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'For Her Price is Far above Rubies': Exploring Motherhood As an Archetype in Yoruba and Hebrew Proverbs

Owólọlá Àjúlékún
Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University,
Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria
ajulekunowolola@gmail.com

&

Francis Olufemi Olatokunbo
Lagos State University of Science and Technology,
Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria
femiolatokunbo@gmail.com

Abstract

Despite the centrality of motherhood in African and biblical worldviews, scholarly engagement with its symbolic and philosophical representations across cultures remains relatively underexplored. The study, therefore, interrogates the cultural constructions and ideological representations of motherhood in Hebrew and Yoruba proverbial traditions. Data were purposively selected from Yoruba proverbs and the biblical text of Proverbs 31:10-30. Anchored in Catherine Acholonu's Motherist theory and employing qualitative content analysis, the study examines how both traditions encode the ethics, aesthetics, and social philosophy of motherhood. The findings reveal the universality of proverbial expressions in expressing the moral and socio-cultural values associated with mothers. Both the Hebrew and Yoruba traditions valorise the mother as a virtuous, industrious and self-sacrificing figure whose wisdom and resilience are central to familial survival and communal stability. The persona in Proverbs 31 finds her parallel in the archetypal African mother who embodies love, tolerance and cooperation in contrast to the confrontational ethos of radical feminism. Like her African counterpart, she achieves empowerment not through antagonism but through

industriousness, moral fortitude and spiritual agency. The study concludes that Motherism offers a transformative paradigm that transcends gender polemics by proposing a humanistic, inclusive, and communitarian model of gender relations grounded in complementarity, mutual respect, and social harmony.
Keywords: Archetype, motherism, motherhood, proverbs, virtuous woman

Introduction

Gender relations have long occupied a central place in the intellectual and cultural discourses of human societies. As a socio-cultural construct, gender organises roles, responsibilities and expectations, thereby shaping the relational dynamics between men and women. This distribution of roles frequently manifests in boy-girl, man-woman and husband-wife binaries that often generate tensions and struggles within the social fabric. At the root of these struggles lies, on the one hand, men's determination to sustain their assumed socio-cultural superiority, and on the other, women's persistent drive to reposition and reassert themselves within public and private spheres. Nonetheless, these struggles vary, dictated by the differences in perspectives across cultural contexts. What may be perceived as female subjugation in one society may constitute an accepted norm in another. In societies where women recognise themselves as marginalised, they often respond by raising collective consciousness and initiating deliberate moves towards self-definition and visibility. To achieve this, women have devised multiple strategies, subtle, conciliatory, radical and confrontational, aimed at dismantling entrenched systems of domination, or what Jones (2000) metaphorically describes as the "patriarchal dragons" (14).

Motherhood has become one of the subtle yet powerful strategies women deploy in Yoruba and Hebrew traditions. Motherhood is revered as a sacred universal institution. Like the Hebrew women, indigenous Yoruba women do not see motherhood as a burden or a

demeaning role; rather, they regard it as a dignified status that can be used strategically to negotiate gender equality and promote social harmony. In the Yoruba worldview, motherhood is elevated beyond its biological dimension to encompass moral authority, spiritual guardianship, and communal responsibility. This symbolic weight allows Yoruba mothers to wield influence within the socio-political order, transforming what might be perceived as domestic confinement into an avenue for cultural power and continuity. Yoruba women 'value motherhood and mothering which [they] view as a model of human love, peace and fruitful interaction with the environment' (Usoro, 2018:205). Similarly, the Hebrew proverbial tradition venerates the mother as a cornerstone of family and moral life. This is evident in Proverbs 31, which encapsulates the mother as an archetypal figure of virtue, industriousness, and other ethical figures. Far from being marginalised, she embodies an enduring symbol of honour and worth, whose character sustains both household and society.

Motherist consciousness informs the belief in the strength of the family as a strategic tool for women's self-assertion, self-perception and empowerment. Individuals who embrace this consciousness recognise motherhood not as a limitation but as a channel through which they can assert their dignity and agency.

As Ogunyemi (1988) observes, such women reject the notion that empowerment requires "becoming" men or cultivating hostility towards them (65). Rather, they envision motherhood as a platform for constructive engagement, where supportive men are accommodated while reorienting the "abusive" or "violent" men towards valuing women as indispensable partners in societal development. This orientation aligns with Motherism and related African-oriented frameworks such as Womanism, Stiwanism, Snail-Sense Feminism and Nego-Feminism. These Afrocentric frameworks are built on the contention that women need not dismantle patriarchy through antagonism but can negotiate space

within it by strategically mobilising their maternal role. In this regard, the family becomes both the nucleus of social harmony and the arena where the transformative power of motherhood is most vividly enacted.

One of the main channels for expressing this socio-cultural consciousness is the proverb. Proverbs constitute one of humanity's oldest artistic and communicative forms. They are the wisdom of elders expressed in a coded language to embellish, clarify or reinforce communication. As a genre, proverbs transcend cultural boundaries, for every human society possesses a repertoire of wise sayings that encapsulate values, norms and experiences.

In indigenous contexts, proverbs permeate virtually all aspects of life, reflecting historical realities, political dynamics and gender relations. Given that societies depend on the wisdom of elders for survival and cohesion, proverbial sayings become inevitable instruments of cultural continuity. Within the biblical text, the crux of Proverbs 31 lies in its celebration of the uniqueness of motherhood, a theme that resonates with Yoruba cultural sensibilities. Both Hebrew and Yoruba societies, though largely patrilineal, acknowledge the indispensable contributions of women-folks. Female figures such as Esther and Deborah exemplify the capacity of Hebrew women to assert their presence and exercise influence within male-dominated systems. The persona in Proverbs 31, an archetypal mother, stands as a symbolic representation of Hebrew womanhood. She embodies virtues and attributes that find striking parallels in the lived experiences of Yoruba mothers.

The thrust of this study, therefore, is to examine the motherist traits of the woman depicted in Proverbs 31 in comparison with those attributed to Yoruba women. Specifically, the study investigates the dominant motherist poetics and themes encoded in the selected proverbial texts. Guided by Acholonu's Motherism, the study

interrogates the ways in which these proverbs conceptualise motherhood as a cultural metaphor that conveys power, dignity and the pursuit of social equilibrium. In so doing, it also demonstrates that motherhood is a trans-cultural archetype that transcends geographical and historical boundaries while retaining unique inflections within each tradition.

Conceptualising Proverbs as Intertextual Poetic Genres

Proverbs have constituted one of the enduring and engaging genres in human expression. They have attracted sustained scholarly attention from the Classical period to the present, largely because of their universal presence across cultures and epochs. Every culture produces philosophical reflections that crystallise into proverbs, which in turn "serve as social controls for the citizen" (Adeniyi, 2011: 160). In the Jewish tradition, for instance, King Solomon is credited with authoring over three thousand proverbs some nine centuries before Christ. Similarly, in the Classical era, writers like Aristotle had collected and documented proverbs, laying the foundation for paremiography, the systematic study of proverbs, which has since been embraced by scholars from diverse cultural backgrounds. The apparent ubiquity of proverbs, however, has complicated scholarly attempts to arrive at an "appropriate" and "acceptable" definition of the form. This section does not seek to rehearse the long-standing debates on which definitions should be considered appropriate, but rather to engage with critical perspectives on the nature and functions of proverbs, to affirm their status as intertextual poetic genres.

Proverbs exhibit a form of universal intertextuality that transcends cultural and societal boundaries. A wisdom-laden expression in one culture often finds expression in another, though expressed in different linguistic and stylistic forms. What distinguishes these expressions is primarily the style. Style, in this sense, entails the deployment of language at both literal and figurative levels. Even within the same linguistic community, proverbs are dynamic; they

often evolve into new variants. Such derivatives represent extensions or adaptations of the original forms. Raji-Oyelade (1999) aptly terms these adaptations "post-proverbials" (75). This implies that proverbs are not rigid or fixative; instead, they are modified to suit various discourse contexts.

Proverbs are multifunctional. They serve various purposes and perform socio-cultural functions that cut across education, entertainment and enlightenment. Within indigenous societies, proverbs function as didactic, propagandist and satirical tools, which convey socio-cultural realities, recount communal experiences and reinforce arguments. In some cultures, mastery of proverbs is indispensable, and those proficient in their use often command respect and social prestige. Reflecting on their centrality among the Igbo and, by extension, African societies, Achebe (1958) observes that proverbs are "the palm-oil with which words are eaten" (5). This metaphor underscores the role of proverbs in enriching discourse, much like palm oil enhances the flavour of yam. In a similar vein, Finnegan (1970) characterises proverbs as sayings in "more or less fixed form, marked by shortness, sense and salt" (383). Her description highlights the distinctiveness, brevity and profundity of proverbs, while reaffirming their status as a refined poetic genre.

Proverbs also play a significant role in expressing gender relations. They serve as a literary genre through which societies express perspectives on male-female dynamics. As Kerschen (2012) observes, proverbs function as "indicators of attitudes and beliefs" (3). The critic views proverbs as an ideal tool for exploring the historical construction of women's identities in oral traditions. Similarly, Sanauddin (2015) argues that "proverbs are tools working at the service of the dominant groups within a society" (12). While this position highlights the patriarchal tendencies often embedded in proverbial discourse, it risks oversimplification by overlooking the agency of marginalised groups. In many contexts,

women strategically deploy proverbs to contest derogatory portrayals, renegotiate their roles, and subvert oppressive gender ideologies. Such acts of re-appropriation illustrate the positive cultural strategies through which women reclaim voice, assert subjectivity, and redefine their place within societal norms.

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that proverbs are poetic texts embellished with cultural aesthetics and codes, aimed at expressing and addressing prevalent issues in human societies. In African societies, when an unusual situation arises, people often draw upon existing proverbs to create new ones that better capture the situation. Moreover, proverbs can be used to elucidate other proverbs. This gives rise to the concept of meta-proverbiality. This suggests that for every human situation, there exists a corresponding proverbial expression. These proverbs are not used in isolation; rather, they are employed strategically to achieve specific goals.

Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Acholonu's Motherism. Motherism is an Afrocentric theory anchored on the matrix of motherhood as an essential instrument for gender negotiation (Acholonu, 1995). Motherism does not seek equality with men; rather it foregrounds complementarity, relational ethics and nurturant responsibility as culturally grounded principles through which gendered social roles are negotiated, sustained and morally legitimised.

According to Acholonu, a mother is "central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of the survival and unity of the black race through the ages" (110). This implies that mothers are indispensable in human society; they own the womb, a sacred space where lives are nurtured. This often creates a cordial relationship between mothers and their children and ensures a peaceful atmosphere in the family.

Motherists, thus, adopt a nuanced approach and respect the positive aspects of their culture while negotiating their way out of oppressive traditions.

Motherist movements are perceived as non-threatening to the traditional society. This is largely due to their accommodationist tendencies, which foster "continuous mutual understanding, togetherness which create a peaceful harmonious atmosphere or environment" (Yacim, 2015: 192). In other words, a motherist recognises the need to operate within her existing cultural context to effectively re-affirm, re-define and re-assert herself. By doing so, she gains a deeper understanding of the culture and a strategic advantage in her quest for self-empowerment, self-definition and self-proclamation. Motherism, therefore, helps in interrogating motherhood as a shared experience among the Hebrew and Yoruba people, and women in particular.

Analysis/Application

The focus of this section is to explore motherist themes and praxis in Hebrew proverbs, as documented in Proverbs 31:10-30, and Yoruba proverbs. In this regard, the study examines the significance of motherhood in both cultural contexts. The biblical text begins with a rhetorical question: "Who can find a virtuous woman?" This question foregrounds the thematic thrusts of the text; it carries both positive and negative connotations. It implies that many women in Hebrew culture may not be considered virtuous, probably due to their non-conformity to culturally assigned roles and status. Conversely, virtuous women are portrayed as rare and embodying the true essence of motherhood. Their virtuous nature can be attributed to their simplicity, maturity and understanding as depicted in the subsequent verses. A virtuous woman is, thus, one who upholds the societal positive cultural practices.

The writer emphasises that a virtuous woman, particularly a mother, is rare and invaluable, "for her price is far above rubies". In Hebrew and African societies, bride price has significant cultural values; it symbolises an agreement between the groom and bride. It also serves as an avenue for the bride to showcase her uniqueness to her would-be in-laws. Failure to pay the bride price is considered an irresponsible act on the part of the groom. However, the payment is often contingent upon the bride's virginity. A bride who preserves her virginity becomes an embodiment of societal virtue, and her value transcends monetary worth. She becomes a vessel of honour to her husband and society at large. To her husband, she is a precious ornament to be treasured. This is evident in the use of "rubies", a metaphor for royalty, wealth and honour. As rubies are typically worn by kings, the rich and emperors, and are extremely rare and expensive, the virtuous woman (a responsible mother) is treasured, worshipped and idolised. The expression "for her price is far above rubies" shares a metaphorical nexus with the Yoruba saying "Ìyá ni wúrà iyebíye tí a kò lè fowó rà" (Mothers are precious gold whose price defies money). This underscores the socio-cultural significance of mothers, which transcends monetary worth.

The lines, "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her,/so that he shall have no need of spoil./She will do him good and not evil/all the days of her life", have a motherist undertone. From a motherist point of view, the persona is trustworthy and supportive. According to Acholonu, some of the tools of Motherism are "love, tolerance, service, and mutual cooperation of the sexes" (111). According to the critic, a woman must strive to maintain a sense of complementarity in gender relations by supporting her husband in the smooth running of the family and the society at large. The woman in this text gives her husband reasons to be calm even when the latter is away from the family. Her husband has a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction because of the trust he has in her. She is a builder and not a destroyer of the family. She complements her

husband. In other words, she would always get herself involved in acts that would improve the life of her husband. Unlike the radical feminists who would do everything to hurt and destroy their "wicked" husbands, this woman is a motherist who "will do [her husband] good and not evil all the days of her life". A motherist supports every good project of her husband. Such a supportive woman as seen in this text "is not only useful to her husband; she is an indispensable asset to her community and humanity at large" (Etim, 2020: 9).

One of the characteristic features of a good mother, as outlined by Acholonu, is the love for her husband. Yoruba and Hebrew mothers are lovers of their husbands. The persona is a good mother who sees to the welfare of her husband. She supports her husband both physically and spiritually. As a result of her diligence within the family and the community, her husband is "known in the gates,/when he sitteth among the elders of the land". Her husband is seen as a prominent figure in the society. The elders, who are believed to be the custodians of values, customs and wisdom, respect the husband. Whenever he speaks in the gathering of the elders, his opinions and ideas are reckoned with. Whatever the man says is regarded as a word of the wise. He is composed, calm and sensitive. This is not unconnected to the supportive spirit of the woman who, according to the motherist theory, is the "spiritual base of [the] family, community and nation" (Acholonu, 3).

From a Motherist point of view, the woman is industrious and hardworking. She is full of strength and energy. The writer says the woman "seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willing with her hands". The woman has a survivalist instinct. She sees survival as an indispensable jewel that must be desired by both men and women within the family and society. To the motherists, a mother must do everything she can to ensure the survival and the sustenance of the family. It is in this regard that the woman would seek "wool", "flax", "spindle" and "distaff", which she later

combines to produce "fine linen" sold to the merchants. This woman, like Yoruba mothers, does her work "willingly" as reflected in the alliterated line "…worketh willing with her hands". She is not forced by anyone; she sees it as a point of responsibility to work with her hands as a form of self-empowerment. She is ever watchful and vigilant; hence, she would always renew her strength, depicted metaphorically as "the candle", to ensure it is not quenched at night. "Night" is a metaphor for rest. Yet, this woman is distinct for her ability to wake, think and re-strategise her plans during the night.

The writer likens the persona to the "merchants' ships", a metaphor for her survivalist instinct. A merchant ship is used for the transportation of goods and persons through the sea. Buttressing the features of the "merchants' ships" outlined by Fred Meldau in his article, "Mother's Day", published in a magazine, *Christian Victory*, Lockyer (1967) says that merchants' ships, guided by a compass and the North star, bring precious cargo from distant lands and endure storms at sea. They are ever active and well-stocked for long journeys and keep nothing for themselves, given that the goods they carry are unloaded for the benefit of others. Motherism, like other Afro-feminist theories, is not a man-hate ideology. The theory acknowledges the importance of men, especially good men, in the family and society at large. The woman is a motherist who values a sensible and reliable man. Such a man is like the pilot of a merchant ship who helps in steering the course of the family. As a good pilot is to a merchant ship, so is a good husband to a mother, especially in Yoruba and Hebrew contexts.

Like merchant ships, the woman "bringeth her food from afar", traversing and relishing life's challenges to provide for herself and her family. She prepares herself for any obstacle, willing to make "constant and personal sacrifices" for the survival of the family (Acholonu, 113). Her hands are always glued to the "spindle" and

"distaff" while she wraps herself with "coverings of tapestry" as a sign of her readiness for daring journeys. Motherhood, in this regard, is rooted in selflessness, kindness and sacrifice. The labour of Hebrew mothers, like Yoruba mothers, is not solely for personal gain but for the benefit of others within the family and the society at large. This is further illustrated in the text:

> She riseth also while it is yet night,
> And giveth meat to her household,
> And a portion to her maidens.
> She stretcheth out her hand to the poor;
> Yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.
> She is not afraid of the snow for her household:
> For all her household are clothed with scarlet.
> She looketh well to the ways of her household,
> And eateth not the bread of idleness.

Motherism is anchored on the matrix of motherhood, nature and nurture (Acholonu, 3). The text above foregrounds the industriousness of mothers, motivated by the desire to provide for and nurture their families. This theme resonates with Yoruba proverb such as: "Bí kò bá sí ti àgbàdo tó hù ní èyìn ilé/Tó ń ṣe irùgbọ̀n yẹ̀rì yẹ̀rì/Kí la fẹ́ ma pè l'ẹ́kọ yàngàn?" (Were it not for the maize growing in the backyard/And dazzling its beards/Where would cornmeal come from?) and "Àmàlà dùn-ún jẹ/Ṣùgbọ́n kò sẹ̀hìn èlùbọ́" (Amala tastes sweet/But its goodness comes from yam flour). A similar motif is found in the saying: "Bí kò bá sí ti iṣu/Kí la fẹ́ ma lè ní iyán" (Were it not for the yam/Where would pounded yam come from?).

In these proverbial sayings, "maize", "yam flour" and "yam" serve as metaphors for mothers whose sacrifices sustain the family and society. Although Acholonu acknowledges that men may also embody motherly qualities within the context of motherist theory, the traditional view holds that women are naturally endowed with nurturing abilities. This perspective aligns with Forcey (1991),

who contends that mothering is a socially constructed role that revolves around nurturing and caring for others. In both African and Hebrew cultures, women are inherently perceived as potential mothers who embody the nurturing role.

The woman "riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household". As a devoted mother, she rises before dawn to prepare meals for her family, ensuring they are well-fed and cared for. This selfless act is a testament to her nurturing nature and her desire to empower herself through the resources available to her. According to King (1995), a mother recognises that her "survival depends on her ability to use all the economic, social and cultural resources available to her" (303). In the words of Chinweizu (1990), women wield significant influence through control of the "cradle", "kitchen" and the "womb", which are transformed into political power (15). In this light, African and Hebrew mothers identify the womb as the basic power, the cradle as the strategic power while managing the kitchen not as a symbol of marginalisation, but rather a tactical means to negotiate their role within the family and society. By joyfully cooking for their loved ones, mothers earn respect and admiration, demonstrating that good food can indeed bring joy and strengthen relationships.

Motherhood entails building several generations through love. A motherist is a builder, a lover of her children, men and women of all colour, race, ethnicity, culture and religion (Acholonu, 112). Unlike Western feminists, who often emphasise individualism, motherists recognise the shared struggles of women and accommodate their differences. This is exemplified by the persona who shares "a portion [of her meat] to the maidens". This persona prioritises the welfare and empowerment of both men and women. The maidens from diverse backgrounds are also treated as indispensable members of her family, entitled to share in the material and intellectual family's resources. In this regard, the persona serves as a mother and a teacher. She nurtures the maidens

by raising their consciousness on the uniqueness of women-folks and the importance of solidarity within the family and society.

The embracing and caregiving nature of mothers is reflected in the Yoruba expressions "ọlọ́ma yọ̀yọ̀" (owner of multiple children) and "ìyè dede ọ̀já" (mother of all). This process of empowerment is akin to what Ogunyemi (1988) calls "dissemination of knowledge that brings about behavioural modification" (85). By sharing her resources, the persona imparts valuable knowledge that helps in fostering peaceful co-existence between men and women in society.

A motherist is an accommodationist who values human differences, whether ideological or socio-economic. A good mother embodies kindness, tenderness and tolerance while acknowledging the dignity of all individuals, regardless of their background or status. As described in Hebrew proverbs, she "stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy". The marginalised individuals, often overlooked by society, are recognised by the motherists as indispensable to nature and societal development. Hence, the persona fulfils her role as "the spiritual base of every family, community and nation" (Acholonu, 3). She is, in this regard, sensitive to the needs (physical and spiritual) of those around her. This selfless dedication also finds a parallel in Yoruba proverb, "Òrìsà bí ìyá kò sí", meaning there is no deity like a mother. Mothers are revered as deities who guard their families and society. This underscores the sacredness of motherhood and the impact mothers have on their communities.

From a motherist point of view, a good mother is defined by her willingness to sacrifice herself for the well-being of her family. She serves as the bedrock of the household and is "ever ready to make personal sacrifices for the good of others" (Acholonu, 113). This is exemplified in the life of the persona who "is not afraid of

the snow for her household". For her, shielding and protecting her family from harm is a necessary duty rather than a burden. She stands for her family against all odds. Here, "the snow" is symbolic of the barriers and challenges that confront the household. However, a motherist does not perceive the demand for protection as a liability but as an extension of her responsibility. While others may be daunted by the dangers of the storm, the mother remains bold and confident because everyone in her household is "clothed with scarlet". The term "scarlet" connotes a double-layered cloth, which is emblematic of the extra efforts the woman invests to ensure the survival and safety of her family. In this regard, she is an archetype of the Yoruba mother, celebrated with appellations such as "abiyamọ afọ̀já gbọ̀rọ̀gbọ̀rọ̀" (a mother with an extended baby wrapper) or "asọ̀já mọ́ra bí ìhámọ́ra ológun" (one who ties her wrappers like the military armours). Such proverbial metaphors highlight the Yoruba concept of motherhood as selfless and accommodating. She extends her wrapper, a symbol of parental care, to embrace and protect every member of her family. She thus becomes a figure of wisdom and fortitude, under whose wings her family finds peace, safety and confidence.

A good mother is also expected to be a moral crusader who upholds the societal mores and inculcates the same in others. In the words of Acholonu, a motherist must embrace the whole gamut of human struggle, which includes the need to maintain, sustain and project moral values in society. Given that women exercise control over the "cradle", "kitchen" and "womb", as affirmed by Chinweizu (1990), it logically follows that mothers have a central role in nurturing a child morally. Mothers play a pivotal moral role and may be regarded as "a core and engine of human development" (Dlamini, 1992: 41). This highlights the sacredness and sensitivity of motherhood in both Yoruba and Hebrew societies, where a mother's word is respected. The persona "looketh well to the ways of her household", monitors and

regulates their conduct to ensure conformity with societal mores. She condemns laziness, rebukes the indolent while inspiring her household to be diligent and hardworking, for she herself "eateth not the bread of idleness".

The central thrust of motherist theory lies in the family relationship and the duties of a mother within the home (Ode, 2007:90). This relationship generates what may be termed the mother-child-father space, in which the mother nurtures both children and husband while receiving respect in return from both. As Proverbs 31 records, "her children arise up, and call her blessed, her husband also, and he praiseth her" (v. 28). In this context, the mother assumes an almost deified status, revered as a goddess-like figure within her household. She rises before others to prepare food for the family and supports her husband, whose social standing is enhanced by her diligence. In addition, she provides moral training for her children and ensures that they do not deviate from ethical standards. This brings to fore the Yoruba axiom, "ìyá ni alábarò ọmọ", a proverb that emphasises the mother's role as a moral compass and formative guide. In Yorubaland, mothers are revered. Much like the virtuous woman of Proverbs, Yoruba mothers sustain a filial bond with their children through care, moral guidance and their role as enduring confidants.

The virtuous woman, having earned respect, is praised even by her husband. In the end, the woman triumphs and becomes the recipient of long-desired freedom within the family and the wider society. Like African motherists, she reclaims a seemingly lost voice and prestige. Significantly, the Proverbs 31 conclude with a directive to "give her of the fruit of her hands" (v. 30). This affirms the need to acknowledge the labour and dignity of mothers. Motherhood is, therefore, a "glorious gift" (Adichie, 2017). It is a source of empowerment for every woman who embraces it with diligence and devotion.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the Hebrew Proverbs 31:10-30 and Yoruba proverbial traditions have intertextual relations in their portrayal of motherhood as a sacred, empowering and indispensable institution. Both cultures elevate the mother as a moral compass, industrious provider, and spiritual anchor whose labour sustains the family and community. The study has also revealed that the motherist theory is "very strategic in the way it is not only about women being able to reach any pinnacle they aspire to, but creating an environment that allows and encourages them to do this" (Morountodun, 2019:49). The persona of the virtuous woman, like the archetypal Yoruba mother, is pervasive, persevering, industrious, courageous, ambitious, sensitive and assertive.

By assuming responsibility for feeding and nurturing her family, the persona strategically rejects the master–servant dynamics traditionally embedded in domestic relations. While absolute gender equality may remain, to an extent, elusive, this study underscores the need to rethink gender relations and recognise the worth and contributions of women, especially mothers. In so doing, the study rekindles the ideals of unity, cooperation and mutual respect in society, while challenging the "self–other" ideology inherent in patriarchy. Ultimately, Motherism emerges not only as a celebration of maternal values but also as a transformative paradigm for envisioning equity, harmony and human development in African and Hebrew societies.

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