

Nursing Mothers as Oral Composers and Performers

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Abstract

This paper examines the art and act of nursing mothers as composers of songs and performances for children between the ages of one day to three years because they cannot express themselves in words except through cries and their mother's perceptions. The paper focuses specifically on the various contexts that require the type of songs composed and sung for the child in a mono-dramatic manner. The child is the audience which the mother watches for clues and responses to the mother's performances which can be measured through the child's calmness, smiles, sleep and gesticulations. In other words, the child's mood dictates the type of songs. Other performances that accompany songs include rocking the child on her arms, dancing with the child strapped to her back, gently tapping the child while lying with it and gently stamping of feet with knee jerks while carrying the child. The methodology used include pragmatic approach which best suits the different occasions of the child's need for the mother's composition and performance, qualitative approach through interviews and recordings of two mothers, and difference as theoretical framework. Different songs are selected and analysed from Yoruba tradition, English, religious and popular artistes' songs to reveal contexts. This paper concludes that nursing mothers have a high compositional creativity through songs intuitions and others come from their repository knowledge of both indigenous, contemporary popular artistes' music and religious songs.

Keywords: *Nursing Mothers, Composers and Performers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nursing mothers who have to nurse their children from the first day of delivery till about three years when the children can possibly respond to speeches by uttering or muttering some words in response to their mothers communications have a daunting task in their hands, In other words, verbal communication between mothers and their children is very important, a great deal imagination is required by mothers to fathom the child's needs such as hunger, sleep, need for nappies to be changed, reaction to environmental conditions (heat and cold temperature) among others.

Mothers watch their children by close observation of their faces, listen to their sounds, feel of their pulses, breath and activities as clues for necessary actions. These actions, we would regard as performances and as a matter of social and economic exigencies, that mothers' need to fulfill because of being working mothers, the care-givers stand in as mothers.

In order to soothe the children, mothers and care-givers have to resort to singing, singing traditional songs at the level of some mothers, while other categories sing contemporary music, religious and television or social-media mediated songs.

The purposes for singing further places the songs as lullabies (with the effect of the songs, Tulling the children to sleep), while some other songs simply entertain the children. The ingenuity of mothers or care-givers as oral composers and performers are evaluated through

their abilities to switch from one song to another based on their repertoires of traditional songs and their compositional creativity of songs as the occasion demands. In order words, the context of the mothers performances are dictated by their audience, that is, the children.

In modern times, by this we mean the age of computer and the social media, the traditional or indigenous songs that used to be the medium of mothers communication with their children is almost being eroded.

Some mothers do not have the knowledge of the traditional songs, while some rely on their own mothers or grandmothers as care-givers to help nurse their children because they are working mothers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Dandatti Abdulkadir, the poet who composes a poem of any length exclusively through the medium of the spoken word must be able to fit his words to the fixed pattern of the verse (18) (Emphasis mine).

A question that readily comes to mind from Dandatti's submission is, 'are poets only male?' However, the fixed pattern of the verse help to classify the sub-genre to be praise poetry, epic and/or panegyric, Iljala (traditional Yoruba oral poetry associated with the hunters), incantatory poetry, Ekun lyawo (the bride's song) among others and the context of their performance.

In this paper, women as composers and performers of songs for children are examined, hence the focus on lullabies. Unyk, Trehub, Trainor & Schellenberg describe lullaby as "intimate, aural communications between care-givers and infants"(16). Moreover, Rock, Trainor & Addition note that

Lullabies are typically short in length, with a slow tempo, and a limited pitch range. They are simple freely, and often semi-improvised, using a soft voice, and have been described as "soothing, smooth and airy" (532) (Emphasis mine).

Thus, the ability of an oral composers to improvise at the context of performance is an ingenious act and this agrees with Dandattis opinion

...that since oral poetry by its nature is open ended, at different performances the singer may add new elements to his song either through embellishment, or by the addition of a complete new episode to expand his performance (24).

The context of the performances of lullabies are not elaborate, they constitute the mother and child or children if they are twins. A baby's reception of a lullaby according to Wendy Brooks,

...usually incorporates hearing the mother's voice while feeling its vibration as the head rests on the mother's chest; smelling the familiar scent of the body: and stimulation of the vestibular system through rocking, bouncing or spinning (84).



Figure 1: Showing a Mother and Baby resting on the mother's chest. "Lullaby: Being Together, Being Well."

Source: Denie Palmer WolfBrown. www.arts.gov 09/11/2019

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is qualitative in nature through interviews and recordings of two mothers. The first mother is a retired Matron in the Nursing profession. She hails from Ekiti (one of the Yoruba ethnic groups) and she speaks, English, Ekiti dialect of the Yoruba language and Oyo dialect.

She is about 65 years old. The second mother is a Secretary in a University, also of Yoruba descent. She is 40 years old with a year old child. She speaks the Oyo dialect of Yoruba

The theoretical framework is ethnographic, as difference. Lorde as a proponent of differences avers that differences among women should be seen as a fund of strengths (Richard Peet and Elaine Hartwick, 2009:245). The differences are "polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic (Lorde, 1981:99).

With this theory, the different nature and role of women in a socio-cultural context especially motherhood, imbues in them a greater strength, rather than weakness. What they perform are incomparable with men's inability to perform.

Figure 2 illustrates men's incapacities to combine the function of preparing food, and pacifying an angry baby strapped to the back.

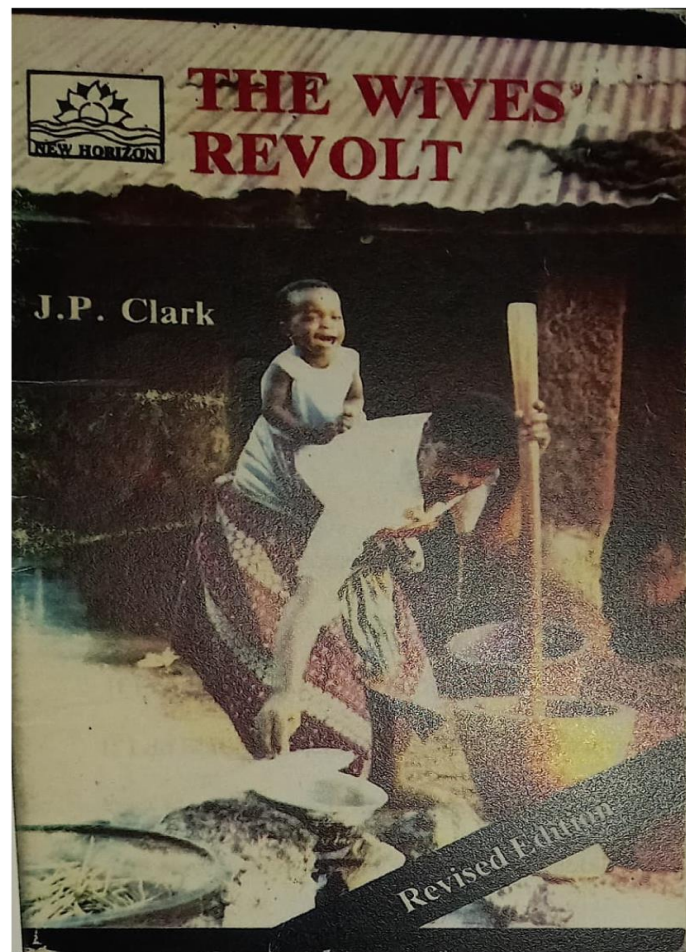


Figure 2: Showing a Baby Crying while Strapped to a Man's Back

Source: "Front Cover" of J.P. Clark *The Wives Revolt*. Ibadan: University Press Plc, 1991

Presentation of Children Songs and their Analyses

First Song

The first song to be presented is the one rendered by my first interviewee, titled, 'Omo mi o a kurubete, kube... It is traditional song of the Yoruba ethnic group, but recited in the Ekiti dialect.

Omo mi o a kuru betekube
Omo mio akuru betekube
Kimi ku o maa runde uno
Kimi nun o maa rugba osun
Ugba osun nuu ye mo lore,
Eru mo ra laa apon o aka o,
Akuru bête kube, akuru bête kube

English Translation

My child who is bouncing
 My child who is bouncing
 If I do not die, I will buy you gold
 If I do not get missing, will buy you a beauty cream
 The beauty cream is most befitting for a child
 The slave I have bought will carry you about on the back.
 My bouncing baby, my bouncing baby,

The Yoruba song and/or composition has seven lines, with repetitions in lines 1 and 2, and with voice modulation, repetitions in lines 3 and 4 with idea variation, that is (unde) gold and beauty cream (osun) respectively. The last line has internal rhyme and repetition which act as the refrain.

The essence of this song is held in the premium a mother (and by extention, the Yoruba culture) places on the child as a beauty to posses, but adorned with gold, beautified with cream and to luxuriate about while the mother's slave, carries it about.

Furthermore, the song can be said to be from the repertoire of Yoruba children songs. To buttress this, Yoruba will always make a prophetic wish for barren women with reference to the gold (unde), and beauty cream (osun) in the following manners:

1. *Omo ni iyun, omo ni ide*

A child is a bead, and a child is a gold

2. *Agan a ti owo a la bo a sun*

The barren woman will be privileged to apply the beauty cream (osun)

It is worthy to note that the sounds of some lines of the Yoruba sounds may vary from dialect to dialect. For instance, the un o that end the third line of the Yoruba composition can be replaced with fun o to represent the Oyo dialect.

The Second Category of Songs

The second sets of songs are classified as categories to represent those rendered by my second interviewee². These songs are a clear departure from the traditional category that the first interviewee gave. They are improvised songs, "Composed Rhymes".

Composed Rhymes

1. MUMMY LOVES YOU
 YES SHE DOES
 DADDY LOVES YOU
 YES HE DOES
 EVERYBODY LOVES YOU
 YES THEY DO
 LOVE! LOVE!! LOVE!!! IN THE AIR

2. I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU BABY
I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU MORE
JOMILOJU I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU SO MUCH
I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU MORE
3. OMOOBAOGO NI MI OLUWA LO KO BE
4. JOMI DON'T CRY YOU BETTER DON'T CRY
AND I TELL YOU WHY
SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN
5. OH LITTLE JOMI
DO NOT CRY
NEVER MIND NEVER MIND
MUMMY IS COMING
6. OLORUN AWEYE! OLORUN AWEYE!! OLORUN AWEYE!!!
MOYIN O FUN ORE TE SE LAYE WA.
7. OMO MI O! OMO MI O!!
OMO TI O FUNMI O BABAAA.
AROLE NI KO BA MI SE
MA JE KO SUNU BABAA
KE SU MA SE GBA LOWO MI

According to my second interviewee, numbers 1 and 2 are composed and sung when she wants to wake the child, that is, 'Mummy Loves You' and 'I Love You' respectively. Number 3 is 'Omo oba ogo ni mi (I am the child of the glorious God) which she sings as she goes to take the child from the crèche.

Moreover, numbers 4 and 5 'Jomi Don't cry...' are sung when the child is crying. The name Jomi is an abbreviation of Oluwajomiloju (a Yoruba name that means God has surprised me). The child's name is fused into the song and the mother addresses the child as she sings. Number 6 'Olorun Aweye!' (God who bathes one clean) moyin o fun ore te se laye wa (I thank you for your loving kindness towards us).

Lastly, number 7, Omo mi of Omo mi ol (my child, my child...) is sung any time because the mother hopes in him as a role model (Arole ni ko ba mi se).

It is unequivocal that the second categories of songs and their contexts of performance range from that of the sleeping to crying, bathing and playing and they are embodiments of the composers' creativity.

CONCLUSION

The ingenuity of mothers' creativity is not restricted to a particular culture or contexts, it is intuitive, spontaneous and not computer, social media and television and radio motivated. Besides, it engages both the mother and the child and acts as bond between them. As much as

the newly improvised songs are aesthetically invaluable, more of the traditional songs should be explored in order to eschew loss. Thus, mothers employ the pragmatic approach that best suit the need for singing.

Notes

1. First interviewee is Mrs. Kehinde Adewole, a retired Matron in the Nursing Profession and who hails from Ekiti State in Nigeria.
2. The second interviewee is Mrs. Temitope Oyetunde, a Secretary in a University setting. She hails from Ogun State.

I sincerely acknowledge their contributions to this study.

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