

The Centrality of Women in Moral Teaching in Yoruba Family System

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Abstract

Social order and peaceful co-existence are some of the primary goals in every human society. Central to maintenance of law and order in traditional Yoruba societies is the family. Culturally among the Yoruba people, women are socialized differently from men. This paper, rather than focus on the oppression of women in Yoruba cultural setting, examines the series of significant contributions of women to the maintenance of social order and ethical well-being of families. The feminine gender is not always synonymous with oppression and domination rather family well-being is mediated by the principle of complementarity between males and females. As a result, women have privileged relationship with their children better than men. Women are the pedagogues to lead their children, and this requires them to live a life worthy of emulation. The paper avers that the argument is not that men are totally left out of the moral upbringing of their children; most times they provide supportive roles. But the fact that women spend more time with the children calls for examination of their roles in the moral standing of children in Yoruba family system. Given the central role of women in the home and society, social order can be attained where women are committed to the moral upbringing of their children, rather than being marginalized in any aspect of the society.

Keywords: women, Yoruba culture, moral teaching, family system, social order

The Background

The Yoruba people live mainly in the south-western part of Nigeria, occupying virtually all of the area formerly known as Western Region. They are also found in some parts of Kwara, Kogi and Edo States. The language is Yoruba which has many dialects – Ijebu, Ijesa, Ondo, Oyo, and Ekiti, among others. The Yoruba are the most urbanized and possibly the most industrialized ethnic group in sub-Saharan Africa. About 20 per cent of Nigerians are Yoruba. Yorubaland has at least nine cities with populations of more than 100,000, and has a 60-70 per cent rate of urbanization overall (Babatunde & Zeitlin, 1995). Yoruba people are said to be highly cultured and religious. An average Yoruba

is born and nurtured from the cultural cauldron and on becoming an adult, he or she is expected not to depart from the ethos (Olawore, 2004). To underscore the place of culture, religion and moral etiquette among the Yoruba, when a youth errs, he or she is promptly referred back home. The implication of this is that the youth either lacks home training or has failed to imbibe one.

Culture, as defined by Geertz, cited in Shapiro (1984), is “whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members.” Adefuye (1992: 1) defines culture as:

The sum total of a people's way of life consisting of values, beliefs and perceptions of the world that underlie a people's behaviour and which are shared by members of a particular society and it contributes to the way they perceive themselves as well as others. It is that aspect of our existence that makes us similar to some people, yet different from other peoples of the world.

Every society has a culture that is unique and such culture contains the norms and values of the people that are different from those of other peoples. The people, therefore, see things differently from those from another culture. Culture is reflected through language, song, works of art, etc. In other words, the culture of a people affects their actions and/or reactions to situations. Social order and peaceful co-existence are however, some of the primary goals in every human society. To have these and other conditions which ensure lives and properties are secured, societies ensure moral and ethical uprightness of its members and this is done through various social institutions – religious, family, education and marriage to mention a few.

Central to maintenance of law and order in traditional Yoruba societies is the family. In the words of Tamuno, 1994: 33

Family system extended or not, provided each rural community's cooperative unity for industry and social welfare as well as constituting primary resource for the transmission of elements of the moral codes appropriate to its neighbourhood. Hence the family provides essential, though rudimentary, services for the proper education of the child as he or she gradually develop into an adult

Among Yoruba people, parents and other family members are the first teachers of their children, instructing them in the “proper” ways of life approved by the society. For example, relating with their elders and people of the same age group, being humble, diligent, truthful and accommodating. Though most of the societal codes are not written down, they are strictly adhered to by every members of the family (Babatunde & Zeitlin, 1995). On one hand, in the communal atmosphere of the traditional family, parents of

children who behave in approved ways are socially approved as successful, while on the other hand, parents whose children misbehave are shamed and advised to "put their houses in order" (Babatunde, 1992). Also, it is generally believed among the Yoruba people that it is the duty of parents and every member of the family to bring up their children ethically and in the knowledge of God (Adewale, 1986). From the beginning, children are made to believe in rewards and punishments and, accordingly, in the potency of blessings and the efficacy of curses of spiritual beings. Parents' role in training is reflected in a Yoruba adage that:

"Omo ti a o ko, ni ngbe Ile ti a ko ta" An untrained child destroys and ruins family properties and hence brings shame to the entire family.

In Yorubaland, individual's conformity to laws and orders of the society, and 'good' relationships with others within the family and society at large are regarded as the basis for good life and delights of *Olodumare* (The Supreme God) (Onabanjo and Omitola, 2006). Anthropological literature on African infant care practices among the Yoruba people reiterates that children are being prepared to seek group survival through acquiring a sense of belonging and loyalty to the group. So Yoruba parents teach their children obligatory sharing. They also teach them practical lessons by withholding portions of meat, eggs, and other animal foods from children because they believe that when children acquire tastes in these expensive and scarce commodities, the desire to satisfy them will make children steal, particularly when the parents are not economically buoyant to meet their needs (Babatunde & Zeitlin, 1995). Though, their views could be regarded as trying to underplay the nutritional intakes of children among the group, it is one of the culturally approved pattern of regulating the acquisitive instinct in children and an indirect way of maintaining social order. Parents' role in training their children is reflected in the verse from the *Ifa* divinatory corpus (*Odu*) as cited in Babatunde & Zeitlin's work (1995):

If one trains one's children,	<i>Ba ko omo eni</i>
They will be perfectly wise	<i>Won agbon fe fe</i>
As <i>Ire</i> , the daughter of <i>Olokun</i> .	<i>Gege bi Ire, Omobinrin Olokun</i>
If one does not train one's children,	<i>Ba o ko'mo eni</i>
they will be stupid and foolish	<i>Won a da di oponu ati omugo</i>
Like <i>Ibawini</i> , the son of <i>Otu Ife</i> .	<i>Gege bi, omokunrin Out Ife.</i>

In addition, culturally among the Yoruba people, women within the family settings are socialized differently from men. Women are socialized to be relationship-oriented and this process prepares them to be sensitive about the quality of relationships in marriages, families, communities, provision of love and care for family members, teaching people to live morally upright lives

(Suda, 1996). By extension from Suda's (1996) submission, the Yoruba people strongly believe that successes and failures of any child has a close association to the level of training received from home as earlier mentioned. The centrality of women in the maintenance of social order and moral teachings among the Yoruba people can thus be linked further to the women's traditional care-giving roles, which is not only limited to production and sustenance of life alone but also in instilling socio-religious values and morals in the family and society as a basis for establishing good and appropriate relationships between members.

It is against this backdrop that this work, unlike several others which focused on deprivation of women in Yoruba cultural settings, seeks to explore series of significant contributions of women to the maintenance of social order and ethical wellbeing in Yoruba cultural settings. It will therefore provide an insight into the centrality of women to the teaching of moral values particularly where women themselves together with men have contributed greatly to the moral decadence in contemporary society.

Conceptualization of a woman in Yoruba culture

A woman in Yoruba culture occupies various positions – a mother, a wife, a daughter, a priestess, and even a witch. The way she is perceived depends on the position she occupies, and the different perceptions are reflected through songs, works of art, music, language, and religion. The highest value is given to woman as a mother because Yoruba people revere motherhood. A popular proverb among the Yoruba presents motherhood as very precious:

Iya ni wura Mother is gold
Baba ni dingi Father is a mirror

Even in songs, mother is rated as precious gold:

Iya ni wura iyebiye Mother is a precious gold
Ti a ko le f'owora That cannot be purchased with money
O l'oyun mi f'osu mesan She carried me in her womb for nine months
O pon mi f'odun meta She nursed me for three years
Iya ni wura iyebiye Mother is a precious gold
Ti a ko le f'owora That cannot be purchased with money.

The way the mother is revered in the culture makes most women look forward to motherhood as she is even deified thus:

Orisa bi iya ko si There is no deity like mother
Iya la ba ma a bo It is the mother that is worthy of being worshipped

Motherhood is considered very important in Yoruba culture because the preservation of humanity depends on the role of mothers in the society (Lawal 1996). Writing on the *Gelede* Society among some communities in Yorubaland, Lawal explains that *Gelede* is a form of advocating respect for motherhood as well as using the performance to entertain the general public and, in the process, sensitize the public to the virtues of social living and good citizenship. The *Gelede* spectacle is a means of educating, amusing, and inspiring worship all at the same time. At this ceremony, colourful masks are displayed in addition to arts and ritual dance. “The *Gelede* society also endeavours to maintain good gender relations by advocating respect for motherhood within a patrilineal culture, such as that of the Yoruba, where men dominate the institution of kingship” (Lawal, 1996: xiv). The *Gelede*’s costume includes big breasts reflecting motherhood. Interestingly, however, the wearers of the *Gelede* masks with the big breasts and big buttocks are always men. The explanation given for this was that since the performance is in honour of women, it will be inappropriate for women to wear the masks as that may be interpreted to mean that the women are the ones honouring themselves (Lawal, 1996: 78). *Yemoja* is one of the goddesses in whose honour *Gelede* is performed. *Yemoja* or “*yeye omo eja*” (mother of fishes) symbolizes motherhood and is eulogized as:

<i>Iya oloyan oruba</i>	The pot-breasted mother
<i>Onirun abe osiki</i>	With much hair on her private part
<i>A b’obo fun ni l’orun bi egbe isu</i>	The owner of a vagina that suffocates like dry yam in the throat

The eulogy brings to mind the two most important parts in the process of becoming a mother – the breasts and the vagina. The heavy breast is assumed to contain inexhaustible flow of milk for her children. Because *Yemoja* is also referred to as “the generous and the dangerous mother” (Lawal, 1996: 73), the suffocating vagina may be the source of the power of life and death. Despite the encomiums poured on a mother, however, a wife is not so revered. In most of Yoruba culture, a wife is referred to as “*eru*” (slave) and yet it is still the ambition of almost every girl to be married, because through marriage she can become a proud mother. The word ‘proud’ is used here to qualify ‘mother’ because of the society’s negative attitude towards having children out of wedlock. By becoming a mother, a woman is promoted to the esteemed position in which she can be referred to as a precious stone. Therefore, it is a tragedy for a Yoruba woman not to have a child, and this is reflected in songs:

<i>Omo l’okun, omo n’ide</i>	A child is a coral bead; a child is silver
<i>Enia t’o wa saye ti ko bimo</i>	A person who has none
<i>Aye asan lo wa</i>	Has not lived a fulfilled life

A child is described as *Okun* (beads). These are a type of traditional necklace worn by *Obas* (kings) and *Ijoye* (chiefs); wearing of 'okun' is a symbol of royalty and authority. Using a royal symbol to describe a child, therefore, may be interpreted to mean that a child confers on his/her mother the power to exercise authority in her husband's home. The importance attached to motherhood thus reduced the negative effect of being referred to as an 'eru' (slave) on the psyche of women.

To be an 'eru' connotes subordination of the woman to the man. It presupposes that a wife is a property to be owned and used as the owner wishes. No wonder, the accumulation of wives in many Yoruba communities brought power, prestige and more wealth. Curiously enough, some women are not bothered about reference to them as 'eru,' and they even pray that they will be 'eru' for a long time, i.e. that they will not be rejected as wives. To them, it means staying married till the end of life. The alternative, of course, is to get out of the marriage to remarry or remain single. The former is more popular because of the social stigma attached to being a single woman. The implication of this attitude is that women are prepared to remain married at all costs. Their attitude may not be unconnected with the Yoruba adage which says that "*tita, riro ni a nkola, ti o ba jina tan, o di ohun oso*", meaning "after pain comes pleasure." Women also ignore the slavery attached to wifedom because they know that the authority that they lack as a wife, they possess both as a daughter and as a mother. As a daughter, she has wives, that is, women who are married into her own family – both her patrilineal and matrilineal sides – over which she exercises a form of authority. And as a mother she can exercise authority over her daughters-in-law. Even where she has all female children, she will be highly respected by her sons-in-law and their families because it is the custom of the Yoruba to give due respect to parents of one's wife. There is the Yoruba saying which says:

Eni ti o fun ni l'omo ti pari oore He/She who gives one his or her child to
be one's wife has given the best gift.

In addition to these, women among Yoruba people are valued and in most cases determined the social status, honour and respect that should be accorded to the entire family. For example, a man without a wife cannot be made an *Oba* (a Traditional ruler) and cannot occupy religious positions in the society. Where such individual is made a king, no honour could be given to him. This is reflected in a Yoruba adage that:

Aponle kan kosi fun Oba ti ko ni olori There is no respect or honour for a
king without a wife

Wande Abimbola (1975) examined the status of women in *Ifa* literary corpus and noted that a woman symbolizes 'iwa', that is, character (which could be good or bad). To him, women are inevitable and in principle they are essential to every man irrespective of their social class. It is generally believed that a man must take care of his character the same he takes care of his wife because, good character to the Yoruba people brings success in life to a man who treats his wife with kindness and affection, takes care of his children, and does what is good. In Yoruba folklore, women represent the two opposite poles of emotional involvement. They are symbols of love, care, devotion, tenderness and beauty. At the same time, they are (especially as witches), the symbol of wickedness, callousness, deceit and disloyalty. Sometimes, women may be regarded as witches and difficult to deal with, but the Yoruba culture realizes that without them human society cannot survive (Abimbola, 1975:400). In the words of Odebiyi and Aina (1998) women occupy a special position because they participate in and are sometimes responsible for many activities that affect the well being of the family members. The significance of women in Yoruba cultural settings is further expressed in *Ifa* literary corpus called '*Osetura*' which states thus:

<i>Aini obirin ko se e dake lasan</i>	Having no wife calls for positive action
<i>Bi a dake lasan, enu ni i yo ni</i>	To keep quiet is to invite trouble and inconveniences
<i>Nini ejo, aini oran</i>	Having a wife is as difficult as having none
<i>Enia ko l'obirin</i>	One without a wife
<i>O to ko kawo l'ori sokun gba oja lo</i>	Should cry and weep publicly in the market place
<i>Ki i se oran aseju</i>	It is neither an extreme action
<i>Oran asesa ko</i>	Nor an over-reaction
	(Ogunbowale, 1966:1 cited in Makinde, 2004: 168)

Also, according to Afonja (1990), the nature-culture mystique for explaining gender inequality is relevant to the Yoruba view of women. This model holds that women are closer to nature by virtue of biological reproduction, and that men as creators of culture, are inherently superior because culture is superior to nature. Babatunde (1992) does not hold this view that procreation becomes the justification for women's inferiority. He demonstrates, instead, that the relatively lower status of females in day-to-day life is reversed in the symbolism of the fertility-enhancing Gelede cult, which honours the powers of older women who are believed to hold control over fertility. These women, past the age of menopause, have the right to speak their minds freely (Fadipe 1970: 116) and potentially could take drastic action if men misuse their powers over nature.

Yoruba women are also noted for their entrepreneurial activities which have placed them in economic advantages when compared with women in other cultural settings. Olutayo (2005: 67) acknowledged this unique feature. To him, Yoruba women have been successful, at least in the sustenance of their businesses. They participate in agricultural production in clearing, sowing and planting, hoeing and weeding, gathering in and storage of harvest, food processing and distribution of food products. Ironically, their businesses could not enhance due to their lack of access to credit, knowledge and technology. This, however, is not surprising to him because women are perceived as second class citizens among the Yoruba people. This view compliments the claims of Alliyu (2004) that women among the Yoruba people are powerless, subjugated, oppressed, devalued, emotional and dependents.

Theoretical Foundation

Previously a homogenized notion of “women” was taken as given, emphasizing commonalities over differences. Now the reconceptualizations of feminism have shifted the focus to issues of race, class, sexuality, ability, seniority, ethnicity, nationality, and globalization, stressing the interconnectedness as well as differences of these experiences. In the field of feminist and gender studies, it is now clearly understood that theorizing women’s experiences from these multiple angles of vision generates new questions, issues, and interpretations (Mohanty, 2003; Oyewumi, 2003; Hill Collins, 2000; Bell Hooks, 1988), thereby broadening and complicating analysis of the historical, political, economic, and cultural forces that shape women’s differentiated lives and produce particular forms of individual and collective action.

In much of African societies, for example, “womanhood” does not constitute a social role, identity, position, or location. This is because each individual occupies a multiplicity of overlapping and intersecting positions, with various relationships to privilege and disadvantage. In addition, local situations are themselves in a state of flux, given the disproportionate influence of external agents in African life. Given the linguistic diversity of the continent, many African scholars have to work in languages that are not originally their own. For example, Oyewumi (1997) has famously challenged the usefulness of gender as an analytic concept for Africa. She argues that among the Yoruba, language is gender-neutral and that social roles and relations between men and women are based primarily on the notion of seniority (which is relative and context dependent), so that men and women can assume powerful positions by virtue of their age and seniority within the family. Although, her work has been widely critiqued by various authors (Bakare-Yusuf, 2004; Olajubu, 2003), for generalizing from the Yoruba to Africa, and for the simplistic notion that the absence of biologically-based gender markers in a language means that notions of gender hierarchies do not

exist. Available evidence on the interaction of Yoruba culture with other world confirms the prominence of gender categorizations. Just because gender difference is not inscribed within discourse or marked within language does not mean that it is absent in social reality.

However, it is important to note that unlike the situation in the West and other places, the existence of gender constructs does not translate into oppression and the domination of women by men in Yorubaland, since it is mediated by the principle of complementarity. This principle, which is deeply entrenched in Yoruba cosmology, conceptualizes the paradigms of engagement between the two sexes not on the basis of equality and parity, but of cooperation and specialization. The key question to ask when examining gender relations in Yorubaland is not which sex is dominant, but rather in which areas is each sex pre-eminent. In any case, gender classification among the Yoruba is essentially culture bound. It is fluid and modulated by other variables such as age and personal achievements, and can be transversely manipulated or even deconstructed in response to structural and ritual needs.

Moral education in Yoruba thought pattern

Yoruba culture encourages individuals within the society to exhibit series of socially acceptable characters which make life bearable. Some of these are:

- ***Sexual uprightness and chastity before and during marriage:*** Sexual activities of individuals within the society are regulated by every member of the society in traditional Yoruba society. To them, sex is only reserved for matured individuals; therefore, sex was confined to marriage alone. This, however, accounted for much emphasis placed on virginity before marriage. Virginity at marriage is valued not only for women even men are also expected to maintain some degree of sexual integrity. Chastity before marriage is considered very essential to a woman. This is observed in the works of Idowu (1962); a woman who is not virtuous at marriage among the Yoruba people is considered a disgrace not only to herself but to every member of her family particularly the mother. He then noted further that chastity in married life is a bounden duty. Though little control is placed on men's sexual activities, be it as it may, a man is not expected to seduce or be involved in any sexual acts with another man's wife as this attracts capital punishment in the society.
- ***Ability of individuals to guide their mouth.*** Individuals are expected to maintain some levels of personal discipline in every aspect of life particularly as it relates to their thoughts and what they say in the public. To Yoruba people, it is not all an individual sees or hears that must be revealed to others. An individual is therefore taught from childhood stage on the importance of this quality and sometimes a child has to be scolded for talking too much. One who is capable of

this and maintaining this kind of attitude is mostly considered disciplined enough to be entrusted with significant assignments.

- **Patience:** This is valued in Yoruba thought pattern. It is generally regarded as the root of any successful relationships and success in life. Though good character is emphasized among the Yoruba people, it is not regarded as sufficient armour against any untoward happening in life. Therefore, one is expected to possess highest degree of patience which is believed to be a pivot through which issues of life roll. This belief is justified in the Yoruba saying that ‘*Suuru ni baba Iwa*’ (Patience is the father of good character) Emphasis on patience is further supported with a song:

<i>E ma fikan ju lole aye o, B’eyankani suuru aajere</i>	Earning a living must not be in haste If one has patience, there is an unreserved reward
<i>Be’yan kan bati nlo mot obo To ba digbakan, Omode nbo wadagba E ma fipa jaye</i>	If some individuals have riches and cars At a time Children will grow and become elders Never be in a haste

- **Family and individual’s good name:** Good name to the Yoruba people has no alternatives. Individuals are compelled to maintain good name of their progenitor or as the case may be develop good name for the coming generation. Good name among the Yoruba people is a source of pride and sometimes an elevator to higher social position. It has also served as a means of social control. For example an individual might decide not to steal or rape because such had never been heard in their lineage. In traditional Yoruba society, an individual could be expelled from family compound if found to engage in anti-social activities which is capable of maligning the integrity and cherished name of the family. An individual is expected to be very careful and disciplined in every activities they engage in. Social control through maintenance of good name is buttressed with a Yoruba adage that :

Ojo ka labaje gbogbo ojo aye ni fi dunni An unethical behavior displayed once in life could have last effect and torment individual all the days of life

- **Diet and foods:** Foods in Yoruba belief system are regarded as the source of life; they are also regarded as an avenue to death, more especially if poisoned. The Yoruba belief that enemies could easily

perpetrate evil into ones' life through intake of poisoned foods. For this purpose, an individual is expected to maintain some degree of discipline as it relates to food intakes particularly eating in the public or taking some foods which source cannot be identified or trusted.

Women as moral teachers

African women have been in the business of moral teaching since time immemorial. Under the traditional family system, African women played a key role in teaching children social ethical and moral values which were part of cultural standards for evaluating 'proper' behaviour. Much of the teaching was focused on regulating sexuality and family life in general. But under the patriarchal system of gender-power imbalance, African women are under more pressure than men to practice what they preach. In her study of elite marriages in East Africa, Obbo (1987) found that many African wives experience conflicting expectations about the proper moral behaviour pertaining to sexuality. On the one hand, as she puts it, "they must try to prove that their chastity is beyond reproach and that they will therefore be faithful wives while they must also demonstrate their fertility. In other words, women must be 'good women' before and after marriage but they must also demonstrate their reproductive potential" (p. 265). Although the Christian teaching preaches chastity to both men and women, the patriarchal authority places the moral requirement of chastity and the burden of compliance more on females than males.

In most African societies, the survival of the family and the future of marriage depend a great deal on the female population. This is not only because the moral upbringing of young people is at the centre of the female universe, but also because, through their expressive and productive roles, women provide a stable emotional environment that will cushion individuals against the psychological damage of disintegrating relationships. Providing love and care for family members, teaching people to lead morally upright lives, helping transform oppressive structures and working towards peace and reconciliation are some of the ways through which many African women have contributed and continue to contribute to the moral health of society. Of course, women's work transcends these realms but their centrality in cultivating and consolidating moral order underscores the idea that morality is about relationships between people who occupy either similar or different structural positions in society. In many parts of Africa, as elsewhere in the world, such positions have often been used and abused to deny other people their rights and a life with dignity.

Mothers had the primary responsibility of teaching their children certain moral standards of behaviour during socialization. In general, children were taught what was expected of them at various stages of their lives. They were taught the community's customs, values and norms that accompany these roles. Among other traditional ethical values, the youths were taught personal discipline, told to exercise a great deal of self-control and shown how to grow

up into responsible and productive members of society (Suda, 1996), though men are not totally left out of these socialization and training roles. Women have the privileged relationship with their children, better than men particularly where the woman concerned has in actual sense demonstrated traits of motherhood. This is depicted in Yoruba adage that says:

gbede bi ogun Iya ani ni lara koko bi ogun baba' As convenient as mother's inheritance also as difficult as inheritance of the father.

The significant roles of women among Yoruba people demands that she exhibits an exemplary life worth emulation; this is believed to be capable of leading their children on the road to a good life through genuine education which involves the shaping of character through the example of the educator. In the views of Dimandja (2004), this challenging aspect of a woman's roles requires that she lives a life worthy of emulation. Among the Yoruba people women are the first pedagogues in the sense that they are the first to lead their children. It is this attribute that explains why Yoruba women maintain strong influence in behavioural pattern of younger members of the society.

Also, in all things Yoruba people are religious (Idowu, 1962). Since women are more oppressed in social relationships in a patriarchal society like Yoruba culture, (Alliyu, 2004), they are more likely to be more committed to religious activities probably as a form of succour to their marginalisation. By extension, the religious beliefs of the Yoruba people demand for children to be obedient, respectful to elders among other ethical issues. Women, who spend more time with the children than their fathers are therefore likely to demand unquestionable submission to their wills, like in other cultural areas, for example, the Hausa people of Northern Nigeria as noted in the works of Hake (1972: 39). Although women like men love their children and attempt to raise them in line with the custom and tradition of their society, they believe that if one is too lenient in training a child such a child could bring misfortune not only to himself but to the family and society at large. This probably influences the Yoruba proverb that:

'Omo to ba da ni ti Baba eyi ti oku die fun ni tiyae' A well behaved child is father's while the wayward one is attached to mother.

Other ways through which women teach morality in Yoruba family is regular attendance in church, mosque or shrine, saying prayers regularly with their children, making the children to memorize religious poems and verses in Bible or Quran and through personal examples, showing love and care when

threatened with physical or emotional disorder (Hake, 1972). Some of the disciplinary methods mostly adopted among women in Yoruba families to instil discipline into their children include the following: restricting the concerned child from playing with his/her colleagues, frightening the child, locking the child in dark room, ignoring the child deliberately, beating, scolding and threatening among others. It must be noted that application of any of these punishments is a function of the nature of the offence and the frequency of the recurring misdeeds (Hake, 1972).

Women in Yoruba family system demonstrate significant influence on the sexuality of their children; for example, young girls were taught by their mothers, grandmothers and aunts how to sit down in a proper and decent manner (with their legs together) to avoid possible temptation on the part of the boys. As young girls grow into puberty mothers are culturally expected to teach them on how to relate to men, sexuality, marital life and relationships. Young girls who become pregnant outside wedlock are socially condemned along with their mothers who most times are believed not to have trained their girls in the culturally approved patterns of behaviour.

Yoruba society is an example of a patriarchal society where men are not culturally bound on the number of wives they can have. Examples from Yoruba communities have shown that where men marry multiple wives, emotional attachment gets reduced gradually and such women most times are denied some of their basic rights by the husband. In this situation, the upbringing of the children, financing their education among other responsibilities are left in the custody of these women. Many mothers ensure that their children are enrolled in good schools and receive quality education. This responsibility can be regarded as an important aspect of parenting and for many poor women whose husband pays no attention to the task of educating their children are mostly done with great personal sacrifices.

Challenges of change on women as moral teachers

Increasing level of women's participation in education, industrialization, and growing urbanization have maintained significant effects on the status of women (Yusuf, 1995: 207), particularly as moral teachers in the contemporary Yoruba society. Women have in the recent times been actively involved in lucrative jobs which have taken them away from homes. As a result of this, women often act as financial and spiritual heads of families. In the views of Afonja and Aina (1995), the emerging trends in Third World Countries points to a significant number of female headed families, who must work to support themselves and their children. This becomes necessary due to the growing economic crisis which has forced more women across social classes and group out of the economic traditional conception of 'male-breadwinner' and the 'dependent female'. Apparently this could have accounted for the absence of any significant difference in life expectancy of men and women in Nigeria, 46 and 47years respectively (World Population Data Sheet, 2008). Due to these changing roles of women, there had been delays in marriages and significant

reduction in fertility behaviour of women in contemporary societies (Onabanjo, 2008a). By extension there has been noticeable reduction in care giving and teaching roles of women in our contemporary societies. These roles have been handed over to schools and religious institutions, where little of moral training can be given during the short duration of school time.

Yoruba traditional family system is noted for solidarity which is made possible by kinship bonds. The society was viewed as a school for all children irrespective of their family status and backgrounds, as a result, every member of the family and society at large were moral teachers (Fadipe, 1991). However, the changing nature of our society characterised by urbanization, economic recession, inflation, unemployment, low life expectancy and low caloric intake, etc. has brought much stress on the family. This, as a matter of fact, has affected the primary roles of the family which in turn contributed to the total collapse of the cherished virtue which were in operation in our traditional society (Onabanjo, 2008b).

Conclusion

The cross examination of women's role in moral teachings in Yoruba family system is not to argue that men are totally left out of the moral upbringing of their children, as most of the time they provide a supportive role. The fact that women spend more time with the children called for examination of their roles in the moral standing of children in Yoruba family system. However, social order can be attained in a society where women are not marginalized in every aspect of the society, but are very much committed to the moral upbringing of their children while men are adequately incorporated into the moral trainings at home at the same time.

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