RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD: A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE, SOCIAL SECURITY AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In this paper, we shall consider responsible parenthood as a paradigm shift to sustainable peaceful co-existence, social security and political stability in Nigeria. The issue, as we argue in this paper, is that most of the anti-social behaviour found among some members of the society is due to the negligence and irresponsible parenting observable in most families. Herein, we argue that families have enough to contribute to the sustainable peace, social security and political stability in the globe, and Nigeria in particular. The truth remains that every human person comes from a family either of a single parent or of both parents. Suffice to say that every terrorist, kidnapper, armed robber, militant, prostitute, etc comes from a family. The aforementioned persons could be said to be brought up by irresponsible parenthood. Contrary to this is what the titled of this paper considers as responsible parenthood. Using analytic method, therefore, we examine the concept of responsible parenthood. We also consider the import of responsible parenthood with regard to peaceful co-existence, social security and political stability in Nigeria. We find out that families have serious role to play in achieving and/or promoting mutual cooperation, mutual understanding of the tribes, ethnic groups, and cultural relations in Nigeria. We further maintain that if families, parents as the architects and pilots of each family, should take up, and be committed to their primary responsibilities, definitely, there will be relative peace, social security and political stability in the world and in Nigeria in particular.

Key words: Responsible parenthood, peaceful co-existence, social security, political stability, Nigeria

Introduction

One may ask; what is responsible parenthood? How can responsible parenthood be a paradigm to sustainable peaceful co-existence, social security and political stability in the globe and Nigeria in particular? Answering these questions will help us to discover the relevance of family in human and social reconstruction. Family, as it stands, is a universal phenomenon. Early philosophers, especially political philosophers did not pay much attention to family as the nucleus of social and political change. According to Austin (2020), Kant and Aristotle did so in fairly way or in fairly terse manner. Getting at the end of twenty century, the discourse on family changed. Today, family issues have been explored by philosophy due to the place of family in contemporary society.

Currently, due to occurrences of child abuse and other challenges facing the entire society, attention has been drawn to the child's rights and parents' obligation to their children. Austin (2020) notes that the claim that parents has obligations, as parents, are less controversial; the basis of this claim has been the problem. Austin (2020) asserts that the concern of philosophers is not just on the theoretical questions related to parental rights and obligations; their attentions have been also focused on the practical questions in the realm of human life. Some issues on discussion are basically with respect to medical decision making, the autonomy of children, child discipline, the licensing of parents, and the property of different forms of moral, political, and religious upbringing have continued to receive increased attention (Austin, 2020).

Having seen the dimensions of philosophical discourse relating to family in contemporary society, this paper chooses to consider the impact of responsible parenthood in achieving peaceful living, social security and political stability. The fact remains that the role of families in every community, state and nation can never be overestimated. Families are the nuclei of every society. Aristotle, in his *Politics*, observes the generative structure of the family (Nwoko, 1988). For him, conglomeration of families or households brings about communities; conglomeration of communities form states; and conglomeration of states forms a nation and by extension the world. Ordinarily, every state or nation desires for responsible citizens, and there can never be a responsible nation-state without responsible families. Of course, there can never be responsible families without responsible parenthood.

Our world, at this point in time, seems to be a confusion world; a world of war, conflict, terrorism, violence, marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion of some sections of the world. Across the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria, from the South-East, South-West, South-South, North-West, North-East to North-Central, there has been one security problem or the other. Among these problems include herdsmen and farmer's problem, Boko Haram

challenges, Fulani militants, Niger Delta militants to mention a few. Other related issues here involve armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, prostitution, extra-judicial killings, etc. The perpetrators of these anti-social actions are not from the moon or the sky; instead, they are from their different individual families and communities. Hence, the burden of this paper is to consider responsible parenthood as paradigm shift for sustainable peaceful co-existence, social security and political instability in Nigeria.

Parent(s), Parenthood and Responsible Parenthood: What are they?
The three concepts, "parent", "parenthood and "responsible parenthood" are vital concepts in this paper. So explaining these concepts will help in the better understanding of the paper. The concepts *parent(s)* and *parenthood* have been so difficult to define. The reason is that there are different understandings or attachments to their meaning. Of course, various approaches have been used; such as biological approach, legal approach, and social approach to define the concepts. Among those approaches include biological parenthood, social parenthood and legal parenthood. Most of these approaches are due to modern technological development, adoption policies, and other recent evolution in human society regarding definition of rights as posited by philosophers, legal jurisprudence, constitutions of various nation-states, etc. Though, a different approach has been taken because of the scope of this work. There are interesting topic here one can still research on as regards the societal influences on child's and parental engagements, which are also very important for social change.

A parent can simply be defined as someone with weighty rights and responsibilities regarding a given child (Elizabeth & Millum, 2016). Explaining further, they state that parents always have decision-making rights over most areas of their child's life and rights to exclude others from making such decisions. As far as parents are able to fulfill the obligation to educate, feed and offer healthcare services to their children, they can take other decision on behalf of their children. They determine when they play, eat, and associate with friends (Austin, 2020). This position is with regard to determining the rights of children, the parents' rights and obligation over their children

However, parenthood, as defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is "the state of being a mother or a father. The term, 'responsible parenthood' is of two words, *responsible* and *parenthood*. Here, the word, *responsible* is serving as an adjective qualifying parenthood. It informs us more on the type of parenthood we are talking about in this paper. Of course, there are different kinds of parenthood as mentioned earlier like social parenthood, legal parenthood and biological parenthood. Such are not what this paper is considering. Contrary to responsible parenthood is irresponsible parenthood.

The term *responsible parenthood* is therefore defined "as the will and ability of parents to respect and to do the needs and aspirations of the family and children. It is also seen as the ability of a parent to detect the need, happiness and desire of the children and helping them to become responsible and reasonable children. It is a shared responsibility of the husband and the wife to determine and achieve the desire number, spacing, and timing of the children according to their own family life and aspirations, taking into account psychological preparedness, health status, socio-cultural and economic concerns. There are social, religious and cultural dimensions of responsible parenthood. One can rightly say that the concept "responsible parenthood" has a Christian origin. Majda Cernic Istenic (2007), in his book, *Understandings of Responsible Parenthood Among University Educated: 'Listening to Our conscience is a Very Demanding Vocation'*, points out that the doctrines on marriage and family by the Protestant and Catholic Churches seemed to have led to the emergence of the idea of responsible parenthood.

Emergence of the Notion of Responsible Parenthood
Istenic (2007) traces the emergence of the responsible parenthood to the period of early Christians. In his view, before the notion of responsible parenthood, Christianity was primarily pre-occupied with the idea of community attitude; brotherhood and sisterhood. With this attitude, family is seen as an obstacle to the enforcement of the community;, brotherhood and sisterhood idea of the early Christians (Istenic, 2007). At this time, religion influences people's thoughts about children, with regard to their meaning, their desirability and their rights (Istenic, 2007). The concern of the Church, that is, the early Christians was on the virginity which was considered the supreme value. As a result, marriage and family were seen as an expression of human weakness and limitation. The real Christians were those who mastered and controlled their emotions and instinct (Istenic, 132). Mount cited in Istenic (2007) assertes that the limitation of expression of love did not pertain only to husband and wife, but also to emotions between parents and children, not love. "The Church", as he says, maintains that "too much love between parents and children was a humiliation to God." So understanding of family, at the Renaissance period, was seen as the place of individuality, and in opposition or a threat, to broader community.

Contrary to the position of the Church however was the position of the emerging nation-states. The Church was accused of greed by the state for activities like collection of indulgences for "sinful" sensual pleasures. For this reason, according to Goody cited in Istenic (2007), the Church lost its position of supreme political force, and a result, turned its attention to the sphere of privacy.

The subtle inconsistencies between the Protestant and Catholic doctrines on the matter of procreation gave credence to the development of the term *responsible parenthood*. For the Catholic, procreation is the exclusive purpose for sexual act, while for the Protestant, sexual pleasure was the purpose of sexual act, and as a result, procreation is not the prime purpose for marriage, but one of its purposes (Chrisman, 1983). Flandrin cited in Istenic (2007) notes that for Protestant, married couples were allowed to limit their procreation with abstinence for the benefits (survival) of their already born children. This is in connection to population control of the number of children for each family. For the Catholic, husband and wife required sexual act so as to fulfill their conjugal obligations always and without any interference in order to avoid adultery (Istenic, 2007). Elaborating further, Chrisman (1983:192-3) points out that:

> Despite the fact that procreation is not the primary purpose for marriage as maintained by Protestant, the Protestant priest taught that the upbringing of children was the primary responsibility or function of family. The family was the place where every child expresses the conversion of assignment among those reborn. The ideal upbringing of children was somewhere between repression and permissiveness, a combination of strong discipline linked with the ideology of original sin (children are by their nature sinful beings and for that reason they have to be socialized by frightening them with death and eternal damnation, and parental love).

From the excerpt, responsible parenthood involves discipline of children just to correct their claimed original nature of sinfulness. It is proper to note that theory of sinfulness of a child is among the theories of children at birth. Other theories include innatism championed by the rationalist philosophers, namely; Rene Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz who propose that at birth a child has innate ideas that develop in the course of his growth and development of the intellectual categories. This occurs in the formation of ideas as the child reflects on the perceived objects around his or her environment (Omoregbe, 2005). On the other hand is the theory of *tabula raza* propounded by the empiricists philosophers, namely; John Locke, Bishop Berkeley and David Hume who assert that at birth human brain (a child brain) is blank like a white sheet (Omoregbe, 2005).

Ozment quoted in Istenic (2007) states that contrary to the Ten Commandments that prescribed obedience and submission of children to parents, but did not say anything on the parent's responsibilities to their children, that Protestant catechisms from the 16th century taught: "Do not live according to the principles of your parents neither obey their orders…Christ asked us to respect our fathers and mothers, but not to trust them or believe them".

One can simply say that the concept of responsible parenthood is developed from the Christian doctrines that emphasized the recognition of children's rights and person's individuality, which were later developed in subsequent years. Responsible parenthood was a call for parents to exercise their parental responsibilities by the Church. Though, there have been several modifications of the definition to cover other areas of child's life. It was the Protestant view towards marriage and parenthood that led to outright definition of responsible parenthood, which took place between 1948 and 1965 in the frame of the World Council of Churches.

From the review of the development of concept *responsible parenthood* made above, it can be deducted that: a) procreation determined the development of the concept; b) responsible parenthood emerged to address the problem of abortion as a measure to preventing conception; c) to regulate the number of children families desired to produce; d) to protect the rights and person's of children; and e) to help parents to care for their children's moral development, education, etc.

Present Understanding of Responsible Parenthood

The present understanding of responsible parenthood is no longer restricted to procreation as seen from its inception or development. It has got other approaches. Nowadays, parents are either applauded or criticized on how they trained their children. Those families that offer their children the basic necessity of life like sound education, moral training, good health, and other basic necessities of life are said to be responsible parents. As defined above,

> Responsible parenthood is the will and ability of parents to respect and to do the needs and aspirations of the family and children. It is also seen as the ability of a parent to detect the need, happiness and desire of the children and helping them to become responsible and reasonable children. It is a shared responsibility of the husband and the wife to determine and achieve the desire number, spacing, and timing of the children according to their own family life and aspirations,

> taking into account psychological preparedness, health status, socio-cultural and economic concerns (passnownow.com, accessed, 9/04/2020).

The present understanding of the responsible parenthood is also visible in the United Nations definition in one hand; and the state's or nation's constitutions on the other hand. Certainly, responsible parenthood has posed a global debate. The United Nations Organization has been paying much attention to this with regard to the progressive increase in the global population, the mortality of children across the world due to abortion and use of contraception. Other areas involved the promotion of child rights for adequate education, health, child's development, etc. These ideals of responsible parenthood are drawn from the previous understandings which were later modified in the 20th century.

At present, responsible parenthood covers various aspects of child's life. In the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations notes that childhood is entitled to special care and assistance (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). It asserts that family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states that:

> The child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding…should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society, and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, and in particular in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.

The Convention asserts further that "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth". Due to the global concern of good parenting, and deadly implications of irresponsible parenthood, various Conventions and conferences have been organized by the United Nations to improve and sustain the basic rights of children all over the world. Among these Conventions include: the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1924, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly on 20 November 1959; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (in particular in articles 23 and 24); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights (in particular in article 10); others are seen in the statutes and relevant instruments of specialized agencies and international organizations concerned with the welfare of children, the provisions of the Declaration on Social and Legal Principles relating to the Protection and Welfare of Children, with Special Reference to Foster Placement and Adoption Nationally and Internationally; the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice (The Beijing Rules) ; and the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict.

 The United Nation recognizes that, in all countries in the world, there are children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, and that such children need special consideration. It takes cognizance of the traditions and cultural values of each people for the protection and harmonious development of the child. It as well recognizes the necessity of international cooperation for improving the living conditions of children in every country, especially in the developing countries.

Responsible Parenthood and Peaceful Co-existence
Family, as it is, is the primary agent of socialization. School, church, and peer-group influences are the secondary agents in the life of every child. So the fundamental social values like justice, equality of every human person, love, solidarity, unity, rule of law and others should be taught to the children in the individual family. Family is by extension the global world. That is why some scholars like Martin Luther King, Jr., Martin Buber and Julius Nyerere gave the inter-connective view of the world in their philosophical thoughts. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania did describe the world as a family. Family, in the understanding of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, as elaborated in the TANU booklet, *Ujamaa*: *The Basis of African Socialism* and the Arusha Declaration of 1967 is a nucleus of the world. '*Ujamaa*', as observed in Nyerere's work, is a *Swahili* word, which stands for "familyhood" or "Brotherhood" (Nyerere, 1967: 11).Nyerere applied this word to interpret his own understanding of African traditional society which he believed was socialist society. The word, *socialist society*, as used here, involves, participation, caring and sharing society unlike Karl Marx view that portrays individualism and conflict orientated. For him, the root of Africa socialism is founded in the concept of "familyhood." He emphasizes that the foundation of African socialism is extended family (Nyerere, 1967). Despite that fact that Nyerere laid much emphasizes on African society as he tried to explain the relations of Africa with the world, he drew his philosophy from the general universe; it is beyond the usual idea Africans have about family unit or family ties in the traditional African society. The traditional understanding of the interconnectivity that exists within the framework of community was extended to incorporate the whole humanity. Nyerere, in his *Ujamaa*: *The Basis of African Socialism*, writes:

> Familyhood in Africa is extended beyond the
> basic family unit; that familyhood goes beyond
> the basic family nucleus, beyond the tribe, the
> community, beyond the nation. It must include
> the entire humanity. It forms the traditional life
> of the African people, where the sense of
> brotherhood is strong; where society is so
> organized that it cares about the individual;
> where the society looks after every one
> including widows and orphans; where no one is
> allowed to starve because of lack of wealth
> (Nyerere, 11).

This is one of the inherent values of the family. We may draw a brief universal meaning of responsible parenthood in the context of global *familyhood* or *brotherhood*, or rather global responsible parenthood. This is in relation to those individuals who have seen the world as a global family of equality, justice, respect for fundamental human rights, as against injustice, inequality, discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of some sections of the world due to racism, colonialism, and slavery/slave trade. One can as well extend to other factors like economic exploitation of the developing countries through some of the financial institutions of the world. This may be seen as a diversion from that context or content of this paper, but is among the basic responsibilities of the responsible parenthood to expose its dangers for the sake of universal peace and mutual cooperation. Martin Luther King, Jr quoted in Jones (2014: 137) once states: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere"

Other principle of universal *familyhood*, *brotherhood* and/or *sisterhood* responsible parenthood is expected to pass to their children is such Martin Luther King, Jr championed when he writes:

> All life is interrelated. All men are caught in an
> inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a
> single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one
> directly affects all indirectly. I can never be
> what I ought to be until you are what you ought
> to be, and you can never be what you ought to
> be until I am what I ought to be. This is the
> interrelated structure of reality (Obijekwu,
> 2020)

 Gandhi asserts that "the good of the individual is contained in the good of all". Martin Buber, in his book, *I* and *Thou*, related the idea of cooperative existence. For him, "man is free, creative and fully human only to the extent

that he possesses, in action and suffering, in his own life, a relationship which binds him completely with others…I become through my relation to thou; as *I* become *I*, I say Thou. All real living is meeting (Obijekwu, 2020).

Responsible Parenthood and Social Security

As said earlier that family is the nucleus of every nation-state. Whenever parents fail to carry out their basic responsibilities of training their children in basic norms, values and traditions of the society, automatically, the entire community, states and nation is bound to collapse, even the entire world. Wherever there is a peaceful and harmonious family, there is a peaceful and harmonious world. It is a well known statement that "no one gives what he has not". The truth is that any child that is well educated or trained on the principles of peace be it family peace, community peace and nation's peace by his or her family would live to appreciate the uniqueness of humanity. These can happen under some applied conditions. First, if a child is well taken care of; this is when a child is well fed, clothed and housed (provided with shelter). Second is if a child is given proper education and provided with good health facilities. Finally, if a child is backed up, or equipped with sound moral training or principles to understand that all human beings are tired together irrespective of one's place of birth, race, gender, religious affiliation, ethnicity and tribe.

There are some basic social security tips every child is expected to learn from his or her family even if those things were not formally taught but should be learned from imitating their parents. Such things like sense of unity among the family members, dialogue, and peaceful settlement in matters of usual dispute between the parents. A fighting family is catastrophe to the society, and children from this type of family are also threats to a peaceful society. If care is not taken, they may become tools for insecurity, especially in the hands of dreadful politicians and power mongers. In Nigeria, insecurity manifests in different forms like politically motivated insecurity, ethno-religious caused insecurity, economic-generated insecurity or violence as well as group-organized insecurity.

Contrary to responsible parenthood is irresponsible parenthood. This has caused the world and Nigeria a lot. About seventy percent of the world population are poor, and mostly from the developing countries of the world. Many families are poor and hungry; as a result, cannot take care of their children's aspiration or provide other basic necessities for family health and development.

Today, especially in Nigeria, many children are roaming the streets without anybody caring for them. Even the government could not provide assistance to some of them. For example, in the Northern Nigeria, the so-called

almajiris are said to be the abandoned children or those children that lack parental care. Since they have no one to care for them, even the government does not accept them by providing their basic needs like education, food, shelter and clothing which the United Nations Organization (UNO) considers the basic needs of every human being; they took to the street and become violent just to provide for themselves. This is the reason the Boko Haram initiated insecurity is considered the greatest challenge facing Nigeria today. Though, security, not only in Nigeria, but across the globe, has become a challenge.

Children (be it males or females, boys or girls) are everywhere considered the most vulnerable members of the society. They can be easily manipulated through indoctrination and other incentives. They can be easily lured to commit one crime or the other. This is the mechanism of the so-called Boko Haram. This method was used by Mohammed Yusuf when he gathered some youths and little children and taught them to reject Western education. He argues that Western education or "boko" had brought them nothing but poverty and suffering to the region and was therefore for forbidden, or "haram" in Islam (2012). Boko Haram simply means Western education forbidden". A person in his or her right sense, or who is well brought up by a responsible parent hardly accept such a doctrine haven seen or experienced some better side of Western education in Africa, and Nigeria in particular. This is how some of the kidnapped Chibok girls and the ….girls are indoctrinated and often used by their abductors, Boko Haram members to perpetrate crimes, and be working as suicide bombers. So this paper contends that children should be taught the basic values by the parents so that even when they found themselves in the hands of the men and women of underworld, they can still project the basic values learnt from their families, or from their responsible parents.

Responsible Parenthood and Political Stability
Another factor to consider here is the responsible parenthood and political stability. One may wonder the nexus between responsible parenthood and political stability. Every human person is a political animal said Aristotle. These basic political values parents are expected to teach their children. Suffice to say that political education is very important in the present day society, especially in the present day Nigeria. Almost all the political thugs, if not all, employed by the politicians to commit their nefarious activities, are the product of families. They are people's children. Political stability, as used here, means absence of political conflict and violence in political society. Then, there is a peaceful election, good governance, respect of human dignity and rights, etc. All these factors are obtainable in a society where there is political stability.

We therefore argue that children should be abreast with the basic information about workings of the society. They have right to information which among them is political information. They should be informed of the basic laws, rules and regulation of the society. They should also be educated on the fundamental human rights which are known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 by the United Nations (UN). These basic rights are also enshrined in the Chapter five, section 33-45 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). United Nations cited in Obijekwu (2020) has the following rights as the basic rights for every human person irrespective of one's religion, race, gender, age, tribal affiliation, etc. The Rights included: the right of life, right to dignity of human person, right to freedom, right to personal liberty, right to fair hearing, right to private life and family life, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to expression, press and opinion, right to peaceful assembly and association, right to freedom of movement, right to acquire and own immovable property, right to education, right to vote and be voted for in any election. These rights are attached to every human being due to his inherent nature and ontological origin, and as well inalienable rights (Obijekwu, 2020),

Conclusion
In this paper, we set out to discuss the necessity of the responsible parenthood in the world peace, social security and political stability. In fact, responsible parenthood is considered in the world as a paradigm shift in maintaining social security, political stability and peaceful co-existence in the world and Nigeria in particular. In doing this, the concept of responsible parenthood is discussed. The development or emergence of the notion of responsible parenthood is as well traced which was discovered to have a Christian background as it originated from the Catholic and Protestant doctrines of procreation and population control. Above all, we conclude that the importance of responsible parenthood can never be overestimated in promotion of peace, social security and political stability if parents should be committed in their primary responsibilities; and if parents/families should provide the necessary care, education, and make the basic needs available to their children; and at the same time make them understand that humanity is one irrespective of one's origin, race, religion, gender, classes, tribe and other factors that have continued to divide the world, be it economic factors, political factors, cultural and social factors.

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