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**“OMO T’O MO ‘YA’RE LOJU”
(A child that despises his mother)
narratives cultural value of motherhood
in Jimi Solanke’s music**

ABSTRACT. Within the traditional African setting, the values of an African mother in the domestic and societal ambience have called for great concerns. Akinjobi (2011, p. 2) examines African Motherhood as a sacred as well as a powerful spiritual component in the nurturing and development of an African child. The scope of this paper therefore, is to examine the position of Jimi Solanke on the values of African mothers as advocated in some of his purposively selected songs which address the values and position of motherhood as caretakers of children and strongholds in African homes. The paper adopts oral interview, the theory of Womanism and Feminism as rightly observed by Sotunsa (2008, pp. 227–234) as its methodological approaches and largely concentrates on the experience of an African mother, the family relationship as well as the importance of motherhood in her role as an African child nurturer and developer. The paper finds out that Jimi Solanke has not only appraised the values of African mothers, but also expressed severe consequences on any African child who despised or despoiled an African mother.

KEYWORDS: child, despise, mother, cultural value and motherhood

Introduction

The culture of a people is what marks them out distinctively from other human societies. In Africa, the cultural values accrued to motherhood are vested in the domestic responsibilities as a child nurturer and develop-

er. This is however; quantified in her relationship to family and the society in general as expressed by Jimi Solanke in his purposively selected songs for this paper. Other musicians in Nigeria have sung about the female gender, but Jimi Solanke is specifically concerned about the values of mothers in the society and he relates these values to mothers as nurturers and caretakers of the home and the society. This is culturally understood to entail a totality of traits that are peculiar to African mothers. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and what is wrong and what is important in life.

Leith-Ross (1967, p. 34) emphasizes that culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge, a position which Jimi Solanke also subscribed to in his music, *'iya lo lu gbo'wo mi'* regards mothers as the first teachers and the caretakers of children from infant even to adulthood. Jimi Solanke opines that mothers are equally responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. Apart from within the African traditional culture, religions all over the global circle, whether Christian, Judaic, Hindu and Islam accord very important place to motherhood, it is widely an exalted realm for the woman hence religious imagery sentimentalizes and idealizes motherhood. The image of Madonna characterizes Christianity; there is the Devi-Ma in Hindu tradition. Africans talk about the creation goddess often depicted as a mermaid or a beautiful woman and associated with the moon and ocean. The idea of self-sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of motherhood in African society (Ogini, 1996, pp. 11–19).

In another song, Jimi Solanke refers to mothers as gold; this song further affirms the golden position of African motherhood because it is considered in African culture that children are more intimate with their mothers. This societal conceptual stand on motherhood has made mothers to be collectively considered as a symbol of the nation-state. Most nationals today address the nation-as-mother symbolism to mobilize patriotic sentiments (Akinjobi, 2011, p. 2). Other writers of literary works have attested to the importance of mothers in African culture in various published books. Camara Laye (1954a, 1954b) and Senghor (1965) express their love for African women in terms of the love for motherhood.

Obiechina (1973, pp. 98–104) echoes this idea in his book review 'Mother is Gold'. David Diop's poem 'Africa my Africa' (1957) glorifies mother in his poems where he states of three African women honored with the Nobel Prize for Peace to express the grand position mothers are

attaining in Africa and Christopher Okigbo’s poem “Before you, mother Idoto, naked I stand” (1967) recognizes the power of his mother “Idoto”. The motherhood symbolism was also evident in the anti-colonial nationalist struggles in Africa in the 1950s and early 1960s up to the point of independence. Ngcobo (1988, p. 143) observes that this was much more evidenced in South Africa especially after Mandela went to prison and in the 1980s and 1990s until the all inclusive election that brought Nelson Mandela to power in 1994. There are also patriotic songs from musicians like Miriam Makeba and monuments in many countries that celebrate the nation-as-mother. There are also patriotic songs and monuments in many countries such as Nigeria, Ghana Liberia that celebrate the nation-as-mother, these patriotic songs often invoke sentiments of loyalty toward the land of birth.

Africana “Womanism”

Africana Womanism is an ideology which is grounded in African culture. The term Africana Womanism was coined by Hudson-Weems in 1997 and it rightly discards the term feminism. According to Lyons-Ruth (2008, p. 23), Africana Womanism was born out of a debate between Third World Women and Western Feminists in which according to Lyons (2008, p. 28) “one perspective laid blame on Western Feminists for silencing the African Woman in the very speech intended to liberate her from oppression” (Lyons-Ruth, 2008, p. 28). Hudson-Weems (1997, pp. 77–97) acknowledges that she did not create the legacy of Africana Womanism but has “observed Africana women, documented their reality, and refined a paradigm relative to who they are, what they do, and what they believe in as a people”. Africana Womanism accepts some elements of mainstream Feminism’s female-centred empowerment agenda. It however, criticises Western Feminism for its “caustic beginnings and inapplicability for women of African descent” (Hudson-Weems, 1997, p. 91). The need for a theory that is Africa specific was brought about through sentiment by women as Marta Bennett (1995, pp. 23–35), who notes that as an African woman: I must remember that:

what I do affects the status in society of my husband, my father-in-law, my mother-in-law...Therefore (African) woman...will always look back and ask, ‘am I carrying the family with me?

With Bennett's submission, African women therefore have peculiar cultural expectations which control their actions and so there is the need for a theory that caters for their special differences. In as much as Africana Womanism is global in its approach and has managed to isolate the African woman from the general category of "women" that includes non-African women, it still has some major weaknesses which need to be addressed. Mangena (2003) states it aptly that the major challenge remains that Africana Woman, just like the term woman is not a monolithic bloc. What is particularly problematic is combining and having one approach that addresses the problems of one category but two separate realities of the African continent and that of its diaspora. In as much as women in the continent and its diaspora belong to the same category their realities are quite different. Whereas Africana women in the diaspora may still be existing in racist societies, those in the continent may not identify race as an immediate problem in their daily encounters because most of the African nations are independent from political imperial rule.

Africana Womanism also does not consider the differences in ethnicity among African women and even women in the same country from belonging to different ethnic groups.

Motherhood and African cultural stand

In most cultures, expectations of mothering roles intensify social pressure to conform to what the culture says or what the tradition decrees. In Iyuku in Estakor (west of Edo State of Nigeria), culture continues to perpetuate highly prescriptive notions of motherhood. In this community of farmers, women are made to pass through some unhealthy practices in the name of motherhood. Women are expected to undergo certain rituals during pregnancy, especially first pregnancy. The woman must go through circumcision when she is seven months into the pregnancy; for this reason, the practice of circumcision and clitorodectomy, now seen in many quarters as a violation of human rights, is vitally placed in Iyuku. Mbiti (1970, pp. 24–36) recognizes the power in the blood which he says binds the individual to the land and consequently to the departed of the society. In this case, the circumcision blood is like making a covenant, or a solemn agreement, between the individual and her people and until the individual has gone through the operation, she is an outsider. While much of our lives involve the enactment of socially constructed cultural representations

which take gender specific forms, motherhood stands out as a construct imbued with extraordinary ideological and cultural significance (Kruger, 2006, pp. 198–204; Phoenix & Woollet, 1991, pp. 13–45). It also provides a pertinent illustration of the way in which some constructions come to assume an identity politics which homogenizes and naturalizes social categories and groupings.

In Africa, like elsewhere in the world, motherhood has been an important theme (Oyewumi, 2001, pp. 1–12; Sudarkasa, 1991, pp. 34–47), informing women's social identity and shaping their political involvement (Walker, 1995, pp. 417–437). Within the African context, the construe of motherhood is heavily implicated in the network of ideological imperatives (gender, 'race', class, culture, nation, and empire) in response to which the Black, female subject is constructed (Mama, 1995, pp. 343–345). In South Africa a number of contextual factors, but perhaps most explicitly the system of Apartheid, has informed the ways in which White and Black women have put possibly common notions of motherhood (under patriarchy) to different political uses (Walker, 1995, p. 433; Hassim, 1991, pp. 65–82).

Motherhood in Africa is seen as a God-given role and for this reason it is sacred, the spiritual power of women especially as mothers must be recognized whether one sees African women as victims or actors. (Christian, 1982, p. 147), whether or not one depicts women's travails especially, in domestic and cultural responsibilities that are endowed upon them (Ojo-Ade, 1983, p. 161; Chinweizu, 1990, pp. 78–84) further argues that mothers have exploited her biological superiority and has consolidated her power by taking over the role of mother, cook and nurse in the household. In this sense, (Ngcobo, 1988, pp. 140–149.) believes that generally, Africans take motherhood to be all about children, as she puts it "every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. Motherhood is so critical in most traditional societies in Africa that there is no worse misfortune for a woman than being childless". In a complimentary statement (Mbiti, 1970, p. 144), writes that a barren woman is seen as incomplete and a "dead end of human life, not only for genealogical level but also for herself".

Feminists in Africa, while conceding that motherhood may at times operate in an oppressive manner, have tried to read other meanings to motherhood, meanings that are empowering for women. Within these meanings, they agree that giving birth bestows a certain status on women, even mystical powers. Yoruba traditions point to this fact. Among the Yoruba people, motherhood is said to confer privileges that give credence to the

very foundations of society and women's presumed roles in it and thus symbolize fertility, fecundity, and fruitfulness. The Yoruba saying, "*Iya ni wura, baba ni jigi*" ("mother is gold, father is a mirror") as also expressed by late Dipo Sodipo (a popular musician in the Southwestern Nigeria) goes a long way in showing the importance of motherhood in African society, the choice of Jimi Solanke music was as a result of his use of African musical instruments and tonality of the lyrical content. Mother is gold: strong, valuable, true and of whose importance is central to a child's existence.

Yoruba concept and values of '*Ikunle Abiyamo*'

The Yoruba concept, belief and value of *ikunle abiyamo*, the kneeling position assumed at the moment of birth confers special spiritual privileges on a mother. Badejo (1998, p. 95) posits that although the reality of motherhood is experienced by women, the institution is ably controlled by men, because the experience is being interpreted by men and the structure they control. Emecheta (1979, pp. 23–38) dwells on the concept of motherhood in most of her books, especially in *Joys of Motherhood* and *Second Class Citizen*. Flora Nwapa mirrors this concept in her *Efuru*, where childlessness and failed marriages mandate a literary criticism that mirrors the importance of children in the African family. Going further in this discourse, most African communities have their own idea of motherhood and how a woman should experience it. Emecheta (1979, p. 32) looks at how sexuality and the ability to bear children may sometimes be the only way by which femininity and womanhood are defined, the same woman has to work and support her family because the so-called bread winner cannot provide any bread for the family, so she is forced to support the family and at the same time be responsible for the children. Mbiti (1970, p. 32) tries to convey the importance and joy of birth, how the mother nurses her infant, and he talks about celebrations and rituals that herald and welcome the birth of a baby. It is fundamentally conceived that the importance of children to the African family is very vital and the nursing of such children rests principally on the African mother.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1994, pp. 23–36) accounts for the importance of motherhood in Africa as due to the theme of extreme relevance to African societies and for this reason; it is widely documented in most of the works by African singers including Jimi Solanke. There are other issues now that are of utmost importance to women in Africa, but the issue of motherhood

is still very important. Musicians, both males and females have always encouraged every woman to bear children and women without children are seen as evil. With motherhood, a woman is considered blessed; she acquires a higher status in society, respected and mythologized. In an interview with Jimi Solanke, the position of mothers in the society was further stressed as encompassing the following:

1. Mothers are custodians of physical beauty, intelligence, tenderness, compassion, patience and tolerance for the benefit of the society.
2. A home without a mother today is looked down upon and often the object of ridicule by people in the society. The home is also shunned by people because it is considered unblest hence, cursed. Who in his right mind would want to visit a home not graced by presence of a good mother?
3. Not all women in Africa are regarded as mothers. Not in the limited sense of bearing children, but in the larger sense of beings the one's God blessed with the gift of continuity of the life line and the linking of man with fellow man. A woman, who even though may have not borne children of her own, is often referred to as a mother in most African societies. A man who beats up his wife is considered by society to be weak in mind and utterly lacking in moral character.
4. Mothers play a complementary role together with their husbands in the society for entrenchment of better societal values.
5. Mothers are also called to be great leaders in the society. To take up leadership positions so as to stop corrupt practices in the society, and
6. Mothers are to teach morals in the society. They are called to be good teachers, not just about education but also about culture and disciplines.

The power of mothers' breasts in the concept of motherhood among the Yoruba

In any African community, the power in and of the breast of mothers is very strong. When a mother tells a child that "I will bring out my breast," it means a lot as this is enough to caution any erring child. The power in the breast is so significant in the sense that everyone is considered to have suckled the mother's breast. No child will be so stubborn to the extent that he/she will not dread the mother's breast, given all of these about motherhood, mothers command so much respect and at the same time awe.

The importance of these cultural and religious symbols of motherhood is borne out of the fact that they are repeatedly alluded to in life and literature. Literary and artistic works through the ages dwell on the attributes of motherhood and depictions of self-sacrificing mothers, mothers as creators who must bear pain with patience and nurture selflessly.

Jimi Solanke and African mothers

Several musicians have released musical tracks with the theme of mother and motherhood. The position of Jimi Solanke on the values of motherhood especially with regards to an African mother, mothering and motherhood have been well expressed in his purposively selected songs where strong advocacy for the importance of mothers in African societies is given uncompromising priority. This campaign has also been well channelled in several folk songs credited to Jimi Solanke. A perusal of several musical activities of Jimi Solanke reflects a supermom nature of African mothers. Attesting to this fact, St. Clair (1994, p. 27) writes that the fact remains that no degree of stereotyping against women existed in traditional Africa. The woman possessed the power to organize the family and the society at large. Clair's position confirms that there is an existing enormous task and responsibility conferred on African womanhood and motherhood. Expressing few considerations of Jimi Solanke's advocacy on the values of African mothers, an interactive session with 'Baba Agba' as he is popularly referred to reveals some of his standpoints as reflected in quotes and figures in this chapter.

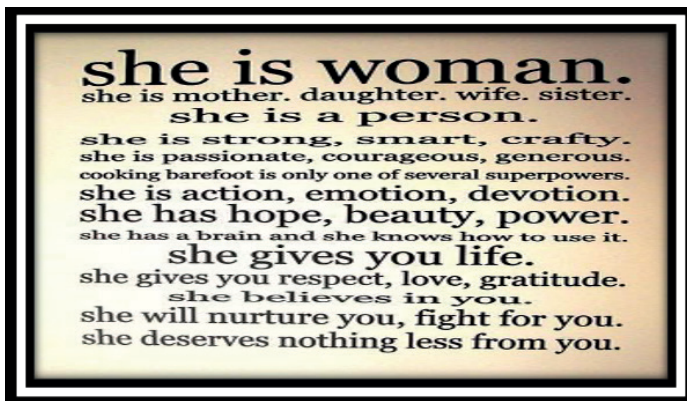


Figure 1. An art work captured during an oral interview with Jimi Solanke on Saturday, February 25, 2017

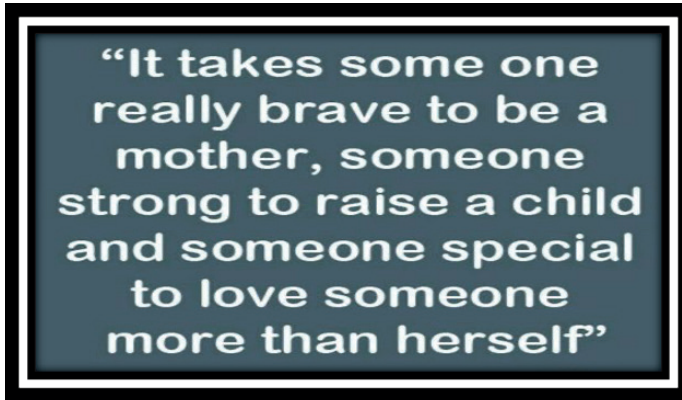


Figure 2. An art work captured during an oral interview with Jimi Solanke on Saturday, February 25, 2017

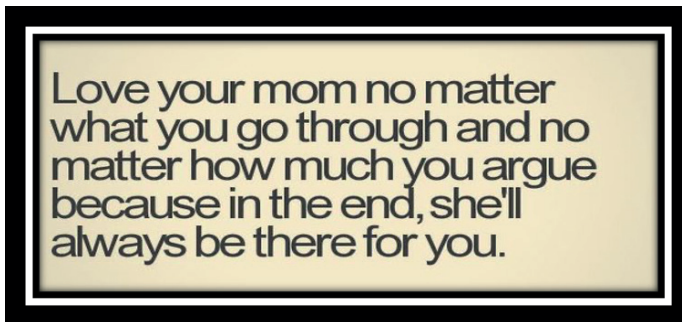


Figure 3. An art work captured during an oral interview with Jimi Solanke on Saturday, February 25, 2017

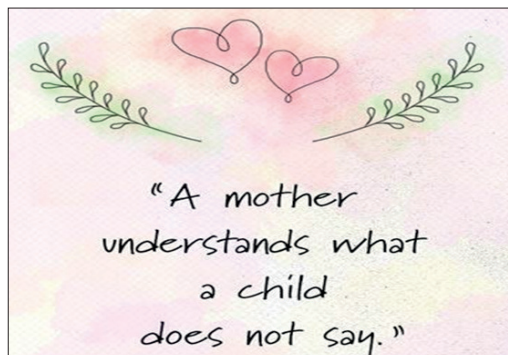


Figure 4. An art work captured during an oral interview with Jimi Solanke on Saturday, February 25, 2017

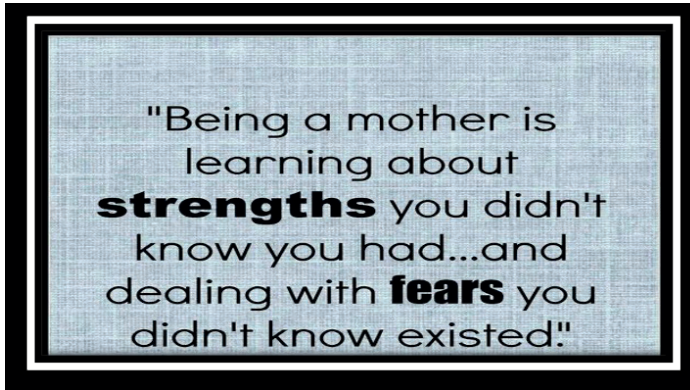


Figure 5. An art work captured during an oral interview with Jimi Solanke on Saturday, February 25, 2017



Figure 6. An art work captured during an oral interview with Jimi Solanke on Saturday, February 25, 2017

An appraisal of the selected songs as expressed below would be necessary as factual evidence to concretise his position on the plates/figures cited above.

Musical and cultural analysis of Jimi Solanke's selected songs

There are three selected songs which are considered for analysis in this study. The first is '*Iya lo'lu gbowo mi*' meaning 'mother is my caretaker'. Below is notational score of the song as sung by Jimi Solanke:

Iya lo lu gbo wo mi

Jimi solanke

I ya lo lu gbo wo mi tin to ju mi ni ke ke re e yin re lo fi po mi i
 7
 ya ku i se mi e mi ki ya mi ku' se pe lu' te ri
 12
 ba mo le e mi ko le ko' se fun i ya mi mo i yao i yao i yao

Musical text and translation

Text

Iya lo'lu gbowo mi
 Ti n'toju ni kekere
 Eyin re lo fi pon mi
 Iya ku ise mi
 Emi k'iya mi ku ise
 Pe lu'teri ba mole
 Emi ko le ko'se fun'ya mi mo
 Iya, iya, iya o

Translation

Mother is my caretaker
 Who took care of me from my infancy
 She puts on her soft back
 Mother well done for caring for me
 I salute my mother for this great care
 With humbleness and humility
 I will never refuse her errands
 Mother, mother, mother

Cultural analysis of the song

Culturally, mothers have played and are still playing a significant role in Africa in which Yoruba culture is also embedded. Mothers are highly respected and adorned in many fashions throughout several clans in Nigeria. African mothers are culturally bound to their children, with strong intimacy from birth to breast feeding, crawling to walking, schooling to graduating and apprenticeship to freedom. A child remains a child to African mothers. It is on these premise that Jimi Solanke pitched his value advocacy for African mothers and gives a strong salute to the mother for all her efforts on him with a 'codetta' conclusion of hailing and addressing her as 'mother, mother, mother'.

The second song is '*Iya ni wura Iyebiye*' meaning 'Mother is a precious Gold. This is a metaphorical statement which adds value to the importance of the African mother who is as precious as gold. Below is notational score of the song as sung by Jimi Solanke:

IYA NI WURA IYE BIYE

Jimi Solanke

I ya ni wu ra i ye bi ye ti a ko le fo wo rao O lo yun mi

6
fo' su me san O po mi fo' dun me ta

9
I ya ni wu ra i ye bi ye ti a ko le fo wo rao

Musical text and translation

Text

Iya ni wura iyebiye
Ti a ko le f'owo ra o
She conceived me for nine months
Iya ni wura iyebiye
Ti a ko le f'owo ra o

Translation

Mother is a precious gold
Which cannot be bought with money
And backed me for six years
Mother is a precious gold
Which cannot be bought with money

Cultural analysis of the song

Quintessential cultural values of motherhood in Africa cannot be underestimated. The metaphorical expression of Jimi Solanke in referring to mothers as "a precious gold of no equivalent price" is an attestation to the high esteem Africans, especially the Yoruba culture, has placed motherhood in the cultural ambience. Moreover, the position of motherhood as the only identifier of children that are legal or bastard puts her in the vital position in any family setting. In the African cultural system, mothers are again perceived to take a lot of forms of responsibilities which are able to

lead the child to be a responsible adult and a good representative of the family.

The third song is ‘Iya ni Wura, Baba ni Jigi’ meaning ‘Mother is Gold, while Father is the Mirror’. This song further affirms the golden position of African motherhood because it is considered in African culture that children are more intimate with their mothers than fathers. The fathers are the mirror that reflects the child in the society. The reason for this concept is likely predicated on the fact that the child bears the name of the father and not that of the mother and most often, they are believed to have adopted the attributes of their lineage through the father. When they behave well, the father is praised and when otherwise the blame goes to the woman. However, the dignity and vocation of mothers are respected in almost all the tribes in Africa. This is because mothers are the bedrock of the early basic acquaintances of culture for their children and thus very fundamental to the issue of moral formation in the family. A family endowed with a good mother who equally enjoys the support of a good father, impacts good moral values into the lives if the children. The result is harmonious and it reflects in the daily activities of such family in the community. Love of motherhood is in the heart of traditional African family values. Other popular folk and popular musicians such as King Sunny Ade, Dipo Sodipo and Sikiru Ayinde Barrister have also expressed their minds on the values accrued to African mothers. But Jimi Solanke addresses these values from the poetic perspectives which have made the lyrical messages more tonal and easily comprehended. Most of the selected songs are home songs which has become familiar with virtually everybody from south-western Nigeria in our early childhood days in elementary schools and villages. Below is notational score of the song as sung by Jimi Solanke:

I YA NI WU RA BABA NI DI GI

Jimi Solanke

I ya ni wu ra Ba ba ni di gi O jo i ya ku ni wu

4
ra o la ba je O jo ba ba ku ni di gi o la wo mi

Conclusion

In conclusion, the mystification of African mothers which (Ogun-dipe-Leslie, 1994, p. 23–36) refers to is due to the importance of motherhood in Africa. This theme is of relevance to African societies and for this reason; it is widely documented in many of the works by African men and women. Among the Yoruba people, motherhood is said to confer privileges that give credence to the very foundations of society and women’s presumed roles in it and thus symbolize fertility, fecundity, and fruitfulness. Jimi Solanke’s agreement with the Yoruba saying “*Iya ni wura, baba ni jigi*” (“mother is gold, father is a mirror”) goes a long way in showing the importance of motherhood in African society. Mother is gold: strong, valuable, true and central to a child’s existence and experience. The Yoruba also believe that *ikunle abiyamo*: the kneeling position assumed at the moment of birth confers special spiritual privileges on a mother. Thus there are powers, privileges, and entitlements that come with motherhood even in the act of giving birth, Jimi Solanke agrees with this position in his song *iya ni wura Iyebiye* where he specifically recounts the nine months of pregnancy and three years of backing the child which is a symbol of mutual relationship between mother and child.

There are other issues now that are of utmost importance to women in Africa, but the issue of motherhood is still very important in Africa. The concept of motherhood has been of central importance in the traditions of people of Africa and it has been presented by many artistes and artists. Both men and women writers have always encouraged every woman to bear children because women without children are seen as evil. Jimi Solanke states that with motherhood, a woman is considered blessed, she acquires a higher status in society, she is respected and mythologized.

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