

PROPER PARENTING AND CHILD UPBRINGING IN YORUBA CULTURE: A TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SOLA ALLYSON'S *ALUJONJONKIJON*

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Introduction

The Yoruba people are domiciled in the southwestern part of Nigeria, consisting of Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Ogun and Lagos States. They also occupy parts of Kogi, Kwara and Edo States. Although the Yoruba speak various dialects such as Egba, Ijebu, Ondo, Ekiti and Ijesa, they speak the Yoruba language which is their generally understood language. The Yoruba people are highly religious and cultured people and “are the most urbanized and possibly the most industrialized ethnic group in sub-Saharan Africa” (Aluko et al, 2011: 94), having not less than thirteen cities. The importance of etiquettes among the Yoruba cannot be understated and it is tied strongly to the family. Training an individual among the Yoruba begins from childhood and such individual is nurtured based on the moral framework of the Yoruba culture. According to Olawore (2004), a trained individual, upon attaining adulthood, is expected to remain in the ethos of the Yoruba culture, with which he has been raised. In view of this position, a Yoruba adage says “*Ile ni a ti n ko eso r’ode*” which literally means “charity begins at home”. Although the training of a young individual among the Yoruba is tied to his immediate family, the communal nature of the Yoruba requires every adult individuals to contribute to the raising of young individuals within their reach. This is premised on the saying that “*Oju meji lo n bimo, igba oju nii woo*” which literally means that “although a child is birthed by two parents, his upbringing is a collective effort of all”.

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Given the importance of child upbringing among the Yoruba, it has been established in literature that women are at the fore-front of child upbringing among them (Aluko et al, 2011; Familusi, 2012; Alanamu, 2016). For instance, Alanamu (2016) noted the disapproval of 19th century observers and missionaries to the fact that Yoruba women had so much control over their sons' upbringing, up to their post-puberty stage. This was at the time when discourses on child upbringing in England focused on the crucial roles of fathers in childhood development, especially that of boys. The missionaries' displeasure about the influence of Yoruba women on their sons is anchored on the fact that many of those women harbour the fear of losing control over their sons once they got indoctrinated into a foreign religion. Aluko et al (2011) from their own view, noted the emotional qualities of women in most African societies, emphasizing the crucial roles they play in sustaining marriages. They noted that apart from the moral upbringing of young people being at the centre of the female universe, African women possess expressive and productive roles, wherein women provide stable emotional environment that cushions the effects of the psychological damage of disintegrating relationships through love and care for members of the family.

Familusi (2012) also shed more lights on the concentration on women, in affairs of child rearing and upbringing among Africans, especially Yoruba. He noted that most of the responsibilities of child upbringing falls on the mother, due to the fact that the child is closer to the mother than anyone, at the initial stage of their lives. He added that the father is often not at home, thereby leaving the child under the supervision of the mother. The mother then has to take responsibility for the training of the child, especially as she is the first agent of socialization for the child. According to Lawal (2005), this could be the reason a child's first language is called "mother tongue". In line with this position is the saying among the Yoruba, that *omo t'o dara, ti baba e; eyi ti ko dara, ti iya e ni*, which literally means, a good child is associated with the father, while the bad one is associated with the mother. The mother is expected to ensure that the children are well raised, even if the input of the father in the upbringing process is little.

The cultural dynamics of parenting and child upbringing have continued to change among the Yoruba. Due to various factors such as urbanization, economic realities, popular culture and schooling, the Yoruba traditional child upbringing

T. Owoaje: *Proper Parenting and child Upbringing in Yoruba Culture: A Textual ..* culture has witnessed drastic change which has continued to have devastating effects on children and adolescents, and most especially young individuals of tertiary educational level. The recent issues that broke up on the social media, concerning the negative conduct of school children, is one of the inspirations and concerns for this study. Such incidence includes sexual intercourse between a school girl of around age twelve and a boy of same age range, which was filmed and uploaded online, and several cases of cultism and battery in Nigerian secondary schools. All of these have continued to generate a lot of debate in the media, with focus on proper parenting and child upbringing. It is to this effect that this study intends to engage proper parenting and child upbringing in Yoruba culture, from the lens of Sola Allyson's *Alujonjonkijon*. This is in order to re-emphasize the roles of every individual in the proper upbringing of young individuals, especially among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria.

Sola Allyson's *Alujonjonkijon* was selected for this study using purposive sampling. The selection of the song was based on its text, which addresses the subject of proper parenting, which is linked to a Yoruba folktale which highlights the sacrifices women make for their children during hard and trying times, in order to ensure their well-being. Alongside the featuring of Adekunle Gold, the music reproduces the folkloric song to suite current realities about proper parenting and child upbringing in the Yoruba worldview. Albert Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning which emphasizes the importance of observation, modelling and imitation of the behavior, emotional reactions and attitudes of others in the learning of a child, is employed as theoretical framework for his study. The theory considers the influence of environmental and cognitive factors in human learning and behavior (McLeod, 2016). The theory is used to explain how individuals in Yoruba societies are expected to conform to a certain cultural behavioral pattern which is summed up in the *omoluwabi* philosophy.

Based on the organization of traditional Yoruba settlements which is established on kinship, every child born within a compound and the community at large is brought up collectively by all. This is alongside the critical interpersonal roles their mothers play in their upbringing. According to Alanamu (2016), the Yoruba run a gerontocratic society, where the young are considered to be fickle, naïve and vulnerable and as a result, expected to be obedient to the elders and be

T. Owoaje: *Proper Parenting and child Upbringing in Yoruba Culture: A Textual ..* unquestioning at all times. This however, does not mean they cannot be inquisitive in their curious moments, as long as it is not aimed at questioning the authority of the elders. In addition, they are expected to assist the elders, especially their parents, in every ways possible. Although Alanamu (2016) recorded several cases of disobedience to parents and family members by young Yoruba individuals in the 19th century, it is important to note, that the circumstances surrounding these disobedience were connected to the influence of European missionaries such as Rev. Andrew Gollmer, David Hinderer and Henry Townsend. According to Alanamu (2016: 106), the archives suggest how children used the changing circumstances around them, particularly the presence of European missionaries, to negotiate their socialization. Moshood (n.d) also notes the importance of parents in the socialization of their children, playing the roles of guardian and counsellors.

The Yoruba believe that a child that is ill-nurtured is a potential danger for the development of any community. Every child therefore, has to be well nurtured, for the betterment of all. This is in order to avert potential dangers that could come up as a result of improper upbringing. All of these is established in several Yoruba proverbs such as:

Yoruba Proverb	English Translation
<i>Oju meji lo n bimo, igba oju ni n woo</i>	Although a child is birthed by two parents, his upbringing is a collective responsibility
<i>Agba ti ko ke'hun soro a ke'tan sare</i>	An elder who refuses to scold a child will do the excessive
<i>Agutan to ba aja rin a je igbe</i>	A sheep that befriends a dog would end up tasting stool

As part of the need to keep a problem-free society, every individual in traditional Yoruba societies is nurtured one way or the other, by elders in his immediate and larger society. This is also in line with the believe that *A kii gbon tan* (no one knows it all), implying that a child's parents may not be entirely knowledgeable. Knowledge is therefore transferred to the younger generations through this and other means such as folktales, children game songs and folktale songs, all of which are intended to fascinate children, while also educating them. These songs include moral teachings of all sorts, ranging from respect for elders, to interpersonal relationship

T. Owoaje: *Proper Parenting and child Upbringing in Yoruba Culture: A Textual ..* among themselves. Also of importance is the *Omoluwabi* ethos of the Yoruba, which defines a complete individual, i.e., an individual who is morally and culturally upright. In his explanation of *Omoluwabi*, Fayemi (2009) described it as “the child begotten by *Iwa*”. *Iwa* in this context refers to the totality of uprightness and the ability to abide with cultural values (Alonge, 2015).

In order to ensure adequate training of young individuals, the Yoruba employ several means such as reward system, punishment, teaching on the potency of blessings, as well as the efficacy of curses (Moshood, n.d). All of these are employed to strongly establish indigenous cultural traits into young individuals, towards achieving uprightness in them. In addition to the afore-mentioned means, Moshood also emphasizes the show of love from parents to their children, which is exemplified in their generosity towards their children.

Alujonjonkijon

It is important to hint briefly on the folktale in which alujonjonkijon the folktale song, is embedded. According to popular narration, there was famine in the land of the animals, and it was so severe that the animals were killing their parents and aged ones for food. Despite the level of hunger, the Dog refused to kill his mother, but instead, took her up in the heavens and went to her each time he needed food. The Dog would get to a place in the forest and start singing thus:

<i>Ìyá iyá ta'kùn wá'lẹ̀ o</i>	Dear mother, let down the rope
<i>Àlùjònjònkijòn</i>	<i>Alujonjonkijon</i>
<i>Gbogbo aye pa yeye e je</i>	Everyone has killed his/her mother
<i>Àlùjònjònkijòn</i>	<i>Alujonjonkijon</i>
<i>Aja mu tire o d'orun</i>	But the dog took his mother to heaven
<i>Àlùjònjònkijòn</i>	<i>Alujonjonkijon</i>

The mother dog, upon hearing this song, would let down a rope with which the dog would climb up to meet her and have delicious meals as much as he desired. This continued for a while and the tortoise who was a friend to the dog, noted the lack of effect of the famine on the dog and persuaded him to share the secrets of his well-being with him. The next time the dog was going to meet his mother, he took tortoise along with him. Upon getting to the forest as usual, the dog sang the same song he had always sung and his mother let down the rope, with which they

T. Owoaje: *Proper Parenting and child Upbringing in Yoruba Culture: A Textual ..* both climbed to heaven. They both ate and had enough food and drink and thereafter, came back to the land of the animals. As a result of his greed, the tortoise went back without the knowledge of the dog, in order to have more foods for himself. The mother dog, upon seeing that it was the tortoise which was impersonating his child, let the rope loose by the time the tortoise was half way into the sky, making him fall down and break his shell. The Yoruba usually make use of this tale in teaching contentment to young individuals, while also discouraging them from greed and betrayal

Proper Parenting/Child Upbringing in Sola Allyson's *Alujonjonkijon*

Like several other cultures around the world, musicians play vital roles among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. Apart from being entertainers, they are custodians and repository of knowledge (Oludare, 2021), historians (Oludare, n.d; Adegaju, 2009), educators (Samuel, 2019; 2013), activists (Samuel, 2015; Sofola, 2021; Owoaje & Sofola, 2020) and social commentators (Opara, 2012). It is in view of these roles that Sola Allyson employed the medium of music, to comment and educate on proper parenting and child upbringing among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria, in her song track *Alujonjonkijon*.

The refrain of the song, which is an adaptation of the folktale song *alujonjonkijon*, stresses the importance of parents, especially mothers, in child upbringing. Although the duty of child upbringing is a shared responsibility between a father and mother, the focus on "mother" in the folktale and in Sola Allyson's adaptation is significant, since women are the ones naturally endowed with the ability to care and nurture, especially since they are the ones who get pregnant and give birth to children. This goes with the views of Aluko et al (2011), Familusi (2012) and Alanamu (2016) which emphasizes the significant place women occupy in the raising of children, among the Yoruba. In traditional Yoruba society, the men are usually farmers, hunters, warriors or blacksmiths. Many of these traditional occupations would always take men away from home, leaving the children with their mothers. Due to polygamy, fathers sometimes have children from many wives, which makes them limited in what they can do in respect to the upbringing of their children.

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In addition, the emphasis on Yoruba women in discourses surrounding child upbringing, may be due to the gender roles whereby a man is saddled with the responsibility of providing for his family, while the mother remains at home to take care of the children and also manage the home. This does not mean that she does not do any other work to earn some income; she only engages in trades that will not prevent her from taking care of her home. Consequently, the mother is the one who nurtures a child from birth until he is able to take care of himself. She is therefore, the first person to which the child is attached. In the case of polygamy, where a man marries as much as four wives, it is left for the various mothers to ensure that their children are properly raised, since the father has lots of other children and wives to cater for. The connection between a mother and her child starts from the moment the mother takes in, until childbirth. The process of breastfeeding and nurturing also strengthens the connection between them. The father, though important in the child upbringing and nurturing process, is characterized by his itinerant lifestyle, while the mother remains with the children. This puts the larger part of the load of parenting and child upbringing on the mother. This goes along with the roles of the society which plays collective roles in ensuring that every child is well behaved and also portrays the required traits of a well-trained individual which Fayemi (2009) referred to as *Omoluwabi*.

I-ya, i-ya ta'-kun wa-'le. A-lu-jan- jan - ki-jan. I-ya, i-ya ta'-kun wa-le o. A - lu-

jan - jan - ki - jan. E ma f'o - mo si - 'le fun 'ya je. A - lu-

jan - jan - ki-jan. E-ni-t'o bi-'mo l'o ye k'o w'o-mo A - lu-jan- jan - ki-jan.

Ìyá iyá ta'kùn wá'lẹ̀ o

Dear mother, let down the rope

Àlùjọ̀nkijọ̀

Alujonjonkijon

Ẹ má f'ọmọ sílẹ̀ fún 'yà jẹ

Don't leave your child to suffer

Àlùjọ̀nkijọ̀

Alujonjonkijon

Ẹni tó bímọ ló yẹ k'ó w'ọmọ

A mother ought to care for her child

In the first stanza of the song, Sola Allyson raised several issues using a number of lines from the Yoruba proverbial compendium. In traditional Yoruba societies, children could be scolded by any elderly person within a community, whenever they behave unruly or demonstrate lack of etiquette. This does not mind whether or not the parents are comfortable with doing so. Such elders do not just scold the young individual, they try to correct the child in order to ensure he does not repeat such mistake or misbehavior, again. However, due to private life as a result of urban settlement and lifestyle, the communal lifestyle of traditional Yoruba society which allows every adult to contribute to the proper upbringing of a young individual is no longer a common practice. An elderly person who tries to do that, nowadays, especially in urban areas, is likely to be arrested and prosecuted on such grounds as trespassing, attempt to harm, attempt to kidnap and battery. It is as a result of this, that Sola Allyson emphasizes the importance of collective effort in proper parenting and child upbringing in the first stanza of the song:

Song Text	English Translation
<i>Ba mi n'omo mi o ye k'o de'nu olomo</i>	Every parent should allow the society to play a part in the upbringing of their children
<i>Oju merin lo n bi'mo sugbon igba oju li n w'omo</i>	A child is birthed by two individuals, but is nurtured and brought up by many individuals

The Yoruba proverb which Sola Allyson quoted above, is originally said thus: *Ba mi n'omo mi k'o de'nu olomo* (No one really likes their child to be scolded on their behalf). Despite this proverb being said like this over the years, it only emphasizes the need for the elderly ones to scold children, moderately. Allyson's deliberate reframing of the proverb is therefore, to stress the need for parents to allow the society play its role in the upbringing of their children, since the parents will not be with the children at all times to monitor their behavior. This is further buttressed in the next Yoruba proverb quoted above (*Oju merin lo n bi'mo sugbon igba oju li n w'omo*). This goes with Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning, whereby an individual learns through series of observation, imitation, modelling, reactions and attitudes of other people. The environmental influence the society is supposed to have on young individuals is anchored on shared values which form the basis of acceptable behavioral traits within the society.

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Fasiku (2019) has attempted to describe the idea of family, society and socialization among the Yoruba, which concerns the upbringing of a child. According to her, the architectural design of traditional Yoruba settlements was of courtyard pattern, which allowed a number of families live together within the same compound. This was possible especially among men of the same parents who were usually related by blood. This way, all men and women within the compound see every child as their own, regardless of whom the biological parents are. In her description of the types of courtyard, Fasiku noted thus:

The internal design consist of a big building in front and surrounded by block of rooms in a rectangle form leaving an open space in the middle. The block of rooms is usually with covered verandahs (Odede). This design is extensible not only to meet the demands of the developing families but to accommodate occupants (many families) and gives room to daily and domestic activities.... External courtyard is the second design of courtyard, the extension of lineage families with the agglomeration of courtyards in a centred place with big open place that can contain members of kinship during the time of important meeting, social gathering, recreation and other purposes (Fasiku, 2019: 9).

The impacts of this kind of settlement on child upbringing among the Yoruba are numerous. Most important of the impacts is the socialization of a child which involves all older members of the family living within the courtyard. According to Fasiku (2019), the courtyard lifestyle allows people in a community, such as the parents, neighbours, other siblings and most especially, the people living in the same courtyard, to pass cultural trait, norms and values of the society and the family in particular, into the young individual. Alonge (2015) avers that every traditional society in Nigeria preaches sound moral values to every young individual, emphasizing on the general saying that a good name is of more value than riches and that no one can buy integrity with money. It is in this light, that Allyson stresses the notion of *Oju merin lo n bi'mo sugbon igba oju ni n w'omo* in respect to child upbringing in Yoruba society.

Allyson goes further to emphasize the negative effects of poor parenting and child upbringing, which includes inability of such child to be independent, inability to manage wealth and poor social skill. This is while also highlighting the advantages of proper upbringing of a child. She further emphasizes the need for prayer and

T. Owoaje: *Proper Parenting and child Upbringing in Yoruba Culture: A Textual ..* confidence in the renovation of a badly raised child. The Yoruba proverb which says *Agba ti ko ke'hun soro a ke'tan sare* (An elder who refuses to scold a child will do the excessive) is a warning about the consequences of refusing to train a child properly. She further employed more Yoruba proverbs in line with this, to emphasize the need for parents to properly train their children as the world becomes more polluted with acts that are non-compliant with the cultural values of the Yoruba, such as homosexuality, disrespect for elders and indecent dressing. Being a Christian, Allyson herself believe in constant prayers as spiritual necessity in the proper raising of a child. This demonstrates the worldview of the Yoruba, that there are spiritual powers which could make a child disobedient, no matter the amount of effort invested in raising them properly.

Song Text	English Translation
<i>Omo t'a o ko a gbelle t'a ko ta</i>	A child that is not trained will squander the family's assets
<i>Omo t'a o to a k'eso t'a ni ta</i>	A child that is not trained will sell out the family's possessions
<i>Omo n'igbeyin omo l'ola</i>	A child is the future
<i>omo l'ola omo n'iyi omo l'ade</i>	A child is one's wealth, honor and crown
<i>Omo l'ewa omo l'eso oh ohhh</i>	A child is one's beauty
<i>O da a bi o da a o le da a o san bi o san a de san</i>	There is hope of a bad child becoming better
<i>Igboya at'adura ni o gba yi o da ahhh</i>	Through confidence and prayer, it shall be well

In addition, a section of the song which is taken by Adekunle Gold who features in the song, cites an example of the biblical Samuel as a model of proper child upbringing, having been an obedient boy who rose to become a prophet of Israel. This further establishes a Christian view of the discourse, owing to the fact that an average Yoruba parent can easily relate with the story of the biblical Samuel, whether they are Christians or Muslims. He charges them to follow the accounts of the upbringing of the biblical Samuel, in the upbringing of their children, even alongside the Yoruba model of child upbringing.

Song Text	English Translation
<i>Ori fun wa l'omo're bi i ti Samuel oh</i>	God give us good children like Samuel
<i>Won ko Samu o gb'eko oh o si se'hun rere</i>	He flourished because he was well trained. If you spare the rod you go (will) spoil the child I hope you know. Train them with the love of God abegi (I beg) oh
<i>Tori alaigboran omo- asa ni</i>	For, a disobedient child is wayward
<i>Agba o kunwo l'oju- asa ni</i>	They have no regard for elders
<i>Agba o jo won l'oju oh- asa ni</i>	They give no reverence to elders
<i>Agba iya ni o da- asa ni</i>	They become uncouth adults
<i>Alalugboran omo oh- omo ni</i>	A disobedient child is a child, too
<i>Won le d'eyan l'ola- omo ni</i>	They can also become successful
<i>T'a ba to won daada o- omo ni</i>	If we endeavor to raise them well

A popular Yoruba song shown below further stresses this position. It is an old Sunday school song which is widely sung among the Yoruba.

Se mi l'o - mo re - re bii Sa - mu - el, O - mo t'o gbo - ran,

T'o ni 'te - ri - ba: O - mo ti ki - i ba o - bi re ji - yan,

Ni koo se mi o, O - lu - wa.

Song Text	English Translation
<i>Se mi l'omo rere bii Samuel</i>	Make me a good child as Samuel
<i>Omo t'o gboran to ni'teriba</i>	A child that is obedient and humble
<i>Omo ti kii ba obi re jiyana</i>	A child that does not argue with his parents
<i>Ni koo se mi o Oluwa</i>	Make me such child, O Lord.

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Adekunle Gold further stresses the need for decisiveness in dealing with children, regarding enforcing discipline in them. Finally, he encourages parents never to give up on disobedient and wayward children, in order to ensure that they are paddled to a desired end. This connects with Allyson's position that prayer is very important in the upbringing of a child, alongside the various efforts of the society and the parents. A popular Yoruba proverb which says *olomo buruku ko ni lee fun ekun pa je* (one would not condemn one's child to death because such child is wayward) also points to the direction that parents should employ prayer when all effort towards properly training a child does not seem to work. The use of music as tool of child upbringing is not a contemporary practice among the Yoruba. It has long existed in the Yoruba traditional culture since time immemorial. For instance, Samuel (2013) hints on the use of folksongs among the Egbeda-Egga people of Kogi State, Nigeria, to educate children in various aspects of life such as the law of karma which is centered on sowing and reaping. He also avers that music can be employed as a tool of promoting the values of virtuousness, as well as in condemning despicable actions which negate societal norms (Samuel, 2009).

Summary

From the foregoing discourse, this paper proposes Sola Allyson's *Alujonjonkijon* as a veritable tool in the proper parenting and upbringing of children in Yoruba culture, which attempts to create a balance between the traditional Yoruba parenting and child upbringing model, and current social realities in the Nigerian society. Yoruba musicians should also do more in the use of their music as tool of sustainable development in such areas as activism, proper parenting and child upbringing, mass awareness, environmental well-being and education. Music educators should endeavor to make use of musical resources such as Allyson's *Alujonjonkijon*, in engaging students and stakeholders at all levels of education, especially on issues pertaining to building and cultivating cultural values and good conducts in children, all of which are geared towards the various scholarly and governmental efforts in achieving sustainable development.

Conclusion

Popular music, especially in Nigeria, has always contributed to the growth of the society and also, to the social, educational and political discourse among others. Like many others, Sola Allyson's *Alujonjonkijon* attempts to create a balance

T. Owoaje: *Proper Parenting and child Upbringing in Yoruba Culture: A Textual ..* between the traditional Yoruba parenting and child upbringing model, and current social realities. The discourse surrounding *Alujonjonkijan* is therefore, an advocacy for a sustainable society rich in deep cultural values and well-trained individuals who would help achieve the desired goals of a better and larger society. Proper parenting and child upbringing is a collective effort of all grown up individuals in every society, as demonstrated within the discourse of the selected song track. Parents should therefore, endeavor to employ a combination of the traditional model of child upbringing and current realities in raising their children, while carrying along every stakeholder involved in the making of the child into the desired individual within their society. This paper encourages Yoruba musicians to do more in the use of their music as tool of sustainable development in such areas as activism, proper parenting and child upbringing, mass awareness, environmental well-being and education. In addition, there is need for music educators to make use of musical resources such as Allyson's *Alujonjonkijan*, in engaging students and stakeholders at all levels of education, especially on issues pertaining to building and cultivating cultural values and good conducts in children, all of which are geared towards the various scholarly and governmental efforts in achieving sustainable development.

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