

*Case Study***Àgó: A Feminine Purification Rite in Ò .wò, Oṅdó State, South-West, Nigeria*****Deborah Bamidele Arowosegbe, PhD***Department of Linguistics and Languages,
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Doi: 10.19044/llc.v11no2a2

<http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/llc.v11no2a2>

Submitted: 08 March 2024

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Accepted: 26 June 2024

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Published: 31 October 2024

OPEN ACCESS

Abstract

In Yorùbá land, raising a child is the continuation of giving birth to the child; a large part of the child's early training is the mother's direct responsibility. Every woman wants her child to prosper to make the father and the entire family proud. A woman does anything she can to see that she achieves this role. This study, therefore, describes the performance of Àgó; a feminine purification rite in Òwò, Oṅdó State, South-West Nigeria to depict how Òwò women use the rite to save the lives of their children and make them prosper in life. The paper adopts womanist theory (the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval and self-assertion in positive cultural ways) and sociology of literature (an attempt to understand the inter-relationship between literature and society) for the work. Findings show that mothers who give birth to children with the same sex three consecutive times perform Àgó. The confinement given to mothers alone emanates from the societal notion that it has assigned that role to women. In this specific cultural setting, women seem to play a role in caring for their children's lives through the performance of the rite, in which, sometimes also the other parent is present. Furthermore, the Àgó rite appears as a collective event, in which the entire community is involved.

Keywords: divinity, mother, prayer, purification-rite, waist**Introduction**

The importance of children cannot be over-emphasized. Children are of great value to parents, to the community and to the nation at large. They are the makers of man. Children are living messages sent to a time when parents will not see. Parents must care about the world of their children and

grandchildren. Apart from parents, a community must protect the child, feed it, bring it up, educate it and in many other ways, incorporate it into the wider community (Mbiti, 1969). A mother carries her child on her back most of the time and breastfeeds the child anywhere. This direct contact between a mother and her child gives the child a deep psychological sense of security (Mbiti, 1969). McIntosh (2010) asserts that the relationship between a mother and her children in Yorùbá society is the most important bond. According to her, a mother gives birth to children, cares for them physically, and in many cases works to earn the money that helps to support and educate them. In addition to this, she teaches her children good ethical values and proper behavior, socializing them into Yorùbá patterns. McIntosh believes that the ties between a woman and her children may have been powerful in polygamous families, where each wife hoped to see her offspring receive special favor from their father. The role and place of women in society are significant. A woman is the mother of all humankind; she embodies respect. The sufferings she endures before she can give birth to a child and what she encounters before the child grows to increase her zeal for the child. Akíntúndé (2005) adds that Yorùbá of Nigeria regard mother as gold when they say ‘iyá ni wúrà’ (mother is gold) which implies that mothers are to be adored. Ilésanmí (2009) depicts the place and role of women in Yorùbá society. In his work, one of his characters (Ewégbèmí) says:

Àwọn obinrin ló bí wa.	Women give birth to us
Àwọn ni ò yọ wá jùnú nínú oyún.	They do not abort our pregnancy
Àwọn ló mọ ìrora ìbí.	They know the sufferings of childbearing
Àwọn la ñ fi ìkúnlẹ̀ abiyamọ̀ bẹ̀.	We implore labor pain to beg them
Àwọn ló fún wa lóyàn.	They breastfeed us
Àwọn ló farada ìjyà itójú ọmọ.	They endure the sufferings of child-caring
Torí ọmọ, wọn kì í lójú oorun lóru.	They do not sleep at night because of children

Among the different types of positive power, Adéjùmò (2002) vested in women are ẹwà (beauty), ọmú (breast), and ìkúnlẹ̀ abiyamọ̀ (labour pain) which she calls ‘èrù jẹ̀jẹ̀ tí í bọmọ̀ lẹ̀rù’ (a veritable powerful force that makes men tremble). Adéjùmò (2002) regards woman as ‘protection’ in one of her poems titled “Ààbò” (protection), she says:

Abo là bá kúkú máa pè láàbò.	It is better to call women ‘protection’
Ààbò tí íbo ọkọ̀ lójó̀ ipónjù.	One that protects the husband in a day of trouble
Ààbò tí í bọmọ̀ lójó̀ isòro.	One that protects children on difficult days

Ààbò in the above excerpt denotes protection, defence, shield, cover, guard and support. It thus rather aptly describes the role and place of women concerning the safety of their men. It is not that man does nothing, but in a binary world, man and woman complement each other. Yorùbá believes that

if any of the power vested in a woman is used to bless anybody, such person shall be blessed and if it is used otherwise, on evildoers, such evildoers will experience the curse.

Yorùbá women always treat with great concern, matters concerning their children. They can go to incredible lengths sometimes to see that their children prosper in life with the hope that the children will make the father and the community at large proud. The community believes that a prosperous child belongs to the father while the mother carries the cross of wretched ones. Women believe that prosperous children will take care of them when they are old; they do all they can to stop anything that can shatter their hopes for their children. Based on this belief of Yorùbá women, this paper tends to describe the performance of the *Àgó rite* in Òwò¹ Local Government Area of Oñdó State using womanist theory and sociology of literature, to investigate the part women play therein in saving the lives of their children and making them prosper.

To better describe *Àgó*, the feminine purification rite in Òwò and present all the contours of the ceremony, first the history of the concept of *Àgó* is tackled, then the preparation of *Àgó*, and the performance of *Àgó* is addressed. In the process, how *Àgó*, is performed on the dead is described, and the role of other family members in *Àgó* is shown. Since *Àgó* has great importance in Yorùbá Society and plays a great role in protecting and blessing children, at last the advantages of performing *Àgó*, and the impacts of *Àgó* on women are demonstrated.

Literature Review of the Rites

There has been much work on rites. Mbiti, (1969) works on the importance of initiation of the young and asserts that initiation rites prepare young people for matters of sexual life, marriage, procreation, and family responsibilities. The significance of the rites is to introduce the candidates to adult life and enable them to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. Adéoyè (1979) depicts that Yorùbá performs rites for special children like *Dàda* (children with knots in the hair), and *Òní* (children that cry day and night) to make them prosper. Adéoyè (1979) explains that the *Olómokò* rite is associated with marriage in Yorùbá land. Ayélàágbé (1981) asserts that chiefs in Ìlá-Òràngún perform *Ìkègbé* rite, which is a male-participant rite, after the demise of any of them. Ògúndèjì (2001) asserts that every traditional festival in Yorùbá land is associated with various religious rites. He explains that the performance of Yorùbá traditional rites, apart from referring to myths, enables peace to reign in the communities where they perform them. They also perform them to ward off calamities from the community.

Ilésanmí (2013) ascertains that there are some family or sub-ethnic rituals and taboos that dehumanize women, which Yorùbá women have to pass through. He explains that the rituals and taboos relate to the nature of food permitted to a woman who has just delivered a baby, the place she can live in, the dress she can wear, the surrounding atmosphere of her sleeping place for the first seven, eight or nine days after she has delivered her baby. Alimi-Adéníran (2021) depicts Orò Ìrìlé as a sacred process carried out for admitting a new member into the Ògbóni Fraternity cult. According to him, initiation rites into Ògbóni symbolize physical and spiritual transformations of members not only within the cult but in the larger community as well.

The works of these researchers enable one to infer that there are various rites in Yorùbá land; they attach each of the rites to customs like marriage, naming or burial. The reason behind the performance of the various rites is to avert evil and ensure that peace reigns in society. Observation shows that there is not enough research work on rites in Oñdó State and none of the rites discusses seems to talk about child protection. The present work, therefore, describes the performance of Àgó in Òwò to depict the part women play in protecting and blessing their children.

Theoretical Framework

Womanist Theory

The womanist theory and the sociology of literature are adopted for this work. The womanist theory is based on the culture and tradition of Africans. Family matters are paramount to African women; family is an important pillar that holds the development of society. African women cherish their role as home-makers as well as their status of mother or potential mother (Kòláwòlé, 1997). The husband is regarded as the head of every family. Mohamed (2019) ascertains that the world has been so far governed by binary and dichotomous thinking based on a power/knowledge constellation and that the view of the 'other' has been primarily hierarchical and ideologically political. Womanist theory wants meaningful union among black women and black men and black children. They believe that society denies women certain rights; hence women have to search for these rights and retrieve them, Women should reject the constraints imposed on them by culture, and they should fight for their rights in a way that will make meaningful progress and advancement possible for them. The theory regards men and women as fellow workers to find solutions to problems of society. Concisely, womanist theory enables women to express their thoughts, and opinions and be able to retrieve their rights in positive cultural ways.

Since the womanist theory is woman-centred and Àgó in Òwò Local Government Area of Oñdó State is also a woman-related rite, it is hoped that the theory would be useful in the description of the rite to determine the place

and role of women in saving lives of their children and making them prosper in life.

Sociology of Literature

Sociology of literature is a subfield of the sociology of culture. It studies the social production of literature and its social implications. Mme de Stael and Hippolyte Taine originated the term 'sociology of literature' in the 19th century in France. It is an attempt to understand the inter-relationship between literature and society. It postulates that a work of art does not exist in isolation and should not be studied as such. This is because works of art are not independent of their society. Literary artists are not independent of their society; their personality is influenced by many socio-political and economic factors (Adébòwálé, 2010).

Sociology of literature is seen as examining literature in the cultural, economic and political context in which it is written or received. It analyzes the relationships between the artist and society. It sees the relationship among a work of art, the artist, and society as one of constant interaction, and each one affects and is affected by the other.

Since traditional rite is regarded as the property of society, it is assumed that the sociology of literature used in this study will go a long way in determining the role of women in protecting their children as depicted in *Àgó* in *Òwò*.

History of the Concept of Àgó

Àgó is a purification rite performed by mothers who give birth to children of the same sex three consecutive times. It is to save the lives of children in that category. Research shows that there was a time when the people of *Òwò* noticed that mothers who gave birth to the same sex for three consecutive times, they lost children at their tender age, and those that were alive did not prosper. The people through their king named *Àtúbà* inquired from *Abàlùfàn* divinity what they could do to avert the premature death and failure in the lives of such children. As pointed out by Ilésanmí (2004), Yorùbá worships their powerful ancestors as *Òrìṣà* (deities) and some natural forces, in which they claim power resides. He explains that the community has its specific deity, which they worship locally, but a popularized deity may have more advocates. There is no universally worshipped deity. The *Òrìṣà* worshipped by the ruler is always given the highest consideration in his domain. Such *Òrìṣà* is *Abàlùfàn*, who is worshipped by the ruler of the *Òwò* community. The divinity (*Abàlùfàn*) told the people to perform a rite whereby the parts of the female body involved in labor would be used to pray for seven days for every woman that gave birth to female children, for three consecutive times and nine days for a mother of male children. After the prayer, the evil is averted; the people thus continue to perform the rite for every affected mother whether living or dead. At times, someone who was supposed to perform this

rite might fail to perform it before her death. Whatever might be the woman's reason for the non-performance of the rite before her demise; neither the woman nor her children are exonerated from its repercussion. After her death, the rite is performed on her corpse before it is buried to avert the evil on her children since the evil can no longer be averted on the dead.

The belief of the people of the community where *Àgó* is performed is that if the rite is not performed for the deceased, her children will not prosper in life, and they may even die prematurely. It is note worthing, why *Abàlùfàn* asked women to perform the rite and not both parents? Children are brought to life through the union of both parents, after all. Husband and wife should work together to bring the children up. However, when one examines the Yorùbá notion of women as explained earlier, one would not be surprised if *Abàlùfàn* should assign such work to women. Ilésanmí, (2004) asserts that Yorùbá culture has always assigned roles to won as well as to men; roles which complement each other based on the reality of the biological differences between men and women. Aasita (2014) confirms this notion when he says that every society, on its own, has repeatedly stated how women should look or the role they should play. He concludes that irrespective of the culture, women have followed these rules and abided by them to get accepted into society. However, a womanist would regard this rite as one of the rites Ilésanmí (2013) refers to as family rituals that dehumanize women in Yorùbá land.

The rite takes its name from the part of the female body involved in labor and delivery, which is the 'waist'. 'Waist' is *Àgó* in *Òwò* dialect and this rite is called *Àgó Rite or Àgó*. It is believed that every human comes to this world through a woman (whether by normal delivery or by caesarean section) and sucks at a woman's breast. It is the belief of this community (like other Yorùbá people) that if a woman uses her private part, breasts, and other parts of the body involved in labor to curse any child, the curse will surely come to pass. If any of those areas are used to bless any child, such child shall be blessed. Therefore, a woman's waist is used to bless children to make them prosper in *Àgó* rite/ *Àgó*. *Àgó* affects all mothers of *Òwò* origin; married within *Òwò* and mothers connected with *Òwò* by marriage but excludes *Òwò* women married in any of the towns where *Àgó* is not recognized; it is believed in Yorùbá land that women belong to their husbands' homes.

Preparation for *Àgó*

Whoever wants to perform the *Àgó* rite needs not to tell anybody before the time except her immediate family members: her husband and her children (if children are grown-ups). This conforms to the social aspect of the Yorùbá people. Yorùbá believes in secrecy when it comes to the spiritual aspect of their lives. The people of this community believe that they should

perform purification rites secretly to avoid evildoers that may debar the efficacy of the prayer. Since they cannot identify such evildoers, they have to keep the rite away from the public. The woman concerned provides the items for the rite, which include *òbẹ* (knife), *ìgbálẹ̀* (broom), *ìkòkò* (pot), *şibi* (spoon), *ìgbá* (calabash), and *ike/péèlì rọ̀bà* (rubber bowl/pail). She also provides *ìgbín* (snail), *ení* (mat), *omọ-odó àti iyá rẹ̀* (mortar and pestle), *àpótí* (stool), *ẹja gbígbe* (dried fish) and *itan ẹtu gbígbe* (dried meat) (antelope). In addition, she provides *àgbéḅò adiyẹ* (a hen) for a female child, *òbúko* (billy goat) for a male child, *gálóṣùnù epo pupa* (a gallon of red oil) and *ìşu mėsán-án* (nine tubers of yam). All items mentioned above should be double. In addition to the above items are kola nuts (seven per day for female children and nine per day for male children). Other provisions include neck beads (one), *aşo òfi*² (the Yorùbá type of weaving materials) (one), *tòkè-tilẹ̀ funfun kan* (a complete Yorùbá female dress of white material), *àtùpà* (local lantern) (one), *omi* (water) (to be fetched every day). There is also *owó* (money) and *yàrá kan* (a room) that the woman uses as a venue for the rite. The room may belong to *Alágòó* (the woman on whom *Àgó* is performed), her husband, her children, or any of her relations. ‘A sharp knife cannot make its handle’ says a Yoruba adage; another woman has to be involved. Therefore, there is a woman called *Ìyá Alágòó* (literally: the mother of *Alágòó*, connoting the woman performing *Àgó* for another woman) who is ready to perform the rite on the mother who is called *Alágòó* (the owner of the waist). Every item for the rite must be ready before choosing a date for the rite. *Ìyá alágòó* and *Alágòó* are not related. *Ìyá Alágòó* performs the rite on payment. For a woman to qualify as *Ìyá Alágòó*, she must be a native of *Ọ̀wọ̀* who willingly takes up the post and must have undergone that type of rite. *Abàlùfàn* divinity may choose *Ìyá Alágòó* through divination since it is the divinity that instructed the people of this community through their king (*Àtìbà*) to perform the rite. *Ìyá Alágòó* collects her entitlement for the work done.

Performance of *Àgó*

Before the commencement of the rite, *Ìyá Alágòó* divides the items provided into two equal parts, and takes one part home leaving the other part for the performance of the rite. Only items for the rite are allowed in the room where *Alágòó* stays. A hole is dug in the room where *Alágòó* keeps her leftover food including water. This belongs to *Abàlùfàn* divinity. Since nothing is allowed to be taken out of the room until the end of the rite, the cooked food has to be kept neatly, hence; it is kept in the hole. There must be light in the room at all times. In the old days, they used local lanterns (*àtùpà*). Currently, kerosene lanterns, rechargeable lanterns or electric lights may be used. The money provided by *Alágòó* belongs to *Ìyá Alágòó*. It serves as her

transport fare back and forth to her house. *Ìyá Alágòó* comes once a day, which is usually in the morning to perform the rite but comes twice on the last day morning and evening for the closure of the rite.

Starting from the first day, *Alágòó* ties *aṣo òfi* (wrapper) specifically woven on her chest; but recent performance reveals that *Alágòó* now ties the wrapper to her waist and puts on any blouse to cover the upper part of her body. This is in line with the change in Yorùbá culture; culture is dynamic; it changes with time. Gone were the days when Yorùbá people performed oral literature in the nude or half-naked. *Alágòó* wears beads and sits on a stool. *Ìyá Alágòó* kneels on her left leg for female children or her right leg for male children. The use of the right leg by *Ìyá Alágòó* emanates from the societal belief that the right leg belongs to the father while the left leg belongs to the mother (Dáramọ́lá and Jéjé, 2005). She places each of the items for the rite on the waist of *Alágòó*, one after the other, and prays for her, where *Ìyá Alágòó* prays for *Alágòó* who has female children. She may pray like this:

<i>Ayò orí ọmà ẹ é a dúbàjẹ.</i>	Your joy for your children will know no bounds
<i>Wé a ṣonkún nórí ọmà ẹ.</i>	You will not weep over your children
<i>Wa jèrè ọmà ẹ</i>	You will reap the fruit of your labor upon your children
<i>Wé a rúbàjẹ nórí ọmà ẹ.</i>	You will never know the sorrow of your children
<i>Ọhọn ọmà ẹ á ṣoriire.</i>	Your children will prosper in life
<i>Ọhọn ọmà ẹ é a rúbàjẹ.</i>	Your children will know no sorrow in life
<i>Ọhọn ọmà ẹ á wúlò hún ẹ.</i>	Your children will be useful to you et ce te ra while <i>Alágòó</i> continues to say <i>Àtṣe</i> (Amen).

This type of prayer continues for seven or nine days depending on the sex of the children and this is the major part of the rite. The belief is that whatever prayer is said by *Ìyá Alágòó* (who has the backup from *Abàlùfàn*) will surely be answered. Like other Yorùbá communities, *Ọwò* people believe that a female has seven pairs of ribs while the male has nine pairs of ribs, although there is no factual evidence for this. This belief brings about the difference in the number of days for the performance of the rite for males and females.

The major food during *Àgó* includes *iyán* (pounded yam) and *àṣaró* (yam porridge) since only yam is provided for the rite (the two types of food are prepared from yam). *Iyán* is the most cherished food in this community, like in many parts of Yorùbá land. Whatever food is prepared is taken from half of the raw food items left behind by *Ìyá Alágòó*. She can also partake in the cooked food (if the food is prepared before she leaves for her house); she either eats it at the venue or takes it home.

Ìyá Alágòó comes to *Alágòó*'s house twice on the last day of the rite as said earlier. After the morning session on the last day, *Alágòó* washes the

aṣo òfi to have it dried before the evening prayer. Now that *Alágòó* has become purified, she puts on the only Yorùbá complete female dress (of white material) which is among the items supplies for the rite. On her second arrival, *Ìyá Alágòó* covers *Alágòó* with the *aṣo òfi* to debar *Alágòó* from watching whatever she does in that room. *Ìyá Alágòó* removes all the remnant food in the hole and throws it away. One wonders why is this aspect of the rite hidden from the woman who bought materials for the rite, stays in a room for seven or nine days, has no freedom of movement and eats whatever food is prepared for her? She does all these in the name of culture to see that her children prosper in life. Upon all these, she is not opportune to witness all the steps taken in the performance of the purification rite. A womanist would see this act as part of the constraints put upon women by culture. After this, *Ìyá Alágòó* removes the *aṣo òfi*; this marks the end of *Àgó* for the living. On the next market day after the rite, *Alágòó*, dressed in her best attire, goes to the market to distribute kola nuts to market women and other well-wishers as a sign of joy and gratitude for the successful completion of *Àgó*. While distributing kola nuts, *Alágòó* says:

Obì àgó ẹ̀ rẹ̀ yí o *This is kola nut to mark Àgó performance*
Yèmi gbà o. *My mother (a sign of respect), takes this*

The women collect the kola nuts and pray thus:

Ee, wa jèrè ọ̀ma ẹ̀ nẹ̀ẹ̀ o. *You will reap the fruit of your labor upon the children*
Wé ní ràrìnò nórí ọ̀mà ẹ̀. *You will not labor in vain on your children*
Àduà ẹ̀ á gbà o. *Your prayer will be answered*

This marks the end of *Àgó* for the *Alágòó*.

Performance of *Àgó* on the Dead

Àgó for the dead lasts one day. Every item provided for the rite is placed on the waist of the corpse, one after the other while praying for the children. At times, this rite may come up later in the life of the children, whenever the need arises. For instance, any of the children after the death of their mother may be having problems like becoming sick, living a wretched life or being unable to get a life partner. The child may be advised by an elderly person who is aware of the mother's inability to perform *Àgó* during her lifetime to do so on behalf of their mother. Such a child may even be directed to do so by an Ifá priest³ on consultation. When this occurs, the rite is performed on *aṣo òfi* provided for the purpose. *Ìyá Alágòó* directs her prayers to the children alone, since the mother who is supposed to partake in the prayer is no longer alive.

The Role of Other Family Members in Àgó

Although, many members of *Alágòó*'s family may not have prior knowledge of the performance of the rite as said earlier, yet none of them takes offence. Every member of the community is aware of the fact that the rite is a private arrangement within the immediate family, that is; *Alágòó*, her husband and the children, so, she does not need to inform other people nor is it a taboo to do so. The children and the husband may be the organizers and the sponsors (if the children are grown-ups and buoyant enough). Therefore, any member of *Alágòó*'s family, especially a female member that is opportune to be there while *Àgó* is in progress, never feel offended for not informing her. She may even contribute her quota to the financial aspect of the rite (as they still need money to buy stew ingredients) or help in the preparation of food. Males may help in fetching water for the rite (water is fetched daily). The pail of water is put by the entrance of the room or in a conspicuous place for *Alágòó* to see since it is regarded as a taboo for other people except *Ìyá Alágòó* to enter the room where *Àgó* is being performed. Food is prepared every day but not in large quantities to make the foodstuff last for the entire period of the rite. The food is distributed within the premises of the venue for the rite.

Advantages of Performing Àgó

Women and other members of the society where *Àgó* is performed always boast of the efficacy and authenticity of the rite. According to the members of the community, the performance of *Àgó* gives at least 90 per cent protection to the mother and their children. They are fond of the rite because they do not want to lose their children; they want them to prosper; prosperous children are the ego of a community. In addition to this, the rite entails holiness and cleanliness in all areas: food, clothing, menstruation and personal hygiene. *Ìyá Alágòó* also enriches her purse and store. Even the weavers of *aşò òfi* collect wages for the work done.

Impacts of Àgó on Women

Àgó is expensive, time-consuming and stressful. Women spend a lot of money buying materials for the rite. She has to plan so that her work does not suffer, for instance, she has to perform the rite when she has less farm work. Today, government workers have to wait until their holiday period or they take a leave of absence from their work. *Àgó* is stressful because *Alágòó* has to confine herself to a room, with only a wrapper tied to her chest or waist for a period of seven to nine days depending on the sex of the children on whose behalf the rite is performed. The preparation of *aşò òfi*

takes time and does not come cheap; it is not what one can easily buy in the market. Weavers of this type of cloth are not easy to come by because of the rules and regulations governing its weaving. Since *Alágòò* has to be holy and clean throughout her rite, everything to be used has to remain holy; therefore, the weaver has to consecrate herself to produce pure clothes to be used by *Alágòò*. Women have to overcome all the obstacles to see that their children live, and they do not see this as a liability. A womanist would commend the efforts of these women for the part they play to see that their children prosper in life.

Now, one needs to ask why should women be made scapegoats? One thinks that both parents should be made to suffer for the prosperity of their children, not for the father to take the financial aspect alone. It is even revealed that only a few husbands are financially connected. The confinement given to mothers alone is based on the societal notion that it has assigned that role to women as noticed in a Yorùbá proverb thus:

‘Ìyá ló ni ojú tó sòro lórí omọ, baba ló ni ojú ayẹyẹ’. The mother bears the cross on those hard days for the child while the father presides on festive days.

Ilésanmí (2013) confirms the responsibility of women when he says that Yorùbá women rejoice at experiencing childbirth and desire the joy of motherhood, nursing and nurturing children and watching them develop and prosper. They believe that giving birth to children is just the beginning of motherhood. The value that the traditional Yorùbá woman places on a child leads her to cherish her child and care for it to maturity. The paper considers such act as part of the constraints culture imposes on women, yet women take joy in doing it. Although, tradition is gradually going moribund, nevertheless, it is high time society changed its perception of women. The fact that women can go to any length to ensure the safety of their children does not exonerate fathers from taking active parts to save the lives of the same children. The father who is to preside on festive days should also bear cross on hard days.

Conclusion

The performance of *Ágò* as a purification rite in Òwò, Ònḍó State of Nigeria has been described in the present work. Mothers who give birth to children with the same sex for three consecutive times perform the rite. During the rite, *Ìyá Alágòò* prays for *Alágòò* to make her children prosper in life. The prayer for the dead lasts one day, and the prayer is for the children alone since the mother who should have been a partaker is no longer alive. Prayer is the most important part of the rite. Other members of *Alágòò*'s family can only help in the preparation of food and fetching of water. *Ágò* is

stressful, the woman confines herself in a room with only a wrapper tied to her waist or chest for the entire period *Àgó* lasts. Despite these sufferings, she cannot witness the activities marking the closure of the rite. Although this paper does not discuss the sufferings a woman is subjected to, after all, it is to make her children prosper in life, it concerns about the exoneration of the husband from the same sufferings. According to Rehman and Saeed (2016), suffering is regarded as an essential part of human existence; every man is born to suffer in this world, more so when it makes one's children prosper in life. Therefore, the father is expected to take an active part in the performance of the rite. The community should not exonerate the father who presides on festive days from all the sufferings, remembering that children belong to the husband, wife and society. The rite is approximately a panacea to the sudden death of children and their failure in life. The place and role of children in society cannot be overemphasized; they are the leaders of tomorrow; and whatever can bring about their premature death should be averted.

Women are, therefore, commended for the part they play in showing themselves as mothers, who would not like to see any of their children suffer either old or young. The African woman cherishes her role as a homemaker as well as her status as a mother or a potential mother. She does not necessarily see these roles as liabilities (Kòláwòlé, 1997). In this specific cultural setting, women seem to play a role in caring for their children's lives through the performance of the rite, in which, sometimes also the other parent is present. Furthermore, the *Àgó* rite appears as a collective event, in which the entire community is involved.

Declarations:

Conflict of Interest: The author reported no conflict of interest.

Data Availability: All data are included in the content of the paper.

Funding Statement: The author did not obtain any funding for this research.

Additional information: No additional information is available for this paper.

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