

Mother is Gold: Appreciating Mothering from the Margins among the Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The general picture that seems to portray the female gender from the western perspective presents the oppressive image of women in society. On the contrary, despite cultural flow as a result of globalization, certain insinuations and indeed realities among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria portray a privileged status for the female gender. “Iyaniwura” mothering is gold, in Yoruba society and indeed the world over shows the value attached to mothering. The psychological impression made on yet to be mothers prepares them for privilege statuses in spite of possible negative experiences in mothering. The value of gold is manifested in what mothers are to expect when their children grow. They are to be cherished, pampered and appreciated. The paper brings to the fore, how these play out in reality by adopting the qualitative method, using the In-depth interview technique to elicit information from young mothers about their expectations, concerning the saying ‘mothering is gold’ and mothers of married children on how real their mothering has been ‘golden’. This study tries to fill the gap by showing that mothering as a process of child caring and rearing, and motherhood as an institution is quite appreciated in the Yoruba society by mothers and children.

Keywords

Mothering, gold, margins, Yoruba, South-west

Introduction

Mothering, a universal activity, could be regarded as one of the primary functions that a woman performs. Though its form changes over time and across cultures and societies. Mothering entails giving life time activities to the process of reproducing, guiding, and managing others’ lives. In most cases, it is seen as an act which starts from when a woman gives birth, to the period her own children start to have their own babies. The image of the mother is one that is culturally elaborated and valued in most societies. The term “mothering” is specifically related to the bearing and rearing of children by the female parent, as rearing can be referred to as the bringing up of a child to maturity

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and at least to the legal age of eighteen (Knowles and Coles, 2013). However, this age differs across societies and cultures. It can also be referred to a job or a kind of work performed by mothers who are not biologically related to the children.

Ironically, mothers are never paid for the work they do in the so called 'modern' world especially in Africa even though indigenous societies have ways of remunerating them (Oyewumi, 2016). Such remuneration comes depending on how well do the families are. It can be in the form of giving the mothers expensive clothes, food items and or any other desired items by the son- in- law, son, daughter- in -law and or daughters as the case may be. The case, however, differs if the daughter lives in western societies such as the United States or United Kingdom, where the mother is likely to be remunerated. The word 'mother' may also indicate a relationship or a title or a way of caring, but primarily a mother is a woman, a person who gives birth, takes responsibility for the care and development of a child. It is also referred to as the practice of being a mother and bringing up children (O'Farell, 2010). It can also mean the nurturing and raising a child by a mother. The word mother is as old as most societies for there have always been mothers at every stage and, in each subsequent age, the society has defined it in its own terms and imposed its own restrictions and expectations on mothers (Dallsy, 1983), but motherhood as a research area is relatively new for it has been invisible as an area of academic study (Ross, 2016). It is however of importance to note that not all women consciously or unconsciously desire to be mothers and many women in the society as a result of societal expectations as well as that innate belief actively play the roles of procreation, rearing and nurturing of their children.

This implies that in some situations, some women do have children which they never planned for as a result of unwelcomed situations, such as teenage pregnancy or unplanned pregnancy even among married couples as well as a result of rape. In other situations, some women might intentionally not want to have children or have difficulties in having children. This is of utmost importance as there is virtually no society whose perpetuation is almost impossible without procreation. Aside from procreation, there is also the dire need to nurture and inculcate into the child the accepted societal norms and values. However, some societies have transferred this role to other social institutions; the family institutions in most Nigerian societies continue to perform such roles. The paper, therefore, interrogates how the different categories of mothers perceive their mothering roles.

Statement of the problem

Literature is replete on mothering and motherhood in different societies the world all over. Glenn (1994) in her work saw mothering as constructed through

men's and women's actions within specific historical circumstances. Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the sexual division of labour. Because of the natural connection between women's child bearing roles and lactation capacities, their responsibility for child care and because human beings need extended care in childhood, women's mothering has been taken for granted (O'Reily, 2010). It has been recognized to be inevitable by social scientists and not the exclusive domain of women (Ritzer, 1996), by many feminists who are of the view that motherhood is fundamental to feminist movement all over the world (Karen, 2012; Kinsler, 2010; Chodrow, 1999) and certainly by those opposed to feminism (O'Reily, 2008).

In spite of the seeming unequal treatment meted to women in their performance of these roles of mothering, they continue, virtually without question, to bear and nurture children in most societies. Such an attitude may not be unconnected, of course, to social expectations. Yet, from the Yoruba cultural perspective, could the acceptance of these roles be associated with non-pecuniary advantages they hope to receive? What are the experiences of old mothers in the acquisition of these advantages? And, in what ways does the psychological effect of what is expected, motivate yet-to-be mothers and young mothers in preparing them for motherhood roles? These are questions which are yet to be addressed by extant literature. This paper attempts to answer these questions as a way to fill the gap in literature and research.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study attempts to find out if mothering is really appreciated in the Nigerian society. Specifically, the study tries to:

1. identify the expectations of yet to be mothers and young mothers on the issue of mothering,
2. explore the experiences of older mothers, that is, mothers whose children are married to find out the extent to which mothering is really 'golden',
3. examine the perceptions of the different groups of women interviewed on mothering being gold and how it has really manifested in their lives is explored and,
4. find out the impression given to children about mothering as they are being socialized for their future roles.

Brief Literature Review and Theoretical Conceptualization of Mothering and Motherhood

Motherhood suggests a unique relationship between the mother and child, one which is seen as the basic requirement for child development. Rich (1976) refers to motherhood as a patriarchal institution that is male-defined, controlled, and deeply oppressive to women. Mothering on the hand explains women's experiences of mothering that are female defined and centered and potentially empowering to women (O'Reiley, 2001) whilst women's identity

becomes connected to her potential for reproduction. This identity is somehow linked to the social expectation that marriage and motherhood are what women aspire for (Friedan, 2001). Oyewumi (2016) refers to motherhood as an institution of *Iya*. Mothers nurse their children, provide love, affection, and guidance, and shape their primary development. This concept differs in terms of meanings, names and even shapes, depending largely on the society that is practicing it.

Motherhood in the developed society during the nineteenth century means mothering in a male-dominated society (Taylor et. al., 2004). It was seen as a necessary act of procreation that ensured the lineage of a particular family (Dally, 1983). Motherhood during this period was viewed as the moral role for women (Fass, 2001). Between 1820 and 1860, the cult of true womanhood was the era in which womanhood was represented as pious, pure, submissive, and domestic (Apple and Golden, 1985). Women were encouraged to embrace these traits and take their rightful place in the home. In such societies, there are boundaries distinguishing biological mothers of children from other women who care and assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities. Such role is, to a large extent, often flexible and changing. In Britain, there has always been a tradition of paid mothering which can be through the nurses, governess, nannies and even boarding schools (Hill-Collins, 2000).

O'Reiley (2004) describes motherhood as an institution filled with tradition that can possibly lead women to a sense of isolation. Motherhood to her is a patriarchal institution as well as a social institution characterised by specific meanings and ideologies. Motherhood is viewed as women's most important role and the figure of the good mother is celebrated as a moral force in American society (Doyle, 2018). Mothering on the other hand is said to be a more active positive position. It focuses on the everyday practices associated with being a mother and looking after children. It is pertinent to note as stated by Evans (2014) that each woman responds differently to the joy and travails of motherhood.

There are different perspectives to the understanding of motherhood. Some see it as an instrument of oppression as well as a burden which women must be relieved of (Doyle, 2018). To others, it is an accepted role which nature bestows on women thus view motherhood as happy mothering and children fulfilling institutions (O'Reiley, 2009). Kiner (2010) opined that the relationship between motherhood and feminism has shifted and often reveals conflicting debates, for it is seen as a painful relationship and often thankless occupation. This is where the view of the feminists comes in. Feminists have conceptualized mothering and motherhood in different ways. Advocates of feminist movements such as Mary Wollstonecraft are of the view that motherhood/mothering consists of duties imposed on the female gender by nature. Early nineteenth century feminists viewed motherhood as an important task, most of these feminists got married and were actually mothers (Christine,

1985). In short, motherhood was not seen to be problematic since many of them had many servants and did not find child bearing tedious.

However, few feminists such as Margaret Fuller believed that it clashes with their fulfillment as people and as women. The work of Lewis (2016) argued that a situation where mothers are not always present with the child in the first few months is not harmful, the most important thing is the availability of persons at different times in the child's life (Lewis, 2016). Though some feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir on the other accepted the traditional role of mothers without questioning, modern feminists (who emerged in the late 1960s) believed that it is impossible to be a good mother in the context of feminism, it is impossible to be committed to both feminism and motherhood because it is irreconcilable (Beauvoir, 1949). Feminists perceive mothering role to be problematic for it is an instrument of female oppression. Firestone (1971) further explained that childbearing and childrearing roles have always been the bedrock of women's oppression; she further explained that women would never be free of patriarchy until they are free from the yoke of patriarchy. Other feminists such as Andrea O'Reily (2016), Hill Collins (2000) were of the view that the problem is not in motherhood but in its social construction which makes mothering synonymous with subjugation.

The centrality of motherhood in religions, philosophies, and socialization is one concept that has been constant throughout the history of African society. To Christine (1985), motherhood is for most African people symbolic of creativity and continuity. This view is accepted because motherhood is valued for it brings about continuity in lineage at large which is very essential. Furthermore, in traditional societies, mothering roles were performed alongside a lot of other productive roles with other family members staying with them. This in a way is a sharp contrast to the western family which was mainly nuclear with just the husband, wife and very few children living together.

Kimberley (1996) in her work identified two types of mothers, *good mothers* who are endlessly patient, forgiving, nurturing and, most important of all, unfailing in their love, meet their children's needs and fulfill their desires. To Miller (2005), they act responsibly and present themselves in culturally recognizable and acceptable ways. To Hays (1996) she never simply put her child aside for her own convenience. On the other hand, *bad mothers* are those who refuse to nurture and even seek to destroy their children (Karen, 2012). In contemporary times also, some women do choose motherhood, which entails when or whether to have a child, and in what context, if at all (Hadfield et al., 2007: 256). This implies that not all women give birth, not all women who give birth rear children, not all women who rear children give birth to them, not all families assign the role of child rearing to women, and not all child rearers are in families.

Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of sexual division of labour. Thus, because natural connection between women's childbearing, their lactation capacities as well as responsibility for child care

has increased, mothering is still performed in the family, and women's mothering role has gained psychological and ideological significance and 'homeliness' increasingly continues to define women's lives. Lorell (2010) explored the historical and political meanings of motherhood in West Africa and beyond, showing that the roles of women are far more complicated than previously thought. The term "motherhood" from the feminist mothering perspective refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and oppressive to women, while the word mothering refers to women's experience of bearing and caring for their children (Hughes et.al., 2016).

In explaining motherhood in the Yoruba proverb "iya ni wura, baba ni dingi" [Mothering is gold, father is mirror], Lorell (2010) seems to praise the value of women and challenge the image of patriarchal power, which is the household. She tried to bring to light the historical processes that shape the cultural and symbolic meanings associated with motherhood. In spite of the cultural interactions among peoples, it has been argued that every society has a culture that is unique and such culture includes the norms and values of the people which are different across societies. Culture is also reflected through language, song and work which in turn affects the peoples' actions and reactions to conditions. Thus, Motherhood has been symbolized in some "societies as the state or even nation". Laye (1955) as well as Senghor in their different works for instance expressed their love for Africa in terms of the *love for mother*.

In literary analysis, different patterns and methods of motherhood portray mothers mostly as a universal force. This is also present in many literature books written by African scholars. For instance, Roscoe (1977) echoed this idea in his book *Mother is Gold*. Diop also glorified mother in his poems (Akujobi, 2011). Love of mother and love of the nation has been taken as one and the same. Motherhood, in short, is a major theme in contemporary women's literature so much so that it features prominently in most texts written by women. This expression is largely visible in the novel written by Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Here she expatiates on the importance attached to procreation and motherhood and defined the validity of motherhood mainly by the success of her children, success as a woman and her success as a mother. She also brought to limelight the great importance of motherhood as well as how sexuality and the ability to bear children may sometimes be the only way by which femininity and motherhood are defined (Emecheta, 1974). Thus, the main character in her book sees herself employed and fought so hard to be a mother even if it means marrying a man you do not love. In addition, the text of Akujobi (2011) dramatizes the cultural tradition of this society through the tragedy of a young woman whose story illustrates the African conception regarding childbearing.

Nwapa (1966) in her book brought to light one of the roles traditionally attributed to women that still influences them, that is, gender identity. She portrays women as mothers who are the primary holders of the nature culture. African collective consciousness relates to motherhood which, in most African societies, plays a pivotal role in defining their condition as women. In African societies, a woman's identity is closely related to her capacity to produce children (Lorell, 2010). This ideology of motherhood is so widely spread that what is natural, that is, the capability to procreate takes a cultural dimension. In fact, for Africans, a woman must not be "unproductive" or childless, be it naturally or voluntarily. In both cases, being childless identifies her not as a female but as "a man" (Oyewumi, 2016). Consequently, childlessness which can either be natural or voluntary and, it is synonymous with social rejection as it defines the woman as an outcast and only motherhood can help her enjoy (Lorber, 2010).

The experience of motherhood according to Taylor and Wozniak (2004) is an unwritten story and she contended that the story is just beginning to be told and this story, to her, interrogates women's struggles to become all that they can be. The role of a mother and all that goes with it as far as she is concerned is universally imposed and it is the only role that everyone agrees should be the domain of the woman. Mbiti (1970) recognized the concept of mother when he stated that it is central to African philosophy and spirituality. Motherhood is a joyful and privileged state for the woman because, in pregnancy, the woman is said to "glow and shine" and she receives special treatment especially from her husband and her mother-in-law. No matter the skills, the desires and the talents of a woman, her primary function is that of motherhood, at least in Africa. We know that in the West or developed countries, reproduction is subject to agreement between couples (Ngcobo, 1988). That is, whether or not to have children is well spelt out before marriage, but this is not so in Africa where every woman aspires to be a mother someday.

Although marriage and adulthood were previously in co-existence with child-rearing, mothering did not dominate women's lives. A woman carried out her child-care responsibilities along with a wide range of other productive activities. Parenting lasted from the inception of marriage to the death of the marriage partners. Motherhood is also seen as a moral transformation whereby a woman comes to terms with being different in that she ceases to be an autonomous individual because she is one way or the other attached to another individual that is, -her baby. In many societies, motherhood is wrapped in many cultural and religious meanings. Cultural as in what the society thinks a mother should be, that is, some elements associated with a mother, and religiously, that is, what the practiced faith of a particular society attaches to motherhood.

In African societies, as in most societies the world over, women not only bear children. They also take primary responsibility of infants and children than do men and sustain primary emotional ties with infants. When biological

mothers do not parent, other women, rather than men, virtually always take their place. Though fathers and other men spend varying amounts of time with infants and children, the father is rarely a child's primary parent (Chodorow, 1995). Mothers, it seems, are gifted with tools and resources so that they can take care of their babies. The case is also the same in Nigeria despite the different societies and cultural norms. In Yoruba tradition which this paper focuses on, compared to other cultures and societies; women are highly placed and revered mostly when they attain the position of wife and mother. The level and extent of reverence a woman enjoys make most of them look forward to motherhood. A number of poetries of Yoruba culture state in praise of a woman as a mother.

*Iya ni wura
Baba ni digi.
Ojo ti baba ba ku, digi omo baje
Sugbon ojo ti iya ba ku ni wura omo wo'mi
Iya ni wura ti a ko le fowo ra!*

Mother is gold
Father is a mirror.
The day a father dies, a child's mirror is destroyed
However, the day a mother dies a child's gold sinks
Mother is the priceless gold that cannot be bought with money.

In songs, mothering experiences are related as golden. Another example of such song through which mothers are metaphorically compared to gold is given below:

*Iya ni wura iyebiye
Ti a ko le f'owora
Oloyun mi f'osu mesan
O pon mi f'odun meta
Iya ni wura iyebiye
Ti a kole f'owora*

Mother is gold of [great] value
That cannot be purchased with money
She carried me in her womb for nine months.
She nursed me for three years.
Mother is gold of [great] value
That cannot be purchased with money

Motherhood is considered to be very important in Yoruba culture because the preservation of humanity depends on the role of mothers in society (Lawal, 1996). In Yoruba culture, a mother occupies various positions, a mother, wife, daughter, a priestess or even a witch (Makinde, 2004).

Motherhood in Yoruba culture is perceived to be cultic for it is also associated with the womb of the earth which produces life and the ability of a mother to carry a child in her womb (Familusi, 2012). An attestation to this is given in a Yoruba saying which is "*Orisa bi iya ko si!*" (There is no deity as [great] as mother). In traditional Yoruba societies, the mother is expected to work within the immediate environ of her home. Her working hour is flexible and allows for her to have a child with her all the time.

However, over the years many mothers are gainfully employed in the formal capitalist economy in which she cannot fully take care of the child whilst working. Thus working mothers especially those with young children seem to reconstruct their mothering identities within the context of full time employment. In most cases, they get alternative care giving facilities such as day care or employ nannies.

Indeed, motherhood as an ideology or institution presupposes women's and children's interests to be exactly the same (Oakley, 1979). That is, children's needs *are* mothers' needs. Good mothers are supposed to subsume their own personality to the family which means having no other real interests, but only substitute or contingent ones, depending on other family member's desires" (Ruddick, 1980). Mother becomes an abstract concept in our minds that combines with our expectations for family and gender and symbolizes the fulfillment of our emotional and physical needs (Lorber, 2000).

Mothering becomes a career in itself that needs a strong commitment in order for one to be successful (Sears, 1999). In this view, no other person is able to provide this care giving role. Fathers are seen as incompetent in many types of parenting activities and lacking the innate ability to nurture like a mother (Johnson, 1988). Such that, the so called "other women" are seen as less able to mother and the real mother usually defined as the biological mother becomes indispensable to the wellbeing of a child. Therefore, while this ever-present mother dedicates herself to producing the well-adjusted children possible through continuous nurturing, the father completes his role by providing for the family as an income earner or as a secondary parent in rare moments (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994).

Most importantly, in time past the mother does not engage in income-earning activities. She was not only at home but also became a true full-time mother because she was not dividing her time or focus between her employment and her children (Johnston and Swanson, 2004). Today, mothers-to-be do face the decision of whether to take up formal employment while mothering or to disengage from formal employment and make mothering her sole social role (Pare and Dillaway, 2005).

Mothering is sometimes affected by social conditions, which shape the mother's actions toward her child, especially her daughter to whom she has the social responsibility of being a female role model and the protector or shaper of her womanhood. To Ngcobo (1988), the mothering process urges that mothers treat sons as differentiated beings but daughters as extensions of themselves because of their gender similarity or otherwise.

Theoretical Foundation of Motherhood

Having interrogated existing literature in explaining and conceptualizing motherhood, there is a dire need to further strengthen the line of argument. The paper adopts the Structural Functional theory to further strengthen the idea which moulds women into the way they are. Structural Functionalism is a broad perspective in sociology and anthropology which interprets society as structure which is constituted with interrelated parts. Functionalism addresses the society as a whole in terms of functions of its constituent elements such as norms, customs, traditions, institutions amongst others. Social structures are stressed and placed at the center of analysis and social functions are deduced from these structures.

According to Structural-Functionalist theory, society is a system of interconnected parts that work together in harmony to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole. For example, each of the social institutions contributes important functions to society: family provides a context for reproducing, nurturing, and socializing children; education offers a way to transmit society's skills, knowledge, and culture to its youth; politics provides a means of governing members of society; economics provides for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; and religion provides moral guidance and an outlet for the worship of a higher power (Ritzer, 1996).

The structural-functionalist perspective of the family focuses on the family and its relationship to the society in which the family fulfills a number of functions within society. Talcott Parson's theory included the differentiation of gender roles within the family, with each partner filling one of two somewhat opposing but complementary functions. Men were characterized as fulfilling an instrumental role, with women's more expressive nature providing the complement. Parsons argued that the expressive role was assigned to women as a result of the primarily expressive bond between them. It is in the context of this complementary role that motherhood connotes a fundamental functional and symbolic meaning in the family.

Summarily, motherhood assumes different names and shapes depending on the society that is practicing it. The word procreation or giving birth and nurturing new life whether physically or otherwise has led to diverse definitions of the words "feminine," "maternal," and "feminine spirituality" in

many cultures and religious traditions. Motherhood in another way can be seen as a sacred and powerful spiritual path for a woman to take. In literature and in other discourses alike, motherhood is a recurrent theme across cultures. It is one striking term in women's discourse that is given prominence. Motherhood has been viewed by many in different lights and presented in diverse ways.

Research Methodology

The study adopts both the primary and secondary sources of data collection. For the primary source, the qualitative method of data collection was used adopting the in-depth interview approach. Here three categories of mothers were interviewed. The first category consists of young yet to be mothers (25-30), which are the newly married young women expecting their first babies on their expectations of motherhood. These yet to be mothers consisted of three (3) educated working ones and three (3) that are either in school or not working. Also, the not educated category was interviewed. This group consisted of both those who are engaged in one form of informal jobs (3) and those who are full time housewives (3). The second group of mothers interviewed was the middle aged mothers (35-50) who have children and are either educated and working or not educated. The last category of women interviewed were older women (55-70) whose children are married and are also having children. Six (6) of these women altogether were interviewed and they also consisted of both the educated and not educated. Altogether the study interviewed twenty-four women. Few children attending primary schools were also asked on the impressions given them about mothering. All these respondents were, therefore, purposively chosen under non-random (accidental) conditions. The study was conducted in selected communities in Ibadan, these are; Akobo, Basorun and Bodija/Ashi communities. The data was collected between January and April, 2018.

Discussion of Findings

In this section, the findings obtained from respondents are discussed systematically in line with the stated objectives using content analysis. Emerging themes from the data collected relate to how mothering is perceived by the different categories of the respondent. The majority expressed that it is biologically informed. To these individuals, mothering is nature bound and biologically inclined. On the other hand, themes that emerged related to how mothering is appreciated in Nigeria. Findings from respondents consisting of the older mothers, as regard their perception of mothering emerged with different themes:

Mothering as biologically informed: From the interviews, a common theme emerged from some respondents that “it is women’s biological destiny to bear, deliver, nurse and to rear children”. To younger working mothers, they believe

that in recent times the family structure has changed in such a way that the mothering of children has become exclusively the duty of biological mothers. Break-in extended family ties were observed because they are increasingly broken from other extended family members' ties.

For the educated non-working mothers, respondents believe that mothering is a long and full term job which must be done wholeheartedly so as to have joy and fulfillment in life. Other themes that emerged are:

Social contacts/Routine assistance: Respondents believed that there are little or no social contacts or routine assistance from their relations during their parenting time.

An 83 years old, educated grandmother took her time to explain mothering in Yoruba tradition. In her words:

Giving birth gives a certain status on women, even mystic power. Motherhood among Yoruba people is said to confer privileges that give credence to the very foundations of society and women's personal roles in it which symbolizes fertility and fruitfulness. You see, the Yoruba saying, *iya ni wura, baba ni dingi* shows the importance of motherhood in African society. (25th April, 2018)

Few yet to be mothers opined that though rearing of children remains a family responsibility, nevertheless, due to the weakening of family ties, the best option is organized day care and schooling outside the home which is an alternative to mothering within the home space. The uneducated young and older mothers had contrary views from the educated ones. To them, the family tie still exists such that our mothers or mothers-in-law are always ready and available in assisting us, even in situations where they are unavoidably absent, neighbours whom they have adopted as family members are always readily available.

In the words of one of the respondents in this category:

Ti enia ba fe iranlowo, alabagbe po ni enia maa nkoko lo ba ki enia to 'ranti ebi; won a ran wa lowo

Meaning: if we need help, we first go to our neighbours before going to our family members and they will equally oblige us. (54 years old Tailor, 6th February, 2018)

Is mothering appreciated in Yoruba societies?

Some were of the view that the biological components of mothering have reduced or lessened because most mothers now opt for controlling conception and even using baby food and bottles which was not done during our mother's time. Others were also of the view that the way a woman is perceived depends on the position she occupies, but the highest value is given to a woman as a mother because Yorubas revere motherhood.

A 65 years old, uneducated grandmother observed that when you say mothering is gold:

It is not only because the mother is well taken care of by her children and are given money or other items but when your children you have nurtured and spent all your youthful years on become successful in life and they are also bringing forth their own children and you are alive to see them and help in nurturing them. This is so because women in Yoruba society do bear the burden of not only child bearers but as scapegoats, they are blamed for any inadequacies of the child. (DoI: 9th January, 2018)

A 30 years working and educated mother expressed her view by describing mothering is gold as:

“the hardest job to undertake, it has no time off, no pay rise, no sick days, no excuses, it is a life time job, but it is worth it.” (DoI: 18th January, 2018)

Findings about the manifestations of “mother is gold” show that aside from the fact that the children are taking care of their mother;

one is fulfilled seeing one's children and grandchildren.

Some grandmothers believe that;

motherhood is an age long institution, and today we have a mixture of old trends and new trends. Our children are lazy these days and are always looking for alternatives to nurturing children such as house helps or nannies and some take their babies to day care when they still need their mother's love. They alternate breastfeeding with goat or cow milk; to crown it all they cannot put their babies on their back. (DoI: 4th March, 2018)

Others were of the view that mothering in their old times was a joint effort because as older children, grandmothers and other older people living with or near a mother helped in child caring, so a mother was hardly left alone in performing her role.

On the expectation of the yet to be/ young mothers, the uneducated young and older mothers had contrary views from the educated ones. To them, the expectations of the yet to be mothers vary. One respondent in the educated and working category said;

We would mother our children as best as we can but not as dedicatedly as our mothers because we also want to be achievers in our careers”.

A critical opinion was also raised by one of the young working mothers. She expressed her view thus:

Spending one’s life time taking care of the children is not as rewarding and valued as one’s job. I would rather work than stay at home taking care of children when there are good options. I don’t see anything wrong in even working long hours, working outside the home makes one better mother because I will be able to contribute to house keeps. (35 years old Lawyer, 7th February, 2018)

The opinion of another respondent, also a working mother was however slightly different. In her words,

“I would have preferred staying at home caring for my children by myself but my husband’s job is not fetching enough money. (41 years Old teacher, DoI: May 14th, 2018)

Here, she justifies her employment or paid work and income she receives as more beneficial to their children rather than herself. In addition, some young, educated and working mothers of the age range of 27 years and 29years were of the view that they would prefer having few children, two children for example,

because we cannot go through the process of so many children. This actually is unlike our parents who gave birth to so many children and they enjoyed it. (21st April, 2018)

Also, others who are of the middle range and not educated were of the view that

mothering is gold, when a mother is wise, valuable, truthful and central to a child's existence. Since motherhood is not always as smooth as expected, it appears to be self-denying, as a result not many mothers can go through the rigours today. (DoI: 5th April, 2018)

Impression given to the children on mothering

Some female pupils were asked about the impression given to them at school about mothers. A female pupil who has an idea of the question of query said:

We are taught in class that mothers role in the home front include bearing and caring for the children, making sure that food is always available. They are also responsible for taking care of the safety of the children. A responsible mother takes good care of her children, a good mother enjoys the fruit of her labour at old age. I am also looking forward to that time when we would also perform such roles. Even at home, our parents buy toys that show what is expected of a girl or boy. (14 years old in JSS 3. 5th April, 2018)

In addition, the male pupils also agreed that;

men are meant to provide for the family, while the mother is expected to take care of the children and the home.

They further stated that;

We are being taught both at home and in school that both the males and females do have different roles they are expected to perform in the society; the mothers to nurture the children and the father to provide for the family.

Conclusion

Women as mothers are pivotal actors in the sphere of social reproduction which is not really different from the biological fact that they bear children and breastfeed them. The Yoruba society do appreciate mothering in the society for it is strongly embedded in the Yoruba culture. Findings from the study have

shown that the different categories of women, despite modernization, seem to accept this stance. Nonetheless, educated women seem to be gradually withdrawing from such acts due to their career aspirations. In spite of this, however, the attachment to their biological responsibilities seem to persist with the emerging trend of 'small is beautiful'. That is, their disposition is towards having few children, yet these children are to be socialized through them. The educational and the family institutions continue to perpetuate gender socialization of children thus perpetuating gender inequality. Thus, while the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria is modernizing in line with global trends, there are still traces of holding tenaciously to the old beliefs, norms and practices.

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