisir sexuel par des jeunes hommes imprudents et âgés, ont augmenté et ont donné lieu à une autre

malveillance potentiellement dévastatrice, c'est-à-dire des grossesses mineures généralisées qui ont abouti à des avortements ou à une maternité adolescente ardue. Le dernier rapport du Conseil national sur la population et le développement expose l'ampleur de la crise des grossesses chez les adolescentes au Kenya : une nation qui se vante de nombreuses lois sur la protection de l'enfance, d'un meilleur accès à l'éducation et d'une croissance économique dynamique. Des cruautés allant du viol au meurtre de filles ont atteint le plafond. Bien que certaines brutalités contre l'enfant fille n'aient peut-être pas été complètement inconnues à l'époque traditionnelle africaine, elles n'étaient certainement pas de la nature et de l'ampleur qu'elles sont aujourd'hui lorsque la civilisation a imprégné presque tous les coins du monde. Cet article cherche à juxtaposer le portrait d'un enfant africain des temps passés à celui de l'époque actuelle en ce qui concerne la perception, la réception et le traitement avant la naissance, jusqu'au moment de sortir de l'enfance. L'écrivain fait valoir que, la cruauté indicible d'aujourd'hui que traverse l'enfant kényane est attribuable à l'érosion, à l'adultération et à l'abdication de valeurs africaines traditionnelles particulières par la mondialisation sans relâche et au refus de la génération actuelle de visiter le passé pour récupérer ce qui était précieux mais qui a été diabolisé et sciemment mis de côté au moment de la colonisation. L'auteur invite le lecteur à tirer la justification de son argument en faveur de la participation à chaque noble campagne qui peut demander justice pour l'enfant assiégé dans le but d'assurer l'avenir, conscient du fait que la mondialisation est un « tsunami » irréversible portant à la fois des mérites et des déméritations.

Mots-clés: enfant, concept, contexte africain, perception, réception, implications

抽象：
自獨立以來，肯亞人不得不面對一些社會罪惡，其中包括腐敗和毀滅性的負面的民族化的國家政治。打擊和根除它們的決心和努力沒有取得成果。今天，輕率的年輕和年老男子對性快感的不謹慎追求所導致的性虐待一直在增加，並造成了另一種潛在的毀滅性惡意，即普遍的未成年懷孕，最終導致墮胎或少女母親難以為之。國家人口與發展委員會的最新報告揭露了肯亞少女懷孕危機的嚴重性：肯亞擁有許多兒童保護法律，受教育機會得到改善，經濟增長充滿活力。從強姦到謀殺女孩等殘忍行為都成為天花板。雖然在傳統的非洲時代，對女童的某些殘暴行為可能並非完全不為人知，但當文明幾乎滲透到全球每一個角落時，這些殘酷行為肯定不具有今天的性質和規模。本文力求將非洲兒童在出生前的感知、接受和治療方面的肖像與當前時代的畫像並列，一直並列在離開童年之前。作者認為，肯亞女童今天所經歷的難以言狀的殘酷，是由於全球化的全球化侵蝕、摻假和放棄特定的非洲傳統價值觀，以及這一代人不願意訪問過去，以收回在殖民化時被妖魔化和機智地推開的東西。作者請讀者從他參加每一個為被圍困兒童尋求正義的崇高運動的論點中引出理由，以確保未來，認識到全球化是一個不可逆轉的"海嘯"，既有優缺點，也是有缺點的。

關鍵字：兒童、概念、非洲背景、感知、接受、影響

1. Introduction

Many studies conducted around the subject of human welfare, indicate that children are the most 'at risk' beings in the world. According to UNICEF (2017), over 535 million children go through experiences that thwart their prospects for optimal growth and development (Haring, Sorin and Caltabiano, 2018; Danese and Baldwin, 2017; Dunn-Snow and D'Amelio, 2000). It is reported that, in 2009, over 300 million children were abused globally (Briggs, 2012).

There is a worrying 'anti-children' attitude that is attributable to many factors. In Africa, the trigger of course can be traced back to the importation of foreign culture first, through colonization and second through technology-driven globalization which (though beneficial in countless ways) has successfully disrupted and adulterated the value systems of many communities (Valentine & Revson, 1979).

According to Ruto (2015) violence against children is a real plague and almost turning endemic in Kenya. Although the ability to estimate the national magnitude of cruelty against children is limited (Ruto, 2015), the consequences are exceedingly conspicuous. A 2010 National Survey on Violence Against Children in Kenya reported that 23% of the girls and 12% of the boys aged between 13 and 17 had experienced some form of sexual harassment ranging from unconsented sexual touching, attempted sex to coerced sexual intercourse (Mwangi, et al., 2015). This is further illustrated in the report by the National Council on Population and Development (2020). The survey reveals that one in every five girls aged between 15 and 19 years of age in Kenya is either pregnant or have already given birth as a result of the escalation of casual sexual activities masterminded by heartless men. It has also been revealed that, at the end of 2019, close to 379,573 girls, including 10-year-olds had been sexually exploited. The fact that more than 20,828 minors aged between 10 and 14 years have been turned into parents is a real disaster. This problem is spread across the country with Nairobi, having the biggest underage sex problem with her 2,432 girls aged below 14 years having conceived during the cited period. Nakuru follows with 1,748, Kajiado (1,523), Kericho (1,006), Homa Bay (957) and Garissa (901). Overall, Narok County leads with 40 per cent of young girls being mothers or expecting babies. Following closely is Homa Bay with 33 per cent, West Pokot 29 per cent and Tana River and Nyamira at 28 per cent. These figures are not mere statistics; they are a depiction of a calamity in the offing.

2. Childhood

According to Qvortrup (1994), certain enduring attributes displayed by children as they grow and develop cannot be ignored. Like adults, children participate both consciously and unconsciously in the construction of a wide range of social realities. There are many decisions and actions taken by adults and other social institutions that are driven by the existence of children. The transmission of treasured cultural heritage for instance, is made possible by the existence of a growing generation. By this very token, every change in the

social structure in any society always comes as a result of the arrival of the young into the family. This underscores the place of the child in the mind of the society.

2.1 Childhood in History

Childhood is a concept whose interpretation is left at the discretion of communities at a given time (Jenks, 1996). deMause et al., (2005) likens the history of childhood to a novel nightmare. People's concept of childhood and the child informs their reception, treatment and childrearing practices. Over time, childrearing practices have moved back and forth from abuse to sensitive nurturing courtesy of a people's selected notion of childhood (Powell et al., 2016; Chaffin, 2006; deMause, 1994; Tomison, 2001). This is affirmed by Tort (2008) who notes that, killing of children by their own parents, accounts for between 10 and 15 percent of all children ever killed.

How children and adults get along with each other is influenced by shifting interpretations of important concepts such as parenting, childhood, child rights and child labour among others (Dekker et al., 2012; Zhao, 2011; Sorin and Galloway, 2006). Sympathetic interpretations lead to providential reception and treatment and vice versa. The expected global concept of childhood currently began around the mid-20th century and is intended to be largely facilitative. Parents who subscribe to it are more intimate helpers of their children in a bid to lead them towards reaching their fullest potentials. It is a perspective credited with enhanced campaign for scaffolding the growth of children into becoming what they can become. Parents and governments have been urged to ensure that children enjoy sufficient security, freedom, space, quality care and facilitative support. This phase is recognized for enormous advancements in pro-child legislations (Boaten, 2010). In 2001, the government of Kenya for instance outlawed the use of corporal punishment as a discipline management strategy in schools in a bid to scale up the friendliness of schools and to give room to more humane approaches to students' discipline issues. However, despite this move, violation of the rights of children continue to escalate unabated (Wangamati et al., 2019; Ruto, 2015).

2.2 Childhood in the Rights Advocacy Instruments

A child as conceived in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in the Kenya Constitution and in many other pro-child legislations is that of a full human totally guarded by unalienable entitlements. In the UNCRC for example, all the rights due to every child are clearly expressed and are meant to be guaranteed for every child: their race, creed or disabilities notwithstanding. In all the 31 Articles of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the contemplated regard for the child in the thinking of Africans is well articulated. Article 53 (1) (e) of the Kenya Constitution provides that *"every child is entitled to quality parental care and protection by the mother and father who may be or may be not married to each other"*. Article 53 (2) further states that, the best interests of the child shall always be taken into account in every matter in which the child has an interest. In conceiving the child as such, these instruments envision a young being,

guarded from all sides from any form of harm (caused or spontaneous), for a guaranteed and enhanced growth and development. This is what should be the ideal situation, but a child, born and growing up in Kenya today cannot remain at ease trusting that there are such well-intended instruments. Without a doubt, one can argue that, there is an ugly rivalry pitting the rest of the members of the society against children. The big question revolves about why children, innocent as they are, must continue to suffer cruelty in the hands of persons into whose care they are put (Ruto, 2015). Could it be as a result of a perverted concept of childhood or the inevitable effects of hard life? Could it also be attributable to an improperly and perhaps rushed push for the child's rights and which may have ignored the diversity of contexts and understandings of childhood creating out of the child an 'enemy of the people'? These and many questions call for answers.

2.3 Childhood Today in the Kenyan Context

In Kenya today, childhood is like a walk across a busy accident-prone super highway where every swiftly passing motor cycle, car and truck represents an inescapable, fatal and horrendous 'accident'. The Kenyan child in the modern day is by definition a victim of many tribulations including abandonment, neglect, abduction, exploitation, starvation, discrimination, child labour, battering, incest, rape, trafficking and murder among many more in the hands of close relatives, well-known neighbours and strangers alike (Wangamati et al., 2019; NSPCC, 2019; NSPCC, 2018; NSPCC, 2017 and Ruto, 2015; Amran, 2011). It has been reported in the media that, in a span of less than three months within the Corona Virus Disease spell, thousands of youthful school girls had been sexually abused (The New Humanitarian, 2020). If the reports are anything to go by, then only time will tell how many more will have been taken advantage of by the time normalcy bounces back. Conceived and born out of desperate circumstances, the babies-in-waiting will most unlikely receive appropriate reception, care and treatment throughout their entire childhood.

3. The Pang of Globalization on Traditional African Family and Childrearing

Globalization is a collective term used in reference to all the processes that occasion a world-wide connectedness of societies through fast-spreading technologies and which have led to the creation of a global citizenry and a chain reaction of sorts including the fusing of different countries' policies, cultures and value systems (Therborn, 2004). With the tide of globalization having proven to be irresistible, communities must brace themselves to tackle the problems accompanying it using all available means including the good in it (Therborn, 2004). Unexamined complacency must not be a choice.

We are, by all standards, global citizens courtesy of globalization. However, we are still native to our origins and residences. As a people, Africans have benefited from their capacity to painstakingly socialize their young for the maintenance and perpetuation of communities over the years. The audacity of her people to survive was drawn from the communalistic nature of existence which enabled the formation of strong

protective social bonds. According to Therborn (2004), Africa's strong patriarchal traditions, polygamy, favourable regard for fertility and lineage were some of the most valued aspects of the African family institution and which effectively glued the extended family and the community together. These values have been diluted. However, the harmonious existence of the African families (Boaten, 2010) need not be fully wrecked. People can still become global citizens without letting go what served and which can still serve them better.

Globalizing campaigns and actions initiated and sustained by multi-national organizations and powerful economies have influenced sexual and gender relations within the family. Birth control and family planning, gender equity and human rights are examples of thematic issues that are advanced from a global platform culminating with far reaching influences on what happens not simply in nations in the world but strictly speaking, in every bedroom both favourably and unfavourably. No family has succeeded in resisting the external influences being driven in the circumstances of globalization.

The weakening of the patriarchal systems in Africa has been both a curse and a blessing (Therborn, 2004). Male dominance that was a feature of African families began fizzling out as global calls for gender equity escalated. A dwindling of respect for seniority and strict paternal discipline which were cherished among Africans has been witnessed but has not been without consequences. It has raised for instance, the levels of gender antagonism and disrupted the calmness that was the hallmark of a typical African family (Therborn, 2004). This disruption has in many ways disoriented the socialization of children in many ways. Most children brought up by single female parents have encountered numerous emotional, social and economic challenges (Mbithi, 2019).

With globalization also came persistent pressure on African governments to work towards lowering fertility levels amongst the populations in the name of fighting poverty. When this agenda was first mooted, Kenya took the lead in embracing and promoting the family planning agenda (Therborn, 2004). The subject of sexuality became a free topic and this led to its 'secularization.' Today, sex has become rampantly casual with no values, taboos and sanctions to regulate it. A surge in illicit sex across all the age brackets has brought about an increase in early unwanted pregnancies, the phenomenon of single motherhood, soaring levels of abortion and murder. Fertility, highly priced in the traditional African culture is now detested by many and has been taken to be a threat to health and likened to a menace which deserves to be slapped with a prescription of contraception. The push to legalize abortion has also gained currency and momentum in Kenya all in the name of saving the lives of women.

The myth that explains the origins of the Agikuyu gives the name 'Mumbi' to the supposed mother of the community. This is the same name for a 'creator' and implies a giver of life. Today, it is this giver of life who is taking away the lives coming through casual sexual activities. She is also the one leading in the call to make termination of life before birth legal. In other words, men and women of these times have become 'moral-liquidates' to an extent that it has become untenable to control bodily urges that end up in casual sex and which most often result in conception and the only way out (it seems)

is to tolerate such sex, make allowances for express contraception and if conception occurs use 'law-protected' abortion as the remedy.

Emanating from all these imported value systems and practices are modifications in child rearing practices. Traditionally, child rearing was carried out painstakingly, dutifully and skillfully. The extended family was the ideal setting within which child rearing was carried out. It helped to develop a strong sense of social responsibility in the bringing up of children from the early years and made them assimilate pro-social values (Degbey, 2012; Gyekye, 1996; Adinlofu, 2009). The extended family defined "*social and moral norms and safeguarded both material and spiritual customs preparing the way for adulthood*" (Degbey, 2012). Today, the influence of the extended family on parenting has diminished significantly. In urban areas for instance, the nuclear family is the face of the wider society and it revolves around an individual, his or her small family, work and property.

With mothers and fathers alike absorbed in wage-rewarded engagements, child care has also been greatly affected. Unlike in the past when a child would breast feed for as long as it was possible and reasonable, today, weaning is hastened so as to release the mother to resume work. The need to get back to work has contributed to a reduction in the amount and quality of child care. Parents leave their children under the care of inexperienced hired house-helps at a time when undivided emotional support and attention for the promotion of growth and development are most needed. In many instances, mothers are pressured into job-seeking both when their husbands fail to find employment (Therborn, 2004) and currently even when the husband is securely employed either to supplement the family kitty or to become economically independent. The outcome has been an unprecedented distortion of traditional gender roles and the creation of a parenting vacuum with certain obligations left unattended to or silently delegated to the house-helps and teachers, majority of whom are not only young and inexperienced but also unfit to handle weighty matters such as sexuality. The decline in the engagement of the extended family in the bringing up of children has significantly compounded this problem.

With sexuality experiencing increased secularization day by day, and with the expansion of its scope of practice, things can no longer be the same. Most traditional African communities had strong norms against extra-marital sex. Today, sexuality has notably and regrettably broken its banks. Children are having their sexual debuts earlier than was the case before globalization. Additionally, sex is carried out for all manner of reasons including the need for sheer peer compliance, economic reasons and entertainment. Exposure to pornography, imported dress codes and the phenomena of 'busy' parents explain this mess. In Kenya, 26 per cent of adolescent women have had sex, long before marriage (Therborn, 2004). This was rare in the traditional African times. All these can be blamed on what Therborn (2004) explains as stripping sex of 'religious or other aprioristic, non-consequentialist normative rulings, as "sinful" or otherwise condemnable outside marriage'.

4. Having Children: Past versus Present

In the past, families' view of children was favourable and there was delight in having many children (Mbiti, 1991). Being a communal responsibility, child rearing was less of a burden. For a couple of reasons, polygamy went down well in many instances (Grace, 2019) and this also made child rearing a shared responsibility of the immediate family members. Secondly, the demands for a livelihood then were not as diverse, numerous and as hard to come by as they are today. With today's family livelihoods heavily dependent on hard earned income from businesses, employment, or side hustles and with the cost of living sky-rocketing, these wages are never sufficient. On the other hand, children cannot support their families adequately as was the case in the past. They all must be in school and when out of school, they cannot be engaged in wage-rewarded responsibilities. This is termed child labour. Its perpetration is punishable by law. Under these circumstances, children have become economic liabilities. Many couples today are not as desirous of children as the couples of the gone days. Today, couples want one or two children at most. Advocacy for family planning has been significantly stepped up and has created, in the process, an enduring impression that having many children is tantamount to courting poverty and destitution. Elsewhere, it is viewed as a blatant display of one's inadequacies in the capacity to think like a modern person. Some couples have even opted for surgically aided deliveries as opposed to natural deliveries.

In the African context a newly married bride's 'honeymoon' was short-lived. It was a period of joy mixed with anxiety. The puzzle of anxiety was initially resolved upon conception, partially upon the birth of a child but fully in many communities upon the birth of a son (Onunwa, 1990). Failure to show signs of timely conception invited many sleepless nights, numerous visits to the traditional healers and to relatives who it was assumed may have been offended in one way or another and by whose power; conception was either thwarted or delayed. A marriage in Africa was simply termed 'incomplete, valueless and unconsummated' if it lacked a child, and more specifically a male child (Onunwa, 1990:21).

The conception of a child (let alone the birth of one) was always considered a joyous occurrence (Onunwa, 1990; Mbiti, 1991). It meant a lot to all those who were related to the mother and father-to-be either directly or indirectly. To the couple, it obviously made their potency and fertility public. It served as a relief from the fear of the stigma of a childless life (Magezi, 2017; Ibisomi et al., 2014). Inability to conceive or sire, was attributed to 'curses' and it triggered a life of perpetual agony. Women who failed to bear children among the Akamba community and those who did not get sons specifically were allowed to get the services of surrogate mothers who were to be taken in by barren women as their wives, with the sole aim of getting children on their behalf (Mbiti, 1991).

Before arrival into this world, a baby was welcomed through the quality of treatment the mother-to-be was accorded (Mbiti, 1991). As pregnancy advanced, amity

and support were stepped up, routine chores got reduced, and better feeding was made possible along with close care and counsel from midwives.

The actual birth of a new-born baby was always momentous. Unlike today, it was not a mother-father affair. It was a desirable relieve and was likened to receiving a much longed for 'guest' and a mark of incomparable blessing across all tribes. New-borns were received with song, dance and appropriate rituals such as child naming. Among the Agikuyu, friends and relatives would await the birth of a child anxiously. Five ululations would announce the arrival of a baby boy and four, that of a baby girl. The Luo and Luhya would receive their new born with a shave of honour; a ritual that could only be carried out by the mother-in-law and which was believed to keep bad omen at bay. That a birth turned a husband and wife into parents, their parents into grandparents, their sisters and brothers into aunts and uncles was no mean achievement. This chain reaction went on and on, changing statuses of many different relatives in its way. These statuses were desired and longed-for. Among the Agikuyu where children are named after their parents' relatives, siblings, just like parents delighted in the birth of children since it meant 'existing' in their relative's families through children who bore their names. Children were thus valued to their proper worth and abuse was unimaginable.

The African child was keenly socialized into the ways of the community. Discipline was at the heart of this training. The training was however conducted gently and cautiously. In the early days, children of both sexes were valued differently. Boys were valued for the roles they would play as heirs and defenders of the community against threat and that of ensuring that the family lineage continued (Dyer, 2007; Kimathi, 1994). Girls on their part were valued for the dowry wealth they would bring back to their fathers upon marriage and for bearing children. At no one time was an innocent and disciplined child seen to be a burden. Rather than never give birth, women who were not able to conceive and bear children wished to have conceived and deliver even a still born just to delight (albeit for a moment) in being referred to as mothers.

Properly socialized children were a beacon of pride and hope to the community. The desire to have not just a child but many children and to bring them up carefully and responsibly was real. Children were born and brought up within the family. Any child conceived and born out of wedlock, from an ordeal such as rape or even out of a promiscuous lifestyle [which was rare] signified a blemish to be borne by the mother, but the child was still taken care of. Destitution was not part and parcel of traditional African culture. Every child was a member of a family, a clan and a community at the same time. As noted by Kilbride and Kilbride (1990), children were secured against abuse and neglect by the social support system. The value attached to children and childhood across communities can be understood from proverbs and sayings of different communities. Below are just a few examples.

a. Ekegusii

'Nguru chia momura , nchogu egwatia mbara'.

A young man's energy is like an elephant which splits trees into firewood.

This underscores the importance of a male child as being the security in a homestead. The boy-child was valued for his stamina which was required in certain strenuous tasks.

'Onabaiseke bange nkerandi kiamabere botakana botakoera'.

He who has many daughters is a gourd of milk that will never go dry.

A person with many girls is seen as having huge source of wealth through the pride price.

b. Gikuyu

'Gutiri ii kahii itakarugwo mutwe'.

There is no household with a male child where a head of an animal will not be cooked.

The implication in this proverb is that a household with a boy has hope for a better future; no matter the current problems.

'Mwana wa kahii ni igiri ria mucii'.

A boy child is the hedge of the home.

This implies that with a boy child, a home, a family is safeguarded.

'Mwana muciare ndateagwo'.

A child already born cannot be abandoned or sent away.

This saying outlines the worth of an already born child and leaves no room for destitution.

'Ubataire ahurithagia kihii ime'

He who is in need sends his boy when the dew is still on.

Meaning, he trusts that the boy will certainly deliver no matter the obstacles.

'Mwari mwega ahitukagira thoome wa ngia'

A girl fair in all ways will just go past a poor youth's home's and shall not be intercepted.

Being poor the young man cannot afford to seduce the girl for she is worth a fortune.

This favourable notion of children as captured in these proverbs and sayings has gradually dwindled.

Contrary to the past when pregnancy was cherished and longed for in earnest, today it is a detested occurrence. It has become so 'secularised' and casually taken that many, disgracefully term it as having a 'ball'? Many homes have broken because of an unplanned for conception whether by married couples or their daughters. In certain circumstances, a baby is seen as having come to strain an already strained relationship. There are many couples who today want a childless relationship. Fertility is no longer a source of pride. In fact, to many, after the first child, this fertility is seen to be a serious

health concern; a condition to be detested and hence treated. Scores of 'modern' married couples have taken their fertility and potency to be managed surgically through tubal ligation and vasectomy in the name of family planning after which promiscuity becomes the order of the day (Kasujja, 2018). Many others are on pills and injections aimed at disallowing conception

To some women, giving birth is no longer an experience to envy. To confirm this, there has been an increase in the number of expectant women seeking to undergo elective-C-section births in Kenya to escape the pang of child birth (Odhiambo, 2018). Today, many women employ baby sitters long before they even give birth, implying that the sooner they would deliver and hand over the babies to some other party, the better. Parents, relatives and strangers alike appear to have embraced another view about who children are. To such, children have evolved into burdens that are too heavy to bear, unwelcome guests coming when least desired and hardly wanted, robbers of the ladies' feminine anatomical elegance and rustlers not of cattle but of time, comfort and good looks.

Today, it is easy to conceive, but a daunting task to carry a pregnancy to its full term, to deliver and to bring up a child. Sadly, moral values have also steadily degenerated, the easier it has become to get an unwanted pregnancy and by extension an unwanted child, the easier it has also become to get rid of it through abortion (Odenyo, 2018), or to deliver and abandon it altogether or even to deliver torture and finally dump into a pit. The failure of the child to win a favourable regard has led to hostile reception culminating in numerous forms of abuses ranging from abandonment to murder by relatives and strangers alike. In their numbers, children are reported born and abandoned to die, if they survive, they are kidnapped and used in hard labour, and others are battered and neglected. In other circumstances children are orphaned and pushed into dehumanizing errands such as street living and child prostitution.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Children undoubtedly need to be protected from abuse. However, keeping the child safe is the nation's most daunting task. The specter of children living on the street, the escalation of early pregnancies and adolescent parenthood are the true indicators of the magnitude of the problem. If today, the child is taken to be what he or she has all a long been known to be: a gift, and the future, no one in his right senses would rape or kill or abandon a gift; batter or injure and kill one's future. The fight for the child must therefore be stepped up. The child protection instruments in place must be seen to enhance the fight for the protection of the child. Those who propagate violence against innocent children must be smoked out of their hideouts, punished, rehabilitated and educated to desist from unleashing any cruelty on the minors. Those who champion the fight for a child-safe and friendly world must step up the campaign. Adolescents who conceive and abort, or deliver and abandon, or deliver and neglect must be educated. All values that made people regard life highly and sacred must be restored. Parenting must be redefined.

Schooling must not be taken to be parenting but only a slight enrichment of child rearing. Those advocating for sex education must do it with caution since they may in the process be officially transferring parental role to teachers who as it has been said are young, inexperienced and unfit to take up the role. Those pushing for the legalization of abortion must also offer solutions to the problem of moral decadence.

Conflict of interest statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

About the Author

The author is a scholar whose field of operation is education and international development. He has interests and is currently conducting studies on several subjects including pedagogical integration of information communication technology, children's literature, career education and youth mentorship, equity, governance, teacher education, instructional strategies. The author is a commonwealth scholar and is a member of local knowledge hubs and is a member of International Connections in Education and Development and East African Network of Development Professionals.

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