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Parenting in Yan Matan dan Gudau's Hausa Oral Song "Yan Uwa": A Motherist Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines the representation of parenting in "Yan Uwa", a traditional Hausa oral song performed by the Yan Matan dan Gudau band. Drawing on the Motherist paradigm formulated by Catherine Acholonu (1995), which places women, as nurturers, at the centre of society's principal concerns, the study analyses how the song articulates the Hausa conception of parenthood and its social significance. The corpus, a five-minute video recording retrieved from YouTube, was transcribed in Hausa, translated into English and submitted to thematic and stylistic analysis. The findings indicate that the song constructs motherhood as a moral vocation and as a symbol of community and unity; that it promotes filial respect and obedience grounded in Islamic and Hausa socio-cultural values; and that it mobilises symbolism, metaphor, repetition and sound patterning both to convey its message and to turn the phrase *Yan Uwa* into a call for inclusive solidarity and, implicitly, for the empowerment of women within a patriarchal social order. The study concludes that, in the singers' view, parenting is a noble status that rests on specific moral requirements, and that Hausa oral songs constitute a repository of maternal philosophy and ethical instruction.

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Introduction

African literature encompasses both written and oral texts, and orality remains the dominant mode of communication across much of the continent. As Anthonia (2016, p. 165) observes, every society possesses a literature of its own, whether oral or written, and the oral form chronologically precedes the written. African oral literature, understood as a body of discourse whose message is conveyed by word of mouth, is therefore at once the historical foundation and a living component of the continent's literary heritage.

Parenting is a pillar of social continuity, moral education and cultural preservation in African societies. Hausa oral traditions, songs in particular, have long served as vehicles for transmitting values relating to family life, child-rearing and gender roles. Women's oral performances, especially those of praise singers, offer valuable insight into maternal experience and into a philosophy of care. This article focuses on "Yan Uwa", a song by the Yan Matan dan Gudau band, in order to explore the complexities of motherhood and the responsibilities attached to parenting in Hausa society.

Adopting a Motherist perspective, the study asks how the song projects the ideals of nurturing, empathy and communal responsibility that underpin maternal roles, how it embodies an ethics of care and solidarity among women, and how it negotiates social expectations within

a patriarchal structure. It is guided by three questions: (1) How are parenting, and motherhood in particular, represented and valorised in the song? (2) Which religious, moral and socio-cultural values does the song transmit? (3) Which stylistic resources do the singers deploy to convey their message? By situating the song within the wider discourse of African feminist thought, the article shows that oral art is both a reflection of and a commentary on lived realities. It seeks to illuminate the social wisdom embedded in Hausa oral tradition and its continuing relevance for understanding gendered identities, familial cohesion and moral instruction in contemporary African societies.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework; Section 3 describes the corpus and the method of analysis; Section 4 analyses the principal themes of the song; Section 5 examines its stylistic features; and Section 6 concludes. The Hausa transcription and the English translation of the song are reproduced in the Appendix.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Motherism, a paradigm proposed by Catherine Obianuju Acholonu in *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995). Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2015, p. 62) describes it as a variant of African feminism advanced by Acholonu. As an indigenous African theoretical paradigm, Motherism redefines gender discourse through the lenses of motherhood, nurture and communal harmony. Whereas Western feminism is often characterised as emphasising confrontation and individual emancipation, Motherism is grounded in an African worldview that privileges cooperation, complementarity and the sanctity of motherhood as central to social balance and development.

At its core, Motherism celebrates the biological and social roles of mothers as life-givers, nurturers and moral educators. It holds that women's strength lies not merely in resisting patriarchy but in their capacity to sustain life, promote peace and maintain ecological and familial stability. The paradigm thus draws attention to the interconnectedness of motherhood, spirituality and environmental ethics, and portrays women as custodians of cultural and moral heritage. In this sense, Motherism transcends biological motherhood to encompass all acts of care, protection and communal responsibility that sustain humanity; Khutia (2020, p. 188) accordingly associates it with love, tolerance and service.

Applied to the present study, Motherism offers a critical framework for analysing how parenting is represented and valorised in "Yan Uwa". The song may be read as a social document that embodies the moral and emotional dimensions of motherhood in Hausa society. Through its lyrics, rhythm and communal performance, it reflects the ethics of care, empathy and solidarity that Motherism espouses, and it portrays motherhood not only as a biological function but as a moral vocation rooted in patience, self-sacrifice and the nurturing of future generations.

The framework further allows Hausa oral tradition to be interpreted as a space of female agency, in which women articulate social values and, often subtly, critique gender expectations. Reading "Yan Uwa" through a Motherist lens thus foregrounds an African-centred understanding of parenting, one aligned with communal harmony, interdependence and the transmission of cultural values, and affirms the enduring relevance of indigenous oral art as a repository of maternal philosophy and moral education in Hausa society.

Corpus and Method

The corpus is "Yan Uwa", a traditional oral song of approximately five minutes, retrieved as a video recording from YouTube. The recording was listened to repeatedly and attentively before being transcribed in Hausa and translated into English; both versions are reproduced in the Appendix. Instrumental interludes and pauses are not transcribed. The analysis is qualitative and proceeds in two stages. The first is a thematic analysis, which identifies the central ideas around which the song is organised. Following the *Glossary of Dramatic Terms* (n.d., p. 8), a theme is understood as the central idea or statement that unifies and controls an entire literary work, whether as a brief insight or as a comprehensive vision of life. The second stage is a stylistic analysis of the literary devices through which these themes are conveyed. Both stages are interpreted through the Motherist framework outlined above. Excerpts are quoted in Hausa and followed by an English rendering. Because the analysis relies partly on a translated text, some connotative nuances of the Hausa original may not be fully captured.

Thematic Analysis

The song develops four interrelated themes: the role of the mother, unity, religious and cultural values, and respect for parents.

The Role of a Mother in Society

The role of the mother is the principal theme of the song. After the introductory salutations, the singers open their argument with the line *Mu duka haihuwarmu a kai muka girma* ("We were all born and raised"). Two elements are highlighted by this statement.

The first is childbearing, which in many African societies is regarded as the principal purpose of marriage and the foundation of a woman's social standing. Procreation confers honour and privileges such as respect, support and affection. N'guessan (2010, p. 1) notes that traditional society treats childbearing as a kind of social passport, with the corollary that childless women are marginalised and denied the respect, celebration and consideration accorded to mothers. The song gives childbearing a strongly physical and spiritual dimension in its account of gestation and labour (Appendix, stanza 4). The singers evoke nine months in the womb, the day of ordeal (*ranar nakuda*) and the day of agony (*ranar murkashi*), and add that only God knows the full extent of the mother's suffering. The tension is resolved in the following stanza, where the mother, on receiving her child, forgets all her pain. Maternal suffering is thus presented as willingly endured and redeemed by joy.

The second element is childrearing. The song shows how a mother accompanies a child from infancy to adulthood, the most formative phase of an individual's life. Rearing a child involves demanding tasks, namely attention, care, feeding, clothing and education, which mothers fulfil with pride and tirelessly. The following excerpt illustrates these efforts:

Itace zata bashi nono tayi goyo
Nan ga jikinta zai yi kashi da fitsari
Bata tsantsaninshi sai dai taji dadî
In kuka yake tana jijjigashi tana yimishi tawai

She is the one who breastfeeds the child and carries it on her back.
The child soils her body with excrement and urine.
She is never saddened by it; she rejoices instead.
When the child cries, she rocks and soothes it with lullabies.

The passage reveals the central contribution of mothers to child-rearing. Breastfeeding, carrying, lullabying and caring convey the degree of the mother's involvement in the growth and protection from which every individual benefits, and they depict maternal instinct and sacrifice for the well-being of the child. It is commonly believed that a mother is uniquely able to calm a crying child and ready to sacrifice whatever is necessary to ensure that the child survives. Akhter (2020, p. 593) similarly stresses that women are an inseparable part of the human race, nurturing future generations while playing vital roles in every sphere of life. From a Motherist standpoint, nurture is therefore not a private domestic task but a form of social labour on which the continuity of the community depends.

Unity and Inclusiveness

A second theme is unity. In Niger, song is a customary instrument for calling for social unity, whether on specific occasions such as national festivals and celebrations or as a spontaneous contribution by traditional or modern singers. "Yan Uwa" expresses this theme explicitly, as the opening lines show:

Yan uwa
Yan uwa mazaje da mata
kanana da manya

Brothers and sisters
Brothers and sisters, men and women
The young and the old

The address widens by successive steps. The term *Yan uwa* might be taken to refer merely to the singers' fellow women, but the singers immediately add *mazaje da mata* (men and women), thereby including both sexes. One might then suppose that they address only the men and women of their own generation, yet the call is extended once more with *kanana da manya* (the young and the old). The song thus rejects every form of segregation, whether social or biological, and constructs a community without exclusion.

Song is, moreover, a synonym of a people's cultural heritage. Awoniyi (2015, p. 1) remarks that African cultural heritage is rich in inspiration and vitality but remains a largely unexplored treasure in the continent's quest for integration and nation-building. The unity advocated in "Yan Uwa" is precisely the kind of resource that Niger requires in the present context of national refoundation and the quest for sovereignty.

Religious, Moral and Cultural Values

The singers artistically evoke the religious, cultural and moral values of the Hausa people of Niger. Religious

references recur throughout the song. They express the singers' attachment to Islam and underline the prominent place of religion in Hausa life, as the following lines illustrate:

Gyara huwallazi mai sama sarki
Sarkin baiwa Allah shiryamu
Sannan zata fara allah mai komai
Shi dai yasan komai

Praise be to God, the Sovereign on High
The Giver of all gifts, God, guide us
Then [the ordeal] begins; God, Master of all things
He alone knows everything

These lines corroborate Awoniyi's (2015, pp. 4–5) argument that religion has formed the basis of life in every community and that, in Africa, the world is understood as God's world, created and governed by Him.

The song also draws on the lullaby, a type of song performed for children, whose functions include soothing and entertaining. The lullaby is captured in the following verses:

In kuka yake tana jijjigashi tana yimishi tawai
Allah na Allah sarki
Allah ka raya
Allah ka barmin
Allah ka barmini da ko dîyata

When the child cries, she rocks and soothes it with lullabies.

My God, O God the King
O God, let this child grow
O God, keep him for me
O God, keep for me my child, whether son or daughter

The extract shows one of the ways in which mothers soothe their children when they cry. The use of lullabies and invocations expresses the mother's devotion and engagement on behalf of her children, and it joins maternal care with prayer.

Respect for Parents

Respect for elders is a socio-cultural value shared by many African peoples. In Hausa society, respect for parents in particular is regarded as a ladder to individual success and is widely promoted. In "Yan Uwa", the singers underline the benefits of obeying and honouring one's parents, as the following passage shows:

In mun gyara ransu yayi musu dadî
Tun nan duniya muna samun tsira
Duk sha ani na duniya yai mana dadî
Albarka ta zanki shida a cikin kasa
Alheri ya shida sharri ya kaura

When we make them happy, they are at ease.
Already in this world we shall find safety.
All our worldly affairs will turn out well.
God's blessing will spread throughout the land.
Goodness will flourish and evil will depart.

The singers recall the benefits of respecting parents, in keeping with religious teaching, since the Holy Qur'an and the Hadith strongly recommend such respect. The passage also illustrates the didactic function that Odinye (2015, p. 76) attributes to African literature, namely the representation of African beliefs, culture and social or moral values in order to correct, enlighten and teach morals. Filial obedience is thus presented as a reciprocal ethic: the care mothers and fathers give in childhood is returned in respect, and the reward is both personal and communal, extending to the prosperity of the whole country.

Stylistic Analysis

This section examines the literary devices through which the singers shape language and transmit their message. "Yan Uwa" deploys symbolism, metaphor and repetition, and its title phrase operates as a significant stylistic and ideological choice.

Symbolism

Symbolism is the use of symbols to create deeper meaning in an artistic work: a word, phrase or object is used connotatively to represent an idea distinct from its literal sense. Awoniyi (2015, p. 8) defines symbols as objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that are ambiguous in the sense of carrying a multiplicity of meanings, and notes that, in traditional Africa, symbolism finds spontaneous expression in many religious and secular processes.

The band uses symbolism to deepen the meaning of the song. In the line *Allah ka barmini da ko dîyata* ("O God, keep for me my child"), the phrase *da ko dîyata* stands for more than progeny: the child symbolises the future,

fortune and happiness. This accords with the Hausa saying *Yara mayan gobe* ("children are the future of tomorrow"). It is likewise socially accepted that a childless couple is associated with a lack of happiness and with failure in society.

The recurrent Arabic word *Allah* represents the singers' monotheistic faith, namely Islam. *Tawai* (lullaby) expresses the African traditional way of soothing children and, more broadly, a means by which women voice their feelings or convey messages relating to family life. *Kalangu*, the drum that accompanies the performance, ties the song to Hausa musical tradition.

Another central symbol is *uwa* (mother), which stands for patience, sacrifice, life and fertility. These associations are developed through the lines describing breastfeeding, carrying the child on the back and tolerating its excrement without complaint (Section 4.1), and they underlie the metaphor *Uwa ba ƙashin yadawa ba* ("A mother is not a bone to be thrown away"), discussed below, which is justified by the fact that the mother gives birth, breastfeeds and carries the baby. Symbolism thus serves not only to reflect the soundness of the singers' message but also to raise the literary quality of the work.

Metaphor

Raupp (2024, p. 61) defines metaphor as a figure of speech that applies a word or phrase to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable; it is an implicit comparison between two elements that share common or uncommon characteristics.

The song contains the following metaphor:

Uwa ba ƙashin yadawa ba
Uba ba ƙashin yadawa ba

A mother is not a bone to be thrown away.
Nor is a father.

Mother and father (*uwa* and *uba*, that is, parents) are compared to bones, and the comparison carries a moral lesson. Meat that has been eaten leaves bones that are useless and are discarded; parents, by contrast, never lose their usefulness. They must never be neglected or abandoned, wherever, whenever and however their children find themselves. The lesson is pertinent because it is common for a person who has become wealthy to disregard parents despite their many sacrifices.

Two further metaphors describe childbirth. The expressions *Ranar nakuda tazo ranar daga* ("the day of labour has come, the day of challenge") and *Ranar murkashi* ("the day of agony") equate the day of delivery with a day of ordeal and anguish, and so convey the suffering a mother undergoes in giving birth.

Repetition

Al-Muslimawi (2024, p. 7071), citing Literary Devices (2017), defines repetition as a device in which the same words or phrases recur several times in order to clarify an idea. Repetition is pervasive in the song and is purposeful. It is a pedagogical device that oral artists use to capture the attention of their audiences, and a feature of poetry and song that creates artistic quality.

The title phrase *Yan Uwa* recurs constantly. This repetition is, first, a call for unity and fraternity among Nigeriens; it also signals the importance of the message and, being euphonious, contributes to the musicality of the song. A four-line stanza also recurs and gives the song its structure:

Sarkin baiwa Allah shiryamu
Kayi mana zuciya sahiha mai ƙarfi
Son da uwaye suke yi mana mu dîya koma bamu kwainataba
Muyi daidai gwargwado

The Giver of all gifts, God, guide us
Grant us a sound and strong heart
The love that mothers bear for us, their children, though we cannot match it
Let us respond as best we can

The opening occurrence of these lines foreshadows the reason why love should be shown to parents, while the closing occurrence justifies it, so that the stanza frames the song and gives it a circular structure. The repetition of *Allah* likewise highlights the centrality of faith for the singers. Beyond the repetition of words and phrases, the song also repeats vowel and consonant sounds, which contributes to its stylistic quality, although a systematic phonological analysis lies beyond the scope of this article.

The Title Phrase "Yan Uwa": Solidarity and Empowerment

Performed by a band of young women, "Yan Uwa" carries the precepts of feminism. The band implicitly

addresses its Nigerien sisters, urging them to wake up and to participate in nation-building. Hausa society, like most African societies, is patriarchal in nature, and women's status is often less considered. By using the phrase *Yan Uwa*, however, Yan Matan dan Gudau urges women to be united and to act in solidarity. The singers recognise that the empowerment of women is a necessity if patriarchal attitudes are to be confronted, and they therefore insist on the mother's role and contribution to the emancipation and development of the community. The call to solidarity is made more precise through the phrase *Yan uwa, mazaje da mata*, which invites Hausa people, men above all, to regard women as sisters and companions. Oseni Taiwo (2010, p. 229) captures the paradox: although the patriarchal system in Africa cannot be denied, the African woman possesses the power that binds society together.

In its broader sense, *Yan Uwa* designates those bound by family ties or blood relationship. Within a family, each member calls the others *dan uwa* (brother), the singular of *Yan Uwa*; those who share both parents, or only a mother, call one another *Yan Uwa*, as do those who share only a father. In every dimension of the phrase the term *uwa* (mother) is at the centre, which attests to the power and significance of the mother in Hausa society. By contrast, replacing *uwa* with *uba* (father) within the phrase may connote enmity and disunity. The title thus exemplifies a powerful use of language by the band to create meaning and style.

In conclusion, this study has shown how oral literature promotes socio-cultural and moral values in Hausa society. Read as a moral song, "Yan Uwa" serves for moral and religious instruction. It places parenting at the centre, and in particular the Motherist vision of the mother's role, which requires personal qualities such as love, sacrifice, patience, commitment and care. The analysis has clarified the depth of the song's message on respect for parents and its rewards in this world and in the hereafter. It has also identified the literary devices, namely symbolism, metaphor, repetition and sound patterning, through which the singers convey this message, and the way in which the title phrase *Yan Uwa* fuses solidarity, kinship and the empowerment of women. The empowerment of women is promoted throughout the song through its emphasis on their contributions and roles in society.

Two limitations should be noted. The study rests on a single song and on a translated text, so its findings cannot be generalised to Hausa women's oral performance as a whole. Future research could compare "Yan Uwa" with other songs by women's bands and with songs performed by men, and could examine audience reception. The study nonetheless supports Anthonia's (2016, p. 164) warning that, if Africa wishes to remain identifiable as a people, its oral forms, including myths, tales, legends, proverbs, riddles and oral songs, must be preserved.

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Appendix: Hausa Transcription and English Translation of "Yan Uwa"

The song is divided into numbered stanzas for ease of reference. Verse lines are separated by slashes. Instrumental interludes (*kidî*) and pauses (*hutu*) are not reproduced.

Stanza 1

Yan uwa / Yan uwa mazaje da mata / kanana da manya muna gaida kowa

Brothers and sisters / Brothers and sisters, men and women / young and old, we greet you all

Stanza 2

Gyara huwallazi mai sama sarki / Sarkin baiwa Allah shiryamu / Kayi mana zuciya sahiha mai karfi / Son da uwaye suke yi mana mu dîya / Koma bamu kwainataba muyi daidai gwargwado

Praise be to God, the Sovereign on High / The Giver of all gifts, God, guide us / Grant us a sound and strong heart / The love that mothers bear for us, their children / Even if we cannot match it, let us respond as best we can

Stanza 3

Yan uwa / Mu duka haihuwarmu a kai muka girma / In mun jingina misali na wajan uwa

Brothers and sisters / We were all born and raised / Let us take the example of our mothers

Stanza 4

Wata guda guda so tara daidai / Nan ga cikin uwa muna jujjuyawa / Ranar nakuda tazo ranar daga / Ranar murkashi / Sannan zata fara Allah mai komai / Shi dai yasan komai / Shi yasan iya wuyar nan da uwa tasha / Dakyar cikin wuyar nan muka hwado

Nine full months, month after month / We turn and move inside our mother's womb / Until the day of labour comes, the day of challenge / The day of agony, being between life and death / Then it begins; God, Master of all things / He alone knows everything / He alone knows the extent of the hardship the mother has endured / With great difficulty, through this ordeal, we come into the world

Stanza 5

An yanke cibiyar mu an yi mana wanka / An sa da cikin zane an kaiwa uwa, ta rungumashi / Ko data ganshi duk wuya ta mance ta kaico

Our umbilical cord is cut and we are bathed / The child is wrapped in cloth and handed to the mother, who embraces him / At the sight of the child she forgets all her suffering; oh, our mothers, how I pity you!

Stanza 6

Yan uwa / Itace zata bashi nono tayi goyo / Nan ga jikinta zai yi kashi da fitsari / Bata tsantsaninshi sai dai taji dadî / In kuka yake tana jijjigashi tana yimishi tawai

Brothers and sisters / She is the one who breastfeeds the child and carries it on her back / The child soils her body with excrement and urine / She is never saddened by it; she rejoices instead / When the child cries, she rocks and soothes it with lullabies

Stanza 7

Allah na Allah sarki / Allah ka raya / Allah ka barmin / Allah ka barmini da ko dîyata

My God, O God the King / O God, let this child grow / O God, keep him for me / O God, keep for me my child, whether son or daughter

Stanza 8

Uwa ba kashin yadawa ba / Uba ba kashin yadawa ba / Uwaye muzan girmamasu / Suke tattalin dîya har su girma / Suyi mana horo mu zam masalan kwarai / Masu nagarta da tarbiyar girma / Dan haka yân uwa / Kowa yabi uwashi kowa yabi ubanshi / Bai zam lahani ba / Komai sunka sa mu kar muyi wani jinkiri / In sun gargaɗemu kar muyi wani shakku / In mun gyara ransu yayi musu dadî

A mother is not a bone to be thrown away / Nor is a father / Mothers deserve our respect / They cherish and look after their children until they grow up / They discipline us so that we become exemplary / People of good character and upbringing / Therefore, brothers and sisters / Let everyone follow his mother, let everyone follow his father / It will do no harm / Whatever they ask of us, let us not delay / When they advise us, let us not hesitate / When we make them happy, they are at ease

Stanza 9

Tun nan duniya muna samun tsira / Duk sha ani na duniya yai mana dadî / Albarka ta zanki shiɗa a cikin kasa / Alheri ya shiɗa sharri ya kaura / Dan haka yân uwa kullum roko muke wurin Allah sarki

Already in this world we shall find safety / All our worldly affairs will turn out well / God's blessing will spread throughout the land / Goodness will flourish and evil will depart / Therefore, brothers and sisters, let us always pray to God the King

Stanza 10 (closing refrain)

Sarkin baiwa Allah shiryamu / Kayi mana zuciya sahiha mai karfi / Son da uwaye suke yi mana mu dîya koma bamu kwainataba / Muyi daidai gwargwado

The Giver of all gifts, God, guide us / Grant us a sound and strong heart / The love that mothers bear for us, their children, though we cannot match it / Let us respond as best we can