

Yoruba Concept of Childbearing and Parenting: An Appraisal of Parental Social Responsibility

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Abstract

The highest totem of life fulfillment in Yoruba philosophy is to have children of one's images who would proclaim and showcase the virtues of omoluabi and inherit legacies of the family. Contrary to this assumption, the rate of abandonment in child-parent-parent-child social responsibilities. Continues to be a worrisome phenomenon, this implied an astronomical increase in the gap between childbearing and parenting process of the Yoruba people. Many literary scholars like Olaiya (2017), Akinlabi and Adeniyi (2017) seek to resuscitate the seemingly comatosed Yoruba virtues but the area of parenting was not adequately captured. This work fills the gap. The research objective was to find out the strategies, challenges and the success faced by parents and children while trying to fulfill their social responsibilities. Data was collected through in depth interview from purposive sample drawn from utterances/interviews of the aged and senior citizens involved in childbearing and parenting which were later analysed and highlighted according to the tenets of Yoruba culture. Findings show that the care and love parents bequeathed to children determine the societal values and ethical developments in the society.

Keywords: childbearing, parenting, omoluabi, befitting burial, social responsibility

Introduction

Ayoola, (2019), opined that, marriage is a legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife, which is usually formalized through some type of solemnization. Nwoye (1991) see marriage as a sacred and permanent contract between a man and a woman who decide, on their own accord and in the presence of at least two witnesses to live, love, care and promotes each other's well being and welfare. From these insights marriage involves two persons: a man and a woman, who consent to live together as husband and wife and fulfill one of life's social responsibilities.

One of the chief functions of marriage is to create a healthy platform for raising a family for procreation and transfer of cultural heritage from one generation to another. This is achieved through the process of childbearing and parenting. Novick (2009), defines childbearing which include pregnancy, birth and early nursing period and child rearing (parenting) that is bringing up and taking care of children which are often differently perceived in our society and by women themselves. Pregnant and nursing mothers experience enhanced narcissism,

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describe themselves as precious and occupy an almost mystical position in the perception of our society now and in the past.

Childbearing and parenting is a universal trend irrespective of religion tribe or race, rich and the poor educated and uneducated people from different cultures all coverage at this important matter of recreation between man and his wife.

This Paper examines African perspectives of childbearing, parenting and societal expectations of the child. It highlights the concept of childbearing, upbringing, the importance and ubiquitous contribution of children to the family and the society at large. The conceptual focus of this paper is on Yoruba land. Yoruba people believe that Olódùmarè is the Ultimate giver of children and the most precious gift humans can desire after marriage is to receive the fruit of the womb. This paper discusses the Yoruba culture on childbearing as embedded in its philosophy, belief and world view.

In Yoruba traditional society, morality, ethics and etiquette is an indispensable quality that forms the concept of *omolúàbísm*. The paper focuses on the essence of children in its entirety by zeroing it down to the fact that adhering strictly to childbearing and parenting. Having all the qualities of *Omolúàbí* is not enough to determine a fulfilled parent until the parents are taken care of at old age and given a befitting/elaborate burial when they pass on.

The research objective was to find the strategies, the challenges and successes during this period of social responsibilities of parent to children and children to parent in Yoruba worldview. The study also aim at establishing what could qualify a parent to be fulfilled in performing their social responsibility against the backdrop of the popular saying that *eni omo sin lo bimo*. To aid this study one question was asked: (i) what qualifies a parent to be given a befitting burial after death?

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The model on which this study is anchored is Porter's (1972) Ethno-cultural theory cited by Idowu (2019:56), porter asserts that culture is the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, feelings, beliefs, values, religion, concept of self, the universe and self universe relationship, hierarchy of status, roles expectation, spatial relations and time concept acquired by a large group of people in the course of generation through individual and group striving. Thompson (1991:26) using the same perspective as Porter notes that culture is the distinctive way of the society as a given point in time, it embraces a particular peoples way of thinking, feeling, believing and behaving.

The relevance of this framework is underpinned by the fact that, the role of children cannot be overemphasized in the life of Yoruba people because

procreation is a cultural fulfillment that shows human beings prayer is answered by Elédùmarè. This cultural value is what Dáramólá and Jéjé (1975) called thought and believe of the Yoruba people. Worldview of the Yoruba encompasses their culture, feelings, views about life description or things that define their existence which is child bearing, parenting and future of the child are of great importance.

In 19th century, culture was used by some to refer to wide range of human activities whereas other uses it to refer to symbolic representation and expressions of human experience from one generation to the other. The societal growth and development in Yoruba milieu is the reflective assessment of childbearing and parenting.

In collecting data for this paper the researcher employed the survey and observation method of research. First a purposive sample was drawn of selected parents of different age group, their experience in childbearing and parenting were considered and subjected to qualitative analysis. The instrument used for data gathering was the indept interview.

Meaning and Scope of Childbearing in Yorùbá Context

Child bearing is what every couple look up to after marriage in Yoruba land and it is believed to be one of the reasons for marriage. It is in fact, the joy of every parent and family members to see their daughter pregnant shortly after marriage. Yoruba people believed that *Olódùmarè* is the giver of children and the most precious gift one can receive from God is the fruit of the womb. That is why women often frequent *Ifá* divination on issues pertaining to child bearing. Olàiyá [2017] opines that barrenness is despicable in Yoruba culture. That is why when a woman is barren it is viewed with a lot of concern. A barren Yorùbá woman (*àgan*) is often a miserable and sorrowful woman who everybody prays for to conceive and be fruitful.

Child parenting is simply defined as the act of guarding, protecting or guiding children and prepares them for a rewarding future.

In Yoruba thoughts and beliefs, child care, tutelage and protection takes a prominent role in social life therefore no one condones messing up with the upbringing of children. Child education and upbringing is a collective effort of kit and kin and everybody in the community. They believe in spirit of one for all, all for one. The Yoruba proverb says that *ojú méjì ní bímọ igba ojú ní i wòó dàgbà* (a child is birthed by one but has many teachers), this affirms that training of a child in Yoruba land is a collective responsibility. The main aim of this concept is for the society to produce a citizen with virtues of *Ọmọlúàbí* – a good persons that combines those qualities of human, sociable, honest, hardworking, courageous,

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humble, faithful, sincere a good representatives of his family and the society (Olaiya, 2017).

The importance of well brought up children in Yoruba society is reflected in these proverbs:

Omọ tí a kò kọ yóò gbé ilé tí a kọ tà [A child that we refuse to train is the one that will sell the house we are building.]

Àbí ìkó, Àkòṣgbà ilé ní i tí i báwọ̀n lọ [the untrained child, a child that rejects training, all comes from the home.]

Omọ gò ẹ̀ni ó máà kú, kíni ní pani bí ó ẹ̀ agò? [A child is foolish, they say so far he did not die, what kills a child faster than foolishness?]

Kàkàkín bí ẹ̀gbá ọ̀bùn, mákúkú bí ọ̀kan ọ̀ṣọ ọ̀gà [Instead of me to beget two thousand useless children, I'd rather have one with integrity].

Omọ bẹ̀rẹ ọ̀sì, bẹ̀rẹ̀ b̀kátà ló ní dà [Too many children, much poverty results in burden.]

Yorùbá believes that a child that is well trained has been equipped with necessary tool for survival, the traditional way of training children in Yoruba community is tripod in nature *ẹ̀kọ̀ilẹ̀* (home training) *Ẹ̀kọ̀isẹ̀* (vocational training) *Ẹ̀kọ̀llú* (civic training) all these three are interwoven and are good criteria in assessing a well brought up child and they are also structured towards quality of being a complete *omọ̀lúàbí*.

Death is a sad thing in life. In Yorùbá land, death is detested as children detest darkness their prayer is that whoever that is going to die should not die premature. Their joy is when someone dies at the appropriate time which is when the person has attained old age, so that the burial will be celebrated with pump and pageantry where the whole community will be involved in the joyous celebration of *ẹ̀yẹ̀ikẹ̀yìn* – (final honor) for the departed (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979). In Yoruba thoughts and belief giving a befitting burial to the dead is very important especially if the person died at old age. One of the Yorùbá proverb depict this value is *omọ̀kòláyò lé, ẹ̀niomọ̀ sin lóbímọ̀* (There is no joy in begetting children except the one who survives one and can bury ones corpse) African people of Yorùbá extraction believes so much in this thought, that's why they try to bequeath a child that will take on the legacies the parents left behind. Dying without having a good child that survives one or gives one a befitting burial is a despicable thing. Another proverb that depicts this is:

Bí iná bá kú a fi eé́rú bojú [When fire quenches it replaces itself with ashes].

Bí ọ̀gèdè bá kú a fi omọ̀ rẹ̀ rọ̀pọ̀ [The banana tree dies is succeeded by its shoots.]

Kí a kú ní kékeré, kó yèni, ósàn ju kí a dàgbàdàgbà kí a má ni adiyè irànà [It is more honorable to die young than to die old without a befitting burial].

Parenting and Responsibilities

Upbringing is the process of early training especially a particular way of bringing up a child in a way that is generally accepted by the society. Ladele T.A. (1986) believe that in Yoruba culture, it is not out of place if a child that is well brought up is described as *omolúàbí* and everybody wants to be associated with him or her.

A well trained Yoruba child is properly brought up and well coached from birth to be of good behavior and this can be seen in the manner and way he or she behaves and shows respect for elders, eats, well dressed, and work hard and endures in all face of life challenges .

The concept of *omolúàbí* is not gender based. The way and manner the child is brought up will determine the state of his or her *omolúàbísm*.

The typical Yorùbá traditional compound (*agboile*) setting where the nuclear family relates as one big family is the first place where the child lives during the formative years and the whole family, friends and relations are deeply involved in the moral training of the child. This is taken with seriousness because no family want his children bring disgrace and disrepute to their name. This collective responsibilities is not left for the parents alone, all will be in the lookout out to be part of the training because they believe in the spirit of one for all, all for one.

Some Yoruba proverbs that depicts children moral upbringing are;

Kàkàkín bí ègbà á òbùn má a kúkú bí òkanṣoṣo ògà [Instead of begetting several children without manners I will rather have one that is morally outstanding].

Ọmọ tí a kò kọ ní i gbé ilé tí a kọ tà [A child is not built up will end up selling the house we built].

Ọmọ ní igbèyìn òla [Child is the end product of wealth]

Ọmọ ní èrè ayé [Child is the profit of life].

Tí a bá lógún ẹrú tí a ní iwọfà ẹgbẹfà ọjó a bá kú ọmọ ẹni làsèhìndè ẹni [If we had twenty slaves, and one thousand two hundred seldom it is one child that looks after one legacies after ones death].

Notable scholars on Yoruba cultured have researched into Yorùbá custom, marriage philosophy. Scholars like (Fálọlá 2001), Ọláìyá (2017), Adéoyè (1979), Ọgúnsínà (2016) all explained that child bearing and upbringing is paramount issues that measures the success of any marriage. For anyone to command respect in the society and be seen an honorable man. *Bòròkìní* who can be referred to as

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a role model the level at which he or she trains his child or ward is a big criterion Olábimtán [1987], agrees that, it is legitimate and tenable in Yoruba society to marry many wives and have as many children one desires, it is also compulsory for these children to be trained well and be brought up with acceptable ethic and tenet of the society.

The unstructured framework of child upbringing in Yoruba society is based on the following;

- Moral training
- Vocation training
- Cultural training
- Chastity training

Moral Training

Moralist in Yoruba worldview is a virtue taken so serious for a well groomed person who has attained the status of an *omolúàbí*. A morally upright person must be polite, accepted and respected in his or her moral behavior, he/she must exhibit good character in all ramification, and all round moral discipline must not be found wanting in his day to day life.

Children of good character are pride to the parents and the society. Rudeness and all sorts of misconducts is not tolerated for instance male children prostrate for elderly ones while female kneel down to greet elder, language use and comportment while relating with elder must be maintained at all times. Taboos, folk tale, and riddles are used to teach some moral and hygiene lessons.

In Yoruba traditional society much emphasis is not placed on material wealth but on good character because they have the belief that with good character every other good thing of life will fall in place. Any wealth acquired without moral upright is regarded as useless. Moral training in Yorubaland is administered by every member of the society to a growing up child between the ages of 1 year to adulthood.

Vocational training

Yoruba people are known to be skillful people they exhibit this in all vocation they engage in even before the western education. Vocational training in Yorùbá land is categorized into three clear parts farming, trading and crafts. Farmland in Yoruba land is a vocation that every family engage in because of necessity if food production. It involves planting of various food and cash crops which can readily guarantee direct food process while engaging in planting and harvests the children are trained in this art for self sustenance. Adéoyè [1979] see farming as the first vocation of Yorùbá people and he opined that "*isẹ̀ àgbẹ̀ ni isẹ̀ àkọ̀ṣe*

Yorùbá ósì jẹ́ iṣẹ́ ẹ́tí ọ́ fún wọ́n lóunjẹ́ ọ́jọ́, isinmi àti ifòkànbalẹ́” (Farming was the first vocation of the Yorùbá and it is the work that gave them food, homeliness, peace and comfort).

The importance of farming is often drummed into children ears whiles undergoing the training this is depicted in Yoruba song;

Iṣẹ́ àgbẹ́ niṣẹ́ ilẹ́ wa

Ẹnikòṣiṣẹ́ a mà jalẹ́

Ìwé kíkọ́ lài sí ọkọ́ àti àdà

Kòì pé oo kòì pé ooo.

[Farming is the work of our land, / Whoever fails to work will steal / Schooling without hoe and cutlass is not complete.]

Trading and craft is another vocation practice by Yorùbá people. Craft like blacksmithing, weaving, mat making, cloth dying, drumming, craving, carpentry etc.

Child are given training from thee vocation so that they can be able to stand on their own and become well groomed, responsible and respected in the society. Other skills are hereditary and family trade and craft which is passed from one generation to the other man in the society.

Cultural training

Merrian Webster (2005) described culture as the integrated pattern of human knowledge, believe and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generation. Yoruba culture and language is rated amongst the most popular in Africa Adéníyì (2010). Yorùbá is spoken by an estimated 25 million native speakers it is the second most widely spoken language in West Africa after Hausa (Akínlabí and Adéníyì 2007).

By these feet Yorùbá children are brought up in a cultural environment where he would be taught everything about his/her culture from early stage of life ranging from greeting, dressing, and language use, initiation into different group awareness about family history through *oríkì* (eulogy / cognomen) food and hygiene, safety, communal services (Daramola and Jeje 1975).

This is done through observation at a tender age and later joins the father of the family in some of the little things her/she can handle before he/she becomes an expert in the above cultural behaviors. For example, a father will teach his son how to prostrate, how to greet an elder and how to behave while relating with them so also a Yoruba girl will be taught how to tie head gear while dressed in

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traditional attire. Initiation into different cultural societies is also done by taking the child along to observe the activities. This is depicted in Yoruba adages that says *oròtí akò bá fojú omọdé mọ, píparun ní i parun* - (A cult that does not involve children will go into extinction)

With all these training which is directly and indirectly inclined the customs, festival, marriages, ethic, taboos, history, sexuality and all that is associated with his or her culture.

Chastity training

Sexual Immorality is a big issue among the Yorùbá people. They detest it so much that they don't want their children or ward involve in it because it is a big shame to the family name. Virginity (*ibálé*) is so paramount in Yorùbá marriage institution. It reveals most about the background of the 'would be' wife and the effort of his parent to make sure her would be husband 'met her at home'. It's a thing of joy for the girl, her parent and her husband family if she's still a virgin in her first sexual encounter with her husband.

Therefore, the parents of the girl usually make sure they train their child to be above board on issue of sexual immorality, so sex education through observation, periodic advice is taken more seriously. A close watch and monitoring is usually kept on the girl. She would be taught about her virginity, menstrual period, child birth, pregnancy, labor and womanhood.

Another way of training in chastity to ensure children are well trained to be a responsible person in the society is the use of "*tésòṣ*" traditional protective means of curbing sexual immorality in a child that the parent have invested much hope and resources on not to be wayward or hooked by unwanted pregnancy. Reward and punishment are also used in training a child to be a responsible person in the society.

Responsibilities of Children to Parents

Training of children in Yorùbá philosophy is not only to fulfill parental responsibilities as a parent but also in preparation for a reliable replacement '*forones*' old age. It is the prayer and aspiration of all parents to have children who will take care of them at that time they can no more work and run around.

Children in Yorùbá world view does not necessarily mean ones biological children but every child, ward or relation including adopted children that got trained under ones tutelage. This anticipation of having a child that would succeed one is sometimes shrouded with mysteries because is not usually gotten from expected quarters. This is the reason why Yoruba people take delight in

treating all children equally. No one actually knows the child that will take care of one at old age. Few Yoruba proverbs and dictums depict this thought and beliefs.

Àjùmòbí kò kan tàánú àfi ẹni Ọlórún bá ránsí ni ló ń ẹni lóore

Compassion is not about relativity it is whose God sent to you that helps

Ànjóórìna òmoriqlólà lóla

We move together but we don't know who is going to be rich in future.

Orí laa fí im'ẹran láwo.

Choosing the best meat in the pot requires luck.

Orí tí yóò bá gbeni ní i gbaláwo re koni

It the head that would bring fortune, that would lead one to good diviner.

Montenegro K.C. (2014), agrees that, old age as “the time rearing or surpassing the life expectancy of human being and it is thus the end of human life cycle”. They are called different names in different culture, old people, elderly (worldwide usage): O.A.P. (British) – old age pensioner); S. C. Senior citizen in America, Elders in Africa, Yorùbá refer to them as *àgbà/àgbàlagbà, arúgbó*. They are elderly people who often have limited regenerative abilities are more vulnerable to disease, syndromes, injuries and sickness than Younger ones. This is a biological state that needs special care and attention. In Yorùbá world view the greatest responsibilities children can perform on their parents is to show kindness to them in whatever way they are capable of showing it, as highlighted below:

- Giving them attention always
- Making sure their feeding is taken care of.
- Striving to the upmost to prevent them from suffering any painful consciousness of their situation.
- A responsible child will employ every facility to endure and cancel the fault of his or her parent.
- Good children never leave their parent behind them in the humble valley of poverty; they ensure they remember them when things are rosy for them.
- Sustenance of family name and good legacy is another crucial responsibility of children in Yorùbá land.

Aládésanmí and Ògúnjímí (2019) opined that any children who do not belong to the above category Yorùbá believe they are mere failure and societal problems that could subject the family name to disregard. It also believed that any child who cannot perform these responsibilities is not capable of giving his/her parent

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befitting burial which is considered as the epitome and essence of child bearing in Yorubaland.

A proverb says *Eni omọ sin ló búmọ* (He who is given a befitting burial is the one that begat children). This proverb explains how important a befitting burial is in Yorùbáland.

Children are not seen to be responsible until they have given their parents a befitting burial and in the other way round parent success and fulfillment are not complete until their children has given them a befitting burial when they pass on.

Burial/Funeral Rites and Children Obligations

Among the Yorùbá, death is not believed to be the end of life but the beginning of another in the world of ancestors. It is also believed that humans are mere strangers; that heaven is the real home (*àlejò ni a jé láyé, òrun nilé*). They believe death is inevitable, before transiting to the great beyond in the land of the ancestors.

Qualifications for the land of the ancestors are however not automatic it comes with good deeds which will be perused here on earth by people's judgment after death. That is why people are advised to engage in good deed to qualify for the land of the ancestors.

Àmọ́ A. (1983) observes that prayer Yorùbá pray to succeed their aged ones, which is a thing of joy and all the protracted process of mourning, burial and funeral ceremony will be fully observed. The children, either biological or adopted, have a vital role to play.

Yorùbá believe that death issue is very spiritual nobody knows the exact time it will come. When Aged died children will be around to mourn him or her as a mark of honor and respect and to show them how much they appreciate and value his/her contribution to their uprising while alive. This spontaneous reaction is of joy and sadness. Joy for the fact that they succeeded their aged which is everybody's prayer and sadness that the deceased is living them physically forever to "*òrun àrémábò*" (Heaven where one goes without returning).

To the Yorùbá, it is a thing of honor and pride for children of the deceased to be around to receive visitor, sympathizers, relatives and friends and also to be capable of supplying everything needed for the process of burial.

It is also honorable for the dead to breathe his/her last breathe in the hand of the children. "*òwọ omọ lókú sí*" (He died on the lap of the child). It shows how responsible and caring the children are.

Yoruba proverb say *sèniyàn tí nǵbélẹ̀ níp'òkúmọ̀ ariwo lásán lẹ̀ni ti n sukún pa* (It is grave digger that is really taking care of the corpse, the person mourning are

just making mere noise). It is the believe of the Yorùbá that adequate, befitting burial must be given to the dead.

The role of the children especially the first son is very important during burial ceremonies. The first son will be the one to mark the place where the deceased is to be buried for digging which is to be done by the deceased in-laws.

Adéoyè (1979) explained that the sand gotten from where the first son marked before digging is kept by children of the decease for oath taking if there is need to swear an oath if there is argument over property of the decease or somebody want to take the advantage or the deed to perpetrate fund. Yorùbá corpse is usually buried within three day at the deceased house so that the ancestral link will be maintained but civilization has change a lot of thing.

During the burial/ Funeral ceremony all the children and relative of the deceased will invite their friends, colleagues, neighbors and well wishers. This is where the strength of the decease is usually known because it always celebrated with fanfare and feasting according to the financial and popularity strength of the children. The town is venue will be agog with visitor from nook and crannies, far and wide and the whole town will be filled with aura of joy will a lot of dignitaries musicians, dirge, chanters, singers and all sort of entertainer always grace the occasion. *Aṣṣẹbí* (uniforms) will be worn. The children will dance round the town and showcase that the decease is valued and has good children to succeed him or her.

Yorùbá people believe that elaborateness of burial/funeral of the dead depends on the children/ “children” the deceased left behind. The good character of the deceased is also a big factor in determining how befitting and elaborate burial/ funeral of the deceased. Yoruba philosophy of life after death shows that the burial/funeral of the death with children is unending (*òkú ọlómọ àṣeṣetán*) because when the children of the deceased started having children after the funeral of the death new life begins and the deceased has come back in another form, that is why we have names like Babájídé (Father has woken up) Babátúndé (Father has come back) Yétúndé, Ìyábò (Mother is back) etc. It is believed that the deceased has lived well by leaving children to carry on with the family legacies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, childbearing and parenting, children responsibilities to the parent and befitting burial/funeral are highly significant to the Yorùbá people. Though they are closely knitted together but they are very crucial to the understanding of human socio – cultural existence both in the physical world and ancestral world. It must be established here that the advent of foreign religions has changed a lot of these cultural values among the Yoruba people. In many instances these

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domesticated religion's philosophy, ideology are practice in such a way that militate against people's traditional cultures. An important factor that must not be overlooked is that Yoruba people see childbearing moral upbringing, responsibilities to parent befitting burial/ funeral rites as religious matters. They are seen beyond mere socio – political matters for their cultural existence not to go into extinction.

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