

**Motherhood in Oduyoye's African Women's Theology:
An Evaluation of Mercy Amba Oduyoye's Methodology Illustrated
by Her Views on Motherhood**

by

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MOTHERHOOD IN ODUYOYE'S AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGY:
AN EVALUATION OF MERCY AMBA ODUYOYE'S METHODOLOGY ILLUSTRATED
BY HER VIEWS ON MOTHERHOOD

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EXAMINER

DR KLAAS BOM

DECLARATION

I **Mairo Anthony** declare that this thesis titled: **Motherhood in Oduyoye's African Women's Theology: An Evaluation of Mercy Amba Oduyoye's Methodology Illustrated by Her Views on Motherhood** is my original work. The thesis is the result of my research and is written only by myself unless stated otherwise. Where information and ideas have been taken from other sources, this is stated explicitly, completely, and appropriately in the text or in the notes. A bibliography has been included. No part of this thesis has been presented for any other degree or diploma at this or any institution.

JUNE 2022

Date



Signature

DEDICATION

In blessed memory of Mama Azumi Habu, my “Hero.”

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4.2	An Evaluation of Oduyoye’s Views on Motherhood	-	-	-	-	59-60
4.3	Oduyoye’s Theology of Motherhood in African Women’s Theology	-				61
4.3.1	Oduyoye’s Communal Motherhood	-	-	-	-	61-65
4.3.2	Oduyoye’s Modeling Motherhood	-	-	-	-	65-67
4.3.3	Oduyoye’s Economy of Motherhood	-	-	-	-	68-71
4.4	Relevance of Oduyoye’s Methodology	-	-	-	-	71-73
	Bibliography	-	-	-	-	74-79

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Watching documentaries on animals is one of my hobbies because there are amazing things to learn from the animal kingdom, suitable for illustrations in developing theology. For example, Motherhood is a fantastic instinct among elephants. Mothering is for life for elephants. Experiment shows that elephants can recognize their mother's smell even after thirty years of separation.¹ The bond of Mothering for elephants remains even after death. A bereaved mama elephant may observe days of vigil over the remains of her calf and protects it to the point that she is not willing to allow predators to take it. A most adorable feature of Mothering in elephants is that it is communal. Elephant sisters can nurse each other's calves.² It indicates that Motherhood among animals such as elephants is not necessarily biological. If such an exciting discovery about Motherhood among elephants is worthwhile, how more is this true of humans created in the image of God?

Mothering is central to women's lives in most societies, and women are seen as life carriers. The mother is a distinct female category that is common to all African forms of society. Her place of prominence is mainly awarded to her by her family. Consequently, she is at the centre of the spirituality and economy of a family and the community.³ In most African societies, womanhood is attained through Motherhood. As one of those African societies, Northern Nigeria has a common Hausa saying, "*Uwa ita'ce gida.*" In a literal sense, a mother is a home or house. Metaphorically, what makes a home is the presence of a mother.

It should be noted that the word *gida* is used either for a house or a home in the Hausa language. It is used depending on the context. Associating mothers with a house is a metaphor

¹ Smithsonian Channel, *Why Elephant Moms Always Stay Close to their Calves*, <https://youtu.be/UFLdm04GAac> (accessed November 28 2021).

² Smithsonian Channel, *Even Death Can't break this Elephant's Bond to her Calf*, <https://youtu.be/6WihTrWU0MU> (accessed November 28 2021).

³ Dominica Dipio, 'African Motherhood Proverbs and Worldview: A Matriarchal Perspective', *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 30.1 (2019), p.3. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ljh/article/view/191115>

to give value to who mothers are in both the home and society. It highlights that there cannot be a complete home or society without mothers.

In recent years, African women theologians have been focusing on using the views of Motherhood as illustrations in their theologies, especially Oduyoye, who is the first and preeminent African female theologian⁴ and the "undisputed founder" of African women's theology.⁵

1.2 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

My experience with theological studies in Northern Nigeria, which is patriarchal, focuses less on African women's theology. African women's theology is connected to feminism, and feminism in my context is considered a negative theology that should not be associated with Christian theology.⁶ Heleen Josiazze, a Dutch female theologian who did her research on gender relations in two Kenyan churches, also discovered the same challenges regarding a lack of theological studies about women in Kenya. She argues, "In theology in Africa, women's voices remain unnoticed, ignored, contested and often demeaned."⁷

My interactions with women in Northern Nigeria as a young woman in church ministry brought me closer to the burdens women experience from patriarchy. I also found that most mothers consider Motherhood associated with pain and joy. Thus, I became motivated to get acquainted with theologies that can address the challenges of women, especially in Northern Nigeria. Women need theologies that can help to make them feel that Motherhood is empowering and that the experiences of Motherhood can be used as a means for women's

⁴ Christina Landman, "Mercy Amba Ewuzdiwa Oduyoye: Motherhood of our Stories," Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa, p.1.

<http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/4460/Landman.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁵ Julius Gathogo, "Mercy Oduyoye as the mother of African Women's Theology," *Theologia Viatorum: Journal of Theology and Religion in Africa*, vol. 34, no. 1. (2016): pp.1, 5,

https://www.academia.edu/7504449/MERCY_ODUYOYE_AS_THE_MOTHER_OF_AFRICAN_WOMENS_THEOLOGY

⁶ Hosea Stephen Vongdip, *Taming the Dragon of Feminism* (Jos: Eunice Ventures, 2011), pp.17, 24.

⁷ Heleen Josiazze, *Women's Faith Seeking Life, Lived Christologies and the Transformation of Gender Relations in Two Kenyan Churches*, PhD Dissertation submitted to the University of Utrecht, 2020, p.16.

liberation, both for literate African women theologians and non-literate women. Thus, how can this be possible without a viable theology to address women's challenges in Africa? The search introduced me to Oduyoye as an example of an African woman theologian. I became curious about how she presents an implicit theology of Motherhood in her African women's theology.

Significantly, doing theology is possible only if a viable methodology is used. As a fresh offshoot from the tree of African Women's Theology (AWT), I see the need to make theology relevant for ordinary women in my society by attempting to construct Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood in African women's theology by evaluating her methodology illustrated with her views of Motherhood. Moreover, this can contribute to a constructive theology of Motherhood in African women's theology since methodology helps us formulate the understanding of God (theology) about African women.

1.3 DESCRIBING KEY TERMS

This thesis defines how Motherhood is understood and used in this research.

The term Motherhood is derived from the Old English *moder* which is cognate with Latin *mater* and the Greek word *meter*. The word mother itself denotes a female parent or a woman in authority.⁸ The suffix -hood attached to mother means a condition, quality, and position⁹ and can be added to many words depending on specific contexts or occasions. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines Motherhood as the state or time of being a mother. Collins English Dictionary describes Motherhood as the qualities or characteristics of a mother.¹⁰

Theologically, the understanding of Motherhood implies a role or taking a responsibility to perform mothering roles. The name Eve, meaning "mother of all living," was devised by Adam to validate the above expression. The role of Motherhood is a command and is

⁸ Webster's Dictionary, "Mother," <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mother?src=search-dict-hed> (accessed November 28th 2021).

⁹ Online Etymology Dictionary, "Motherhood," <https://www.etymonline.com/word/motherhood> (accessed November 28th 2021).

¹⁰ Collins English Dictionary, "Motherhood," <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/motherhood> (accessed November 28th 2021).

prophetic.¹¹ James M. Hamilton expresses that "...humanity cannot do what God commanded apart from Motherhood."¹² In this sense, Motherhood is a role performed by all because caring for God's creation fulfills God's will for both males and females, which was a responsibility given to Adam and Eve.¹³

Kathleen Uno, a social science researcher, believes that the concepts of Motherhood and Mothering are social constructions. Recent reports of crimes by teenage mothers abandoning their babies, brutally inflicting physical pain on the babies, or starving them to death is a factor in understanding Motherhood from different perspectives.¹⁴ For the sake of analysis, there is a need to distinguish diverse forms of Motherhood according to social acceptance and function. There are different understandings of Motherhood from different continents and periods based on historical and cultural variations. These perspectives of Motherhood are birth Motherhood, social Motherhood, and caregiving Motherhood. Birth Motherhood refers to the biological mother or the person who gives birth. Social Motherhood refers to the person married within a household or officially registered and acknowledged as the child's mother. Caregiving Motherhood refers to child-rearing or to the person who feeds, bathes, clothes, and performs all the necessary functions to rear a child.¹⁵

According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, Mothering "is the process of caring for children as their mother or caring for people in the way that a mother does."¹⁶ Mothering is closely related to the understanding of rearing a child to fit into "the family, the community, and religious and other institutions and the larger society and nation."¹⁷ Mothering is a task that takes many years of labour that nonmothers can also perform.¹⁸

¹¹ James M. Hamilton, "A Biblical Theology of Motherhood," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* (JDFM) 2.2 (2012), p.8. <https://jimhamilton.info/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Hamilton-James-A-Biblical-Theology-of-Motherhood-JDFM-2-2.pdf>

¹² James M. Hamilton, "A Biblical Theology of Motherhood," p.7.

¹³ James M. Hamilton, "A Biblical Theology of Motherhood," p.7.

¹⁴ Kathleen Uno, "Mothering and Motherhood," in Encyclopedia.com, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/children/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/mothering-and-motherhood> pp.1-2, (accessed September 26th 2021).

¹⁵ Kathleen Uno, "Mothering and Motherhood," in Encyclopedia.com, pp.1-2.

¹⁶ Cambridge English Dictionary, "Mothering."

¹⁷ Kathleen Uno, "Mothering and Motherhood," p.3.

¹⁸ Kathleen Uno, "Mothering and Motherhood," p.3.

Hence, Motherhood is the state of being a mother, while Mothering is the process of nurturing children or people like a mother. Thus, Mothering is discussed within the framework of Motherhood and both terms are used interchangeably in this thesis.

1.4 PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Northern Nigerian women, especially the Yandang women, suffer from cultures and social constructions of Motherhood that appear oppressive to women. The works of Oduyoye in African women's theology can be resourceful towards a liberating theology of Motherhood in Northern Nigeria. But this research observed that there is no such explicit theology of Motherhood by Oduyoye as the mother of African women's theology. It is seen that she only uses the views on Motherhood as an illustration in her methodology toward other themes. Her storytelling method is used to narrate women's experiences and is regarded as a significant source of theology. She argues that women's experience in Africa is a necessary framework unique compared with other fields of theology to interpret contemporary Africa. She points to the use of the Bible and tradition in a critical examination of African women's methodology.¹⁹ From a Western feminist perspective, Kathryn E. King argues that feminist researchers form their methodology to break free from the confines of patriarchy and go beyond the borders of traditional methods.²⁰ At the same time, Oduyoye argues that using the term 'African' and 'women' implies that "...women have a desire and a responsibility to do their thinking and to speak their own words about God as about all other religious and cultural concerns."²¹ These African women theologians are known as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Oduyoye birthed the Circle alongside a few other women she selected in 1989 at Trinity College, Legon, Ghana. The purpose of the Circle was to develop African women's methodology through publications and to facilitate research. Their interest in narrative methodology is

¹⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland, Ohio: Pilgrims Press, 2001), pp.10-11.

²⁰ Kathryn E. King, "Method and Methodology in Feminist Research: What is the Difference?," *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 1994, 20, p.20, <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1994.20010019>.

²¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.10.

located within the corpus of African culture and religion.²² Oduyoye describes that despite being focused on narrative theology, it is also a deliberate effort to make women's theology perspectival. It suggests that women have their opinions on matters that affect women, Africa, but that women's theology also involves an attempt to address issues that can have a global impact even outside the African region.

It should be noted that all these women have unique approaches to their methodologies. These African women theologians resort to cultural hermeneutics as their perspective, but it comes with its challenges, as stated by Oduyoye. For example, the skill of African women in interpreting the Scripture and culture, dealing with the diverse cultures in Africa, how to reveal meaning derived from cultural codes, reading and critiquing African myths, and the like.²³ According to Oduyoye, cultural hermeneutics "enables women to view the Bible through African eyes and to distinguish and extract from what is liberating."²⁴ It is also a deliberate effort by African women to address with caution the matter of continuity and change.²⁵

Consequently, since the use of storytelling is to make the stories of African women that were silenced be heard, to complement African church history, to make women participants and actors in history rather than being victims and spectators, to make narrative methodology therapeutic, "narrative therapy," and to bring about transformation in the world, there is the need to make Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood be heard for the transformation of both the church and society.²⁶

²² Musimbi Kanyoro, "Beads and Strands: Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," in *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster publications, 2002), p.17.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.10

²³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, pp.10, 11, 13.

²⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.11.

²⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.14.

²⁶ Isabel Apawo Phiri, Betty D. Govinden, S. Nadar, "Introduction" in *Her-Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others, pp.6-7, 9.

Joyce Trebilcot argues that some Euro-American feminist theologians use illustrations from mothering theories to focus on constructing theologies of Motherhood.²⁷ The volume on *Mothering*²⁸ is an excellent example from the treasury box of Western feminist theologians which is yet to be developed explicitly by African female theologians such as Oduyoye. Also, African women theologians such as Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale lament that there are limited research and literature from African feminist theologians, especially from the Circle members, on the theology of Motherhood.²⁹ This research observes that Oduyoye's methodology, illustrated by her views on Motherhood, lacks an explicit theology of Motherhood in African women's theology, for example, as seen in her major theological work, the *Daughters of Anowa*.³⁰

1.5 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This research aims to evaluate the methodology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, as illustrated by her views on Motherhood in African women's theology. And it seeks to construct her theology of Motherhood as found in her methodology illustrated by her views of Motherhood.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

How are Oduyoye's views on Motherhood illustrated in her methodology?

Sub-questions:

- a. What are Oduyoye's views on Motherhood?
- b. In what sense are they illustrative of her methodology of doing African women's theology?

²⁷ Joyce Trebilcot, "Introduction," in *Mothering, Essays in Feminist Theory*, edited by Joyce Trebilcot (Totowa, N. J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1984), p.1.

²⁸ *Mothering, Essays in Feminist Theory*, edited by Joyce Trebilcot.

²⁹ Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale, 2018, "Disabled motherhood in African Community: Towards an African women theology of disability," *Die Skriflig* 52(1): pp.1, 2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2375>

³⁰ Christina Landman, *Mercy Amba Ewuzdiwa Oduyoye: Motherhood of our Stories*, p.1.

- c. How can her methodology illustrated by her views on Motherhood be evaluated?
- d. How can Oduyoye's views on Motherhood be constructed into her theology of Motherhood toward a liberation theology both in Yandang culture and African women's theology?

1.7 METHODOLOGY

This research chooses to describe, analyze, and evaluate the methodology of Oduyoye as illustrated in her views on Motherhood. Her views on Motherhood are analyzed from her selected works. The aim is to discover her views and meanings of Motherhood and how she uses it in her methodology in African women's theology. Cultural hermeneutics with the lenses of gender and Sankofa philosophy is used to evaluate Oduyoye's methodology for constructing her theology of Motherhood. The objective is to develop Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood to liberate Yandang women from the oppressive social construction of Motherhood.

Mothering is central in women's lives, and Western feminist theologians during the early 1980s took the centrality of Motherhood for theorizing in feminist theology.³¹ Today, the use of the theories of Motherhood is a trend for African women theologians toward the liberation of women and the land of Africa.³² The lenses of Sankofa philosophy, an essential tool in Oduyoye's methodology, are considered critically. *Sankofa* means going back to pick what is helpful.³³ It can also be expressed in a popular Hausa saying, "*Ba wanda zaice tuwon Uwarsa babu dadi.*" It means no one will say their mother's cooking is not delicious. Or the Yandang people saying, "*Ya telang le yenuk buri bi kpansuri bi be,*" "Your mother's pot content is better than that of the queen." *Sankofa* also relates to cultural hermeneutics. I utilize cultural hermeneutics to critically analyze African culture and pick³⁴ what is helpful and delicious in

³¹ Joyce Trebilcolt, "Introduction," in *Mothering, Essays in Feminist Theory*, edited by Joyce Trebilcolt, p.1.

³² Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga, Josephine Muganiwa, and Musa Wenkosi Dube (eds), *African Literature, Mother Earth and Religion* (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022).

³³ Southern Illinois University, *About the Sankofa Bird*, <https://cola.siu.edu/africanastudies/about-us/sankofa.php> (accessed October 11th 2021).

³⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.10.

Oduyoye's views of Motherhood in order to construct Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood in African women's theology. Suzi Adams, a sociologist, in her discourse on Ricoeur's cultural hermeneutics, defines cultural hermeneutics as diverse approaches in the field of human sciences that deeply interpret the meaning of culture in the situations of humans. But it can function more or less in independent ways.³⁵ Letty M. Russell also adds that cultural hermeneutics is used to analyze cultures because humans live in the reality of social constructions.³⁶ The African male theologian Justin Ukpong refers to David Tuesday Adamo, a male African theologian (both are Nigerians), who describes African cultural hermeneutics as focusing on interpreting the biblical text within the African social context as the subject of interpretation. In this regard, and it is one of the essential criteria for African cultural hermeneutics, Adamo adds that the interpreter has to be an insider.³⁷

Cultural hermeneutics is a key to the ongoing development of African women's liberation. African women's approach to cultural hermeneutics is different from male African theologians. African women theologians claim that African male theologians have ignored the way women are oppressed in the African context.³⁸ Letty Russell adds that both Oduyoye's and Kanyoro's development of cultural hermeneutics has also contributed to postcolonial discourse.³⁹ African women theologians use culture as a double-edged sword toward empowering and liberating African women and girls against patriarchal oppression.⁴⁰

Since the Yandang culture is where this research is situated, the views on Motherhood from the Yandang culture are described and analyzed through oral interviews, the experiences of Yandang men and women, and other documented sources of the Yandang culture from both published and online sources. The researcher is participating as an insider in interpreting the Scripture to analyze, evaluate, and construct Oduyoye's views on Motherhood within the

³⁵ Suzi Adams, "On Ricoeur's Shift from a Hermeneutics of Culture to a Cultural Hermeneutics", *Journal of Etudes Ricoeuriennes/Ricoeur Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2015): p.131, <https://ricoeur.pitt.edu> (accessed April 11th 2022).

³⁶ Letty M. Russell, "Cultural Hermeneutics, A Postcolonial Look at Mission," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 20, no. 1, published by Indiana University Press (Spring, 2004): p.24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25002488> (accessed April 7th 2022).

³⁷ Tuesday David Adamo, "African Cultural Hermeneutics," in *Vernacular Hermeneutics*, edited by R. S. Sugirtharajh (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p.68.

³⁸ Letty M. Russell, "Cultural Hermeneutics, A Postcolonial Look at Mission," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.28.

³⁹ Letty M. Russell, "Cultural Hermeneutics, A Postcolonial Look at Mission," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.24.

⁴⁰ Letty M. Russell, "Cultural Hermeneutics, A Postcolonial Look at Mission," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.28.

context of the Yandang people. It is also intended to apply Oduyoye's constructed theology of Motherhood as a contribution to liberation theology within the Yandang context.

1.8 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The first chapter presents the introduction of this thesis; it explains the methodology, problems, and reasons connected with undertaking this research. It describes the significance of the thesis and where the research is situated.

Chapter two analyzes Oduyoye's views on Motherhood derived from some selected texts of Oduyoye (both primary and secondary), followed by how she uses her methods as illustrated by her views on Motherhood in doing African women's theology. It is also necessary to introduce Oduyoye through a presentation of her brief biography to understand who she is. The chapter concludes with a summation of the views on Motherhood according to Oduyoye and what methods she uses in doing African women's theology.

In chapter three, the researcher looks at the context of the research, which is the Yandang people of Northern Nigeria. The chapter is a descriptive and analytical presentation of the Yandang culture and is followed by a brief historical background of the Yandang people of Northern Nigeria. It looks critically at what is oppressive and liberating in Yandang views on Motherhood and how Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood can be applied within a context that is liberating to Yandang women. It also attempts to view how some of the sources of Oduyoye's theology, such as the use of proverbs, are also found in Yandang culture.

Chapter four presents an evaluation of the methodology of Oduyoye illustrated by her views on Motherhood in African women's theology by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Her views of Motherhood are evaluated with Yandang views on Motherhood as a dialogue partner. It further depicts a constructive theology of Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood. It is applied within the Yandang context for the liberation of Yandang women and possibly for both African and global women.

CHAPTER TWO

MERCY AMBA ODUYOYE AND HER METHODOLOGY AS ILLUSTRATED BY HER VIEWS ON MOTHERHOOD

This chapter considers sub-questions a and b, as previously stated in the introductory chapter. Section 2.2, which corresponds to sub-question a, picks up the presentation of Oduyoye's views on Motherhood. Section 2.3 (sub-question b) focuses on the question in what sense her views on Motherhood are illustrated in her methodology of doing African women's theology. The chapter begins with a brief biography of Oduyoye.

2.1 BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MERCY AMBA EWUDZIWA ODUYOYE

Mercy Amba Oduyoye, also referred to as the mother of African women theologians,⁴¹ was named by her parents Amba Ewudzima Yamoah, before her marriage in 1968 with Adedoyin Modupe Oduyoye, a Yoruba from Nigeria, where her name carried her husband's family name.⁴² She was the firstborn of nine children,⁴³ born in Amoanna, Asamankese, Ghana, on October 21, 1934, to her parents, Rev. Charles Kwaw Yamoah, a Methodist minister, and her mother, Mercy Yaa Dakwaa Yamoah.⁴⁴

Due to her father's itinerant ministry Oduyoye received her primary education in different places in Ghana.⁴⁵ She obtained her Bachelor of Divinity (BD) in 1961 from the University College of Ghana Legon. She also earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) from the University of Cambridge, the UK, specializing in Dogmatics (1963-1965), and a Master of Arts (Honours)

⁴¹ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.2. <https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/mercy-amba-oduyoye> (accessed May 11th 2021).

⁴² Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.8.

⁴³ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own Words," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 32 no 2, Fall (2016): p.156.

Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.3.

⁴⁴ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.2.

⁴⁵ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.3.

from the same university in 1969.⁴⁶ She was the first African woman to receive an honorary doctorate from the University of Amsterdam.⁴⁷ Other honorary doctorates were received from the Academy of Ecumenical Indian Theology, University of Western Cape, Republic of South Africa, Chicago Theological Seminary, and Yale University.⁴⁸ Initially, Oduyoye was interested in studying geography, economics, and the British constitution, but she saw her theological journey as a calling, a journey she succeeded in completing.⁴⁹ Yolanda Smith attests that "Oduyoye's life has been full indeed as she has worked on multiplying God's love, the fullness of humanity, creativity, God's glory..."⁵⁰ She also refers to Oduyoye's works, which testify that Oduyoye, the mother of African women's theology, can be proclaimed very worthy by God because of her ability to respond to the call to "...increase and multiply."⁵¹

Oduyoye mentioned her professors Noel King, Alec Vidler, and Maurice Wiles from Cambridge University as vessels encouraging her to study theology. She pointed out that some community members questioned her decision to undertake theological studies. It should be noted that during the 1970s in Ghana, women undertaking theological studies were rare because women were not ordained into church ministry. She responded that, for her, the aim of doing theology was to become a teacher and specialize in religion. Smith quoted her as saying, "...with teaching came public speaking and writing. With theology came the passion for justice and dignity. With teaching came also all my involvements in humanization."⁵²

Regarding her earliest ecumenical contacts, she refers to the Reverend Adeolu Adegbola of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) and Mr Albert van den Heuvel of the World Council of Churches (WCC) as motivators to be on the international scene of ecumenism since 1966. Moreover, her close friend and colleague Brigalia Bam spurred her to pursue women's

⁴⁶ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.5.

⁴⁷ Jaqueline Williams, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye Visits our Faculty (University of Amsterdam)," *Exchange*, vol. 21 no 1 (April 1992): p.61.

⁴⁸ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, pp.18-19.

⁴⁹ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.5.

⁵⁰ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.20.

⁵¹ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.20.

⁵² Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.5.

rights. Constance Buchanan at Harvard Divinity School encouraged her to start the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, which was launched in 1989.⁵³

Furthermore, Oduyoye's theological views on liberation theology were developed with her experience of working closely with James Cone at Union Theological Seminary and with Gustavo Guterrez. She refers to liberation theology as her theological voice.⁵⁴ It is to be noted that Cone (1939-2018)⁵⁵ was a forerunner of Black Theology, which was the product of the Civil Rights Movement in America in the 1960s.⁵⁶ One of his foremost publications is *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, published in 2011. Gustavo Guterrez (1928-)⁵⁷ is the founder of Latin American Liberation Theology, whose movement is towards the liberation of the oppressed in society.⁵⁸

In African Christian Theology, Oduyoye refers to Professor Bolaji Idowu (1913-1993)⁵⁹ as one who stimulated her theological formation. Idowu was an influential theologian and the pioneer of African Christian Theology, the proponent of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in African theology, an associate with the Methodist Church in Nigeria, and a professor from the University of Ibadan.⁶⁰ Oduyoye's interaction with Idowu on African theology brings her to the understanding that African women theologians are the other wing for African theology to be able to fly.⁶¹

Oduyoye has been involved with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). This organization was formed in 1976, and she attended the 1977 EATWOT Africa Continental Conference in Accra. Since then, she has attended most of the meetings and has

⁵³ Yoland Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, pp.8, 13, 19.

⁵⁴ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own Words," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.159.

⁵⁵ Jacey Fortin, "James H. Cone, A Founder of Black Liberation Theology Dies at 79" (April 29, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/29/obituaries/james-cone-dead.html> (accessed August 7th 2021).

⁵⁶ James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p.vii.

⁵⁷ Liberation Theologies, Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, n.d., <https://liberationtheology.org/people-organizations/gustavo-gutierrez/> (accessed August 7th 2021).

⁵⁸ Robert McAfee Brown, *Makers of Contemporary Theology: Gustavo Gutierrez* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), p.21.

⁵⁹ Michael Leke, Ogunewu, *Idowu Bolaji* (published 2009), <https://dacb.org/stories/nigeria/idowu-bolaji/> (accessed August 7th 2021).

⁶⁰ Bulus Galadima, "Evaluation of the Theology of Bolaji Idowu," *African Journal of Evangelical Theology* (February 20th 2011), https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/20-2_105.pdf (accessed August 7th 2021).

⁶¹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own Words," *Article in Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.161.

presented essential and illuminating papers, which always spark reactions. The most significant contributions were: "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology" (1977) and "Reflections from a Third World Woman's Perspective: Women's Experience and Liberation Theologies" (1983). These reflections urgently advocated that women's voices be heard, with her famous phrase, "Irruption within Irruption." These terms imply that women are to be free from sexism and take their place not just in the theological space and the leadership of the church but also on the front row of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).⁶²

Oduyoye founded The Circle of Concerned African Women, also known as the Circle, between September 24 and October 2, 1989, at Trinity College (now Trinity Theological Seminary), Legon, Ghana. Despite being the founder, she does not want to be referred to as its leader. She argues that she does not believe in a hierarchy but in circles, considering the Circle a model for her theology and thinking.⁶³ Membership of the Circle is only open for women who publish.⁶⁴ One of the critical concerns of the Circle is upholding African religion and culture as the crucial foci for developing liberation theology that will respond to women's needs in Africa.⁶⁵

Oduyoye served the ecumenical movement through the World Council of Churches (WCC). In 1998, she emerged as the first African woman to become the WCC Deputy General Secretary.⁶⁶ She is the author of fourteen books, editor and co-editor of nine volumes, and author of over eighty published articles and book chapters.⁶⁷

Oduyoye served as a teacher in high schools and different outstanding universities worldwide. At the same time, she was active and, at a certain point, invited as a visiting lecturer

⁶² Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, pp.10, 11.

⁶³ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own Words," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.161.

⁶⁴ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.15.

⁶⁵ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, "Beads and Strands, Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," in *African Women, Religion, and Health, Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojina Nadar (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), p.21.

⁶⁶ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, "Beads and Strands, Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," in *African Women, Religion, and Health, Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojina Nadar, p.22.

⁶⁷ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.18.

within Africa and beyond. She contributed as a leader as well in various Christian associations and organizations.⁶⁸

2.2 ODUYOYE'S VIEWS ON MOTHERHOOD

Oduyoye has written no explicit theological work on the theology of Motherhood. This section attempts to describe her views on Motherhood as derived from fragments of her works in which she uses Motherhood either as a theme or as an illustration. The description of her views on Motherhood is taken from four perspectives: her biography, storytelling theology, critical liberation perspective, and her use of Motherhood as a metaphor in ecological theology. Then, we will conclude with a summary of Oduyoye's views on Motherhood.

The order follows the chronology of her publications. Her biography is taken as the starting point. It should be noted that the texts selected are sources derived from the works of Oduyoye, except the articles of Yolanda Smith and Oluwatomisin Oredin, which are biographies and later publications. I consider them excellent sources because they were documentations of personal interviews with her.⁶⁹

From the angle of her biography, the articles by Yolanda Smith and Oluwatomisin Oredin highlight the views on Motherhood from Oduyoye's context: the Akan of Ghana, right from her early years. While "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space" contains her experience of childless marriage in the West African region, but with a strong theme of Motherhood. For the perspective of storytelling theology I have selected *Daughters of Anowa*, which is regarded as Oduyoye's major theological work, mentioned earlier in my reference to Christina Landman in chapter one. *Daughters of Anowa* is highly focused on Oduyoye's method of storytelling. However, it is also a fine expression of the theme of Motherhood derived from African sources of folktales, proverbs, and myths. Russell referred to Kanyoro's comments on the book as an excellent example of engendered cultural hermeneutics

⁶⁸ Yolanda Smith, *Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, p.18.

⁶⁹ The selected texts are from Yolanda Smith and Oluwatomisin Oredin as referenced in Oduyoye's brief biography under section 2.1.

because of her use and analysis of African proverbs, myths, and folktales.⁷⁰ *Beads and Strands* voices Oduyoye's liberation theology of the early 21st century. However, she reemphasizes her views of Motherhood with various themes that intersect women's challenging experiences with religion, economy, and African society. Lastly, Oduyoye has joined her voice with other African women theologians on ecofeminism, especially in her preface to the volume *Mother Earth, Mother Africa*, published in 2020. She used the views on Motherhood as a metaphor to present her methodology in the theology of the Earth. One can say it is a summary of Oduyoye's methodology.

2.2.1 Oduyoye's Views on Motherhood from Her Biography

On many occasions, Oduyoye refers to her personal experience concerning Motherhood. She grew up in a matrilineal society in the Akan tribe of Ghana, in which her parents and grandparents belonged to the mother-centred class.⁷¹ However, the matrilineal system is embedded in the patriarchal system (I will come back to this under section 2.2.3). She narrates that women were given the space to grow up with self-esteem and are regarded as necessary in the family. Oduyoye highlights that in the Akan society, the birth of a girl as firstborn means so much because she is the second mother; she is to take responsibility for the family. The birth of a girl in the family guarantees the continuity of the family.⁷² As the firstborn in a family of nine, Oduyoye assisted her mother in Mothering, and she explains that being the firstborn girl means one is a second mother. She expresses that she performed all the aspects of Mothering; hence, she treats people as younger. That is why she always tries to see that everybody does the right thing; this implies that Oduyoye upholds the Akan understanding of Mothering, which begins from an early stage in the life of every female child. It also suggests that one can take the mothering role without necessarily being a mother.

⁷⁰ Letty M. Russell, "Cultural Hermeneutics, A Postcolonial look at Mission," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, p.28.

⁷¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p.57.

⁷² Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in her own words," p.155.

Her second biographical note considered in this thesis is excerpted from her essay "A Coming Home to Myself."⁷³ She wrote this essay within the context of liberating eschatology from an African cultural-religious and Christo-centric perspective. Oduyoye was critical in her reflections on Africa's worldview of the fruitfulness of life on earth and ancestorship beyond the land of the living.⁷⁴ She pointed out that preserving genealogy and childbearing are significant for African cultures spiritually and religiously. Oduyoye wrote her theological reflection as a voice for women in Africa who are stigmatized by the issue of childlessness. She argued that women without biological children must be heard and acknowledged that there are limited possibilities in this regard.⁷⁵

Moreover, the essay dealt with the narrative of her childless marriage with Adedoyin Modupe Oduyoye in 1968 and her transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal and patriarchal society.⁷⁶ This experience made her reflect on her matrilineal childhood formation.⁷⁷ She was married in a patriarchal context where childbearing was a significant factor, and a childless marriage was regarded as an embarrassment. Among the Asante, childlessness is taboo, and she found herself in such a state. She clearly explained that children are in central to all aspects of human interaction in Africa, and⁷⁸ "...no one lightly forgoes the 'duty' to have them."⁷⁹ For example, she referred to one of the Akan cultural beliefs that one of the seven signs of human wellbeing is the ability to procreate. The fruitfulness of both plants and animals is vital for Africans and is associated with childbearing and continuing the family name.⁸⁰

Hence, in her essay "A Coming Home to Myself," Oduyoye accepts the reality of who she is as a childless mother even though she nurtured some of her nieces and nephews.⁸¹ Letty Russell comments that Oduyoye managed to be a mother to many despite not being one

⁷³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," in *Liberating Eschatology: Essays in Honour of Letty M. Russell*, edited by Margaret Farley and Serene Jones (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1999).

⁷⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.105.

⁷⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.108.

⁷⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.106.

⁷⁷ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own words," p.155.

⁷⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," pp.111, 113,114.

⁷⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.114

⁸⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.105.

⁸¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.108.

herself, even "...in a country where motherhood is as sacred as it was in Israel..."⁸² Oduyoye takes pride in her story and argues that no one can tell it but herself. She feels her story is a starting point for developing a theology that can address the absence of fruitfulness. Oduyoye presents her argument by avoiding the negative aspects of African cultural beliefs, which make childlessness a burden.⁸³ She unravels the positive view of African traditional beliefs that raising a child is communal. Oduyoye's marriage with her husband Modupe informed her understanding of Motherhood that children are gifts from God to the community.⁸⁴ According to Oduyoye, the early church concentrated on spiritual fruitfulness and not biological fruitfulness. She critically reflects on the biblical narratives, arguing that the narratives do not give evidence about the children of the following biblical characters: Esther, Deborah, Miriam, Mary, Martha, John and James, Priscilla, and Aquila. She thinks the above positive notions should be a starting point for developing a theology that speaks to childlessness in marriage.⁸⁵

Therefore, in her essay "A Coming Home to Myself," she understands Motherhood as not necessarily about giving birth to children but about bearing spiritual fruitfulness. Connecting it to eschatology and a critical reflection on the Bible, she submits that when Christ returns to earth, the most important thing is not the number of one's children but if one is still found in the faith. She argues that there were no photocopies of Saints in the Bible, "...only their spirits and what they stood for abide."⁸⁶

A third biographical note concerns the importance of her mother as a role model. She narrates how relevant her mother's status is within the Akan society. Oduyoye, in her words, said, "My political and economic status in Akan structures depends on who my mother is. I am who I am because of who my mother is."⁸⁷ She also claims that she has come to harvest what her mother planted. Oduyoye narrates that her mother was born on her grandparents' cocoa

⁸² Letty M. Russell, "Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye, Wise Woman Bearing Gifts," in *African Women, Religion, and Health, Essays in Honour of Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and Sarojina Nadar (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock publishers, 2006), p.46.

⁸³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," pp.105, 106, 108, 109.

⁸⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.111.

⁸⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.115.

⁸⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.116.

⁸⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.57.

farm during the planting season, while Oduyoye was born during harvest.⁸⁸ Oduyoye's mother was a prototype to her. Her mother was an activist for the liberation of women and youths within the church and society. Oduyoye and her mother have concerns for women, and she refers to circumstances where her mother will speak for women with questions such as, "What about the women?"⁸⁹ Rachael Fiedler gathered that Oduyoye regards her mother as an African women's liberation model. For example, the unveiling of an inscription commemorated her mother's achievements during a ceremony at the Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana in 2005. She comments, "This practical step taken by Mercy Amba Oduyoye aimed to honor her mother as a model of African women who enjoyed liberation in the church and society."⁹⁰

2.2.2 The Views on Motherhood in Oduyoye's Storytelling Theology

Oduyoye's views on Motherhood in this subsection do not come from explicit statements but are derived from illustrations in her book *Daughters of Anowa*. The book is Oduyoye's critical theological work addressing the challenges of patriarchy in the church (Western church) and African society and colonial exploitation. *Daughters of Anowa* is about "...the mythical woman, prophet and a priest whose life of daring, suffering, and determination is reflected in the continent of Africa."⁹¹ It is a woman's narrative interlocked in three storytelling circles from myths, folktales, and proverbs.⁹² A highlight of Oduyoye uses storytelling in her methodology will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

In general, the views on Motherhood from Oduyoye's storytelling theology imply that understanding Motherhood from an African cultural perspective can be empowering. For example, she uses the myth of Woyengi or Tamarau, the Great Mother from the Ijo or Ijaw people of Southern Nigeria. Woyengi the Great Mother is a creator who moulds people with

⁸⁸ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own Words," p.156.

⁸⁹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Across Generation Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Mercy Amba Oduyoye in Her Own Words," p.154.

⁹⁰ R. N. D. Fiedler and J. W. Hofmeyr, "The Conception of the Circle of Concerned African Women's Theologians: Is it African or Western?," *Acta Theologica*, 31 (1) 2011: p.42.

⁹¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), p.6.

⁹² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.13, 14.

her hands and breathes life into them. But she is such a creator that she grants her creatures the ability to choose their gender according to their desires. Oduyoye connects the myth with Ogboinba's Destiny.

Ogboinba is one of the creatures of Woyengi who chose to be a woman with mystic powers but not a mother. At the same time, the other creature (unnamed woman) chose to be the mother of rich and famous children. Woyengi decided that she would connect Ogboinba to partner with her sister in mothering through her mystic powers to raise rich and famous children. Eventually, Ogboinba became egocentric, ambitious, and selfish. She later desired to change her destiny to be both a mother of the rich and famous and simultaneously a possessor of mystic powers. Her return was a risky journey that almost cost her her life because she dared to challenge Woyengi in a battle for destiny change. Ogboinba survived because she took cover under a pregnant woman.⁹³ Oduyoye said, "Having lost her mystic powers, Ogboinba allied herself once more with the role of child-bearing woman to survive."⁹⁴ Fortunately, Ogboinba survived because the creator, Woyengi, decreed that no pregnant woman should be killed.⁹⁵

According to Oduyoye, the above myth suggests communal Mothering in Africa as empowering, and that Mothering is not necessarily the same as giving birth. Woyengi deliberately sponsored partnership Mothering so that Ogboinba (the childless woman) could experience Mothering. Motherhood should not be related to gender differentiation. Mothering is a societal responsibility, especially in African culture, because it comprises nurturing, discipline, and protecting, a role that all can perform.⁹⁶ At some point, Oduyoye, from her Christological perspective, gave the illustration of her views on Motherhood in "Christ for African Women," that Christ also performs mothering roles.⁹⁷ She also describes mothers as most adorable in men's hearts in the Akan culture. They give gifts to their mothers without being asked. Sometimes it can be costly or sacrificial. An example is the story of Kwesi and his two brothers who promised to bury their mother lavishly. It became competitive for the

⁹³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.23-24.

⁹⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.27.

⁹⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.24.

⁹⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.23, 29, 60.

⁹⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christ for African Women," pp.44, 45.

brothers, but Kwesi won top prize by getting the tail of the queen elephant placed in his mother's coffin. It means that this attitude is inherent in Akan men and in what can be referred to as a definition of internal masculinity.⁹⁸

2.2.3 Oduyoye's Views on Motherhood from a Critical Liberation Perspective

It can be said that Oduyoye's views on Motherhood from her work *Beads and Strands* on the theme of poverty and Motherhood present her views on Motherhood from a critical liberation perspective. Fiedler adds that Oduyoye's "...story, and also her mother's story, demonstrate how African women should re-define culture with a view to their liberation."⁹⁹

As previously discussed, Oduyoye sees the richness of Akan cultural beliefs of Motherhood in the society as holistic and regards Motherhood as a "...a religious duty. It is what a socio-political and economic system should be about..."¹⁰⁰ For the Akan people, biological Motherhood is holistic. When Mothering is insufficient and lacking, the children are disorganized, for Motherhood is life.¹⁰¹ She asserts that associating Motherhood with poverty is the "...internalization of domesticating cultural norms."¹⁰² First, she blames the drastic change in the economy. For example, women are excluded from opportunities that generate wealth in society, and mothers are vulnerable.¹⁰³ Second, the Western ideas of adoption are influencing Africans.¹⁰⁴ She explains that "...cultures that do not understand the African concept of family and mothering, including carrying financial responsibility for the family's children are penalized...because of western ideas of adoption."¹⁰⁵ The concept connotes that taking care of children in the family and community is a responsibility of the community. In this sense, Oduyoye refers to state and religious policies infiltrated by Western ideas as penalizing what

⁹⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.46.

⁹⁹ R. N. D. Fiedler and J. W. Hofmeyr, "The Conception of the Circle of Concerned African Women's Theologians: Is it African or Western?," *Acta Theologica*, 2011, 31 (1): 39-57, p.41.

¹⁰⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.57.

¹⁰¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.57.

¹⁰² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.57.

¹⁰³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.57.

¹⁰⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.58.

¹⁰⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.58.

the norm for the African understanding of communal Mothering is. For example, some Western ideas require that a woman with children must prove there is no man with her before being assisted by the state for the children's welfare, whereas in some Western societies, a woman with children and without a man is penalized.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, she argues that there is no single Motherhood in Africa.¹⁰⁷

Third, the challenges of war, natural disasters, economic and political irregularities, and the quest for survival are significant factors, especially for women and their children who are victims of these circumstances.¹⁰⁸ It is observed that these situations are constantly present, especially in Northern Nigeria today. Mothers are more vulnerable and have become victims of terrorism due to losing their husbands to death. Some mothers are kidnapped with their children by terrorists or become homeless because their homes are burned. Some are forced to marry or used as pawns by Boko Haram terrorists.¹⁰⁹ Mothers who are eventually rescued from their captors live with stigma.

Nevertheless, in their poverty of identity or stigmatization in society, they have not been deterred from reaching out for the survival of humanity. Oduyoye says, "They give until they have nothing more to share but their poverty."¹¹⁰ This notion relates to how women in Northern Nigeria are found on the streets as mobile shops, their heads stacked with produce, to sell food items to meet their children's and extended family's needs. It is estimated as of 2019 that 45.5% of the labour market in Nigeria are females. As a result of Islamic culture, Muslim women are not privileged in the labour force compared to other religions.¹¹¹ 73.15% are primarily found in farming and 26.85% in small-scale businesses. A researcher with the Institute of Development Studies, United Kingdom (UK) Aid, Sue Enfield, established that

¹⁰⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, pp.58-59.

¹⁰⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.58.

¹⁰⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.59.

¹⁰⁹ Jacob Zenn and Elizabeth Pearson, "Women, Gender and the Evolving Tactics of Boko Haram," *Journal of Terrorism Research* (JTR), Volume 5, Issue 1 (Special Issue, Feb. 2014): pp.47, 48, 50, <https://cvir.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/10.15664/jtr.828/galley/697/download/> (accessed August 7th 2021).

¹¹⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.59.

¹¹¹ Sue Enfield, *Gender Roles and Inequalities in the Nigerian Labour Market*, Institute of Development Studies (2019): p.2, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d9b5c88e5274a5a148b40e5/597_Gender_Roles_in_Nigerian_Labour_Market.pdf (accessed August 7th 2021).

women are twice poorer than men in Nigerian society.¹¹² Oduyoye's fourth point in her concerns is that women are used as objects of research and experiments. She argued that they have no choice in how they plan Motherhood, especially regarding the issue of contraceptives. They ignorantly take what is toxic for their bodies and the environment.¹¹³ Fifth, she noted that women are unemployed, and those employed are underpaid in the labour market even though they contribute immensely to the local economy.¹¹⁴ Sixth, Oduyoye blames Western Christianity, African culture, Islam, and Arabic culture as androcentric, suppressing and eliminating women's welfare from their provisions. These cultures pressure women to be producers of human beings at all costs.¹¹⁵ For instance, in Akan culture, fertility is a crucial factor. Young women are expected to be the medium for the reincarnation of ancestors through childbearing. As a ritual, a bride is fed with eggs as a symbol of fertility.¹¹⁶ The status of a woman depends on being a "mother" or a "wife" and not on her achievements. Oduyoye cites the finding of Christina Oppong that young university girls attach themselves economically to men. It shows that these young women feel they are owned by men who support them economically.¹¹⁷

On the need for women's liberation, Oduyoye turns to the understanding of the economy of God and the economy of Motherhood. She argues that Motherhood should not be associated with poverty. The juxtaposition of Motherhood and poverty is disrespectful and requires caution. Proper analysis and sufficient evidence should be used to validate such notions.¹¹⁸ In Oduyoye's analysis, mothers are co-creators with God and are imitators of God's care of creation. She adds that humanity is challenged with the poverty of understanding who mothers are. Injustice against women as humans is the exploitation of God's creation.¹¹⁹

¹¹² Sue Enfield, *Gender Roles and Inequalities in the Nigerian Labour Market*, p.6.

¹¹³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.60.

¹¹⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.60.

¹¹⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.61.

¹¹⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Ritual in Africa," in *The Will to Arise*, edited by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), p.13.

¹¹⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986), p.122.

¹¹⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.58.

¹¹⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.62.

Her critical reflection on Motherhood within the Asante culture presents that a child belongs to the mother. It is also a communal responsibility to protect a prospective mother. She draws attention to the need to learn from the Asante culture that Motherhood is communal. She concludes that the "Inability to transform this ancient wisdom into modern socio-economic terms is at the root of economic impoverishment of women."¹²⁰ She concludes that Mothering has not made her mother poor; Mothering has made her mother rich. Her mother is wealthy because the joys and sorrows of the community are hers. Richness has a special place for Motherhood in the community. She added that biological mothers and women are rich because they understand Mothering as a sacred duty for humanity. She suggests that Motherhood is a responsibility not just for mothers but for all humanity as a means of survival. Motherhood gives them the confidence to survive. Humanity should not just honour mothers but empower them.¹²¹ The state of women being poor is making their communities rich. They ensure that their families are sustained, no matter how difficult the situation.¹²² Hence, we can observe that Oduyoye emphasizes communal Mothering, a responsibility for all humanity.

2.2.4 Oduyoye's Views on Motherhood as a Metaphor in Ecological Theology

More recently, Oduyoye reflects on Motherhood in the context of ecological theology in the preface she wrote to an anthology of essays by some African female theologians, *Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and African Indigenous Religions*.¹²³ Oduyoye comments that her contribution to the subject matter is an "hors d'oeuvre," which means she presents a starter dish to what other contributors are to serve in the discourse that follows.¹²⁴ Even though it seems like an appetizer, much is presented from her African women's ecology. Not all subjects in her reflections under review are presented, the focus being on how her notions on Motherhood appear here.

¹²⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.61.

¹²¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.63.

¹²² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.62.

¹²³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, (n.p.: African Sun Press Media and Editors, 2020). Ebook.

¹²⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiv.

Oduyoye developed her ecology based on Bolaji Idowu's work on African Traditional Religion. He argued that the metaphorical use of Earth and Africa as mothers fits African women.¹²⁵ According to Oduyoye, the same idea is found in the Akan language about the Earth as *Asaase Yaa* as female and has the same meaning for God, implying Mother Earth is a sacred place for worship.¹²⁶ Oduyoye uses Motherhood here as a metaphor for both Africa and the Earth. She begins by establishing the challenges women face with patriarchy in Africa. She compares African women's experience with oppression and suppression by patriarchy, Westernization, and colonialism.¹²⁷ For example, cultural beliefs treat both women and Mother Earth as possessions of men.¹²⁸

It should be noted that patriarchy, Westernization, and colonialism as guilty of oppression of women is a theme and matter of emphasis in Oduyoye's African women's theology. She discovers that even in matrilineal African society, women being powerful may be no more than implicit. Realistically, power is not in the hands of women, especially in the Asante culture; the maternal line is irrelevant to political power.¹²⁹

Furthermore, Oduyoye reflects on the metaphorical use of African culture to explain the connection between birth and the cemetery. The umbilical cord goes to Earth at birth, and one is buried in Mother Earth at death. This explains the circle of life for humanity. At birth, a human comes via the umbilical cord connected to a mother, and at death, goes back to Mother Earth. Hence, it refers to the Earth as the resting place for all humanity. She explains this illustration thus, "When we are young, we sleep on our mother's bosom; when we die, we find comfort in Mother Earth."¹³⁰ She derives this from Akan proverbs, which say, "the earth does

¹²⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiii.

¹²⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiv.

¹²⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiii.

¹²⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xvi.

¹²⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, p.123.

¹³⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xvi.

not refuse a dead body,"¹³¹ yet the Earth is not offended by how she is treated.¹³² Thus, it explicates that women as mothers and the Earth as a mother have a similar attitude in being slow to voice their pains. The Earth as a mother is slow to respond to how she is treated as a dumping place. She notes that, recently, Mother Earth has been making known how she feels. The same applies to how Africans and women are feeling. Prophetically, Oduyoye mentions that someday the Earth may get back at us. And she states that the Earth should be treated as sacred and as a voice toward liberation.¹³³

Second, it is time for women to speak up as mothers for their liberation in Africa. Africans should realize that women are God's precious creation and should be revered. Oduyoye argues that understanding African culture is an excellent ground for reflecting on gender and human relations since African Traditional Religion sees the Earth as female.¹³⁴ She proposes that it is possible to have proper gender relations that can be "life-giving and life-enhancing."¹³⁵ She also proposes dialogue with African Indigenous Religion, Christianity, Islam, and other religions towards the liberation of Mother Earth and Mother Africa.¹³⁶ Interestingly, she argues that women as mothers have a role to play in the liberation of the Earth as this connects with African cultural beliefs.¹³⁷

Thus, Oduyoye's eco-theology is related to African culture and traditional religious beliefs. Traditional African religio-cultural beliefs understood women and the Earth (Mothers) as sacred. Through the bodies of women and the Earth, life begins and ends. But men have failed to treat the Earth and women as sacred; instead, they see them as possessions. Now that Mother Earth and women are no longer silent, African women theologians take the role of

¹³¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiii.

¹³² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiii.

¹³³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xvi.

¹³⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xvi.

¹³⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xviii.

¹³⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xviii.

¹³⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, edited by Nobuntu Penxa Matholeni, and others, p.xiv.

addressing the oppression through dialogue within the Sankofa philosophy. It is considered the method of highlighting what is liberating in African culture and religion towards an efficient eco-theology in Africa.

Therefore, Oduyoye's views of Motherhood from her biography describe that Mothering can begin early, especially for the first-born girl-child. It is a process of nurturing the girl-child to be a communal mother, implying that Mothering is not necessarily biological. Mothering is also a means of role modeling toward leadership and liberation of women from oppressive cultures. Oduyoye's views on Motherhood from storytelling theology derived from African sources such as myths, folktales, and proverbs give liberating elements about Motherhood. They reveal how enriching and empowering communal Mothering is in African culture. These views also portray how mothers can be seen as creators and protectors and are most cherished in the African community. Oduyoye's views of Motherhood from a critical liberation perspective indicate that Motherhood is not poverty but richness. Mothers are assets and contributors that empower society's economic, social, political, and religious spheres. They give their lives as a sacrifice to make sure everyone in the community is rich. Lastly, Oduyoye's views on Motherhood as a metaphor from her ecology give the understanding that Motherhood is life. Life begins with women as mothers, life is sustained on Earth as a mother, and life ends on Mother Earth. Mother Earth, Mother Africa, African women are oppressed. Thus, they need to be liberated by African women as mothers seeking dialogue with African culture and religion towards liberation.

Finally, Oduyoye's views of Motherhood emphasize communal Mothering. It is a responsibility and role performed by all in the community. Even the gods do not bother about gender when creating people. For example, Woyengi, the Great Mother, generously allows her creatures to choose who they want to be.

2.3 METHODOLOGY OF ODUYOYE AS CAN BE OBSERVED IN HER VIEWS ON MOTHERHOOD

As we saw in 2.2, Motherhood is an essential theme in Oduyoye's African women's theology.; We now turn to the methodological questions on which her theology is built and how these sources relate to each other. However, regarding the distinction between methodology and methods as briefly defined in the introductory chapter, this chapter attempts to briefly present the methodology and methods of Oduyoye in her African women's theology.

2.3.1 Methodological Issues

Oduyoye, the mother of African women's theology, proposed the other wing of African theology in Accra, Ghana, in 1989. The child of AWT is called the Circle of Concerned African Women, whose theology is focused on communal theology that addresses women's issues from an African liberative perspective claimed to be different from Western feminist theories.¹³⁸ Oduyoye comments that it is a paradigm shift with a critical distance from Euro-American feminist and womanist theologies. However, African women theologians acknowledge that they share specific theological heritages, contexts, and themes with the Euro-American feminist theologians. Oduyoye further describes that women construct African women's theology at their own pace and from their own context, priorities, and perspectives.¹³⁹ She pointed out that although they have a communal theology, there is a difference between African women's "theology" and African women's "theologies," built on their different experiences and contexts; thus, there are constructions of diverse theologies.¹⁴⁰ This is based on the fact that Africa is diverse. Julius Gathogo cites Apawo Phiri as arguing that "African women theologians want to acknowledge that even within Africa, there is a diversity of women's experiences due to [the] differences in race, culture, politics, economy, and religion."¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ R. N. D. Fiedler and J. W. Hofmeyr, *The Conception of the Circle of Concerned African Women's Theologians: Is it African or Western?*, p.40.

¹³⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.15.

¹⁴⁰ Julius Gathogo, *Mercy Oduyoye as the Mother of African Women's Theology*, p.6.

¹⁴¹ Julius Gathogo, *Mercy Oduyoye as the Mother of African Women's Theology*, p.6.

Oduyoye uses cultural hermeneutics in her methodology. She asserts that African women resort to cultural hermeneutics with an African lens and skilful critical examination. The task is to distinguish what is liberating and reject what is oppressive to women.¹⁴² Kanyoro argues that cultural hermeneutics is a key to African women's liberation. It correlates with the scrutiny of culture. Culture is considered in cultural hermeneutics "...the most important authoritative canon to the African worldview and any form of liberation theology will have to come to terms with culture."¹⁴³ According to Oduyoye, cultural hermeneutics is the path that women theologians in Africa take with earnest attention to matters of "continuity and change." It is a shift toward African women holding on to cultural heritage to maintain dignity in their traditional society.¹⁴⁴

About the notion of "African women theologies," Oduyoye's theology is distinct in her cultural hermeneutics. She places her emphasis on the Sankofa philosophy. *Sankofa* is an Akan concept that means "go back and fetch it."¹⁴⁵ *Sankofa* in Asante is a gold weight symbol implying the need for one to use his resources.¹⁴⁶ In this regard, *Sankofa* derives sources from African culture and religion, which is an acceptable source in Oduyoye's methodology. She argues that African theologians should do African Christian Theology drawn from what they have and not from external sources. She sees that African culture has empowering and liberating elements. Thus, what is required is the liberation of minds to face the realities of today with all resources available.¹⁴⁷ She submits that she is a promoter of such a philosophy as a source in her theology.¹⁴⁸ Her Sankofa is cultural hermeneutics, an ongoing process similarly used amongst the Circle members.¹⁴⁹ Oduyoye argues that Sankofa is a task that she will not give up. In her words, "I personally am not ready to give up on the need to bring Africa's religious-cultural heritage into the arena of study, analysis, and transformation."¹⁵⁰ Following Oduyoye's argument on Sankofa philosophy, her methodology lies undoubtedly within the corpus of

¹⁴² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.10.

¹⁴³ Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics*, (Cleveland, The Pilgrim Press, 2002), p.55.

¹⁴⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.14.

¹⁴⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.17.

¹⁴⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture," *International Review of Missions*, 84 (1995): p.86.

¹⁴⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture," p.88.

¹⁴⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture," p.86.

¹⁴⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture," p.87.

¹⁵⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Christianity and African Culture," pp.87, 88.

liberation theology and the field of contextual theology. Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, a Nigerian contextual theologian, argues that all theologies are inherently contextual. He narrates that contextual theology gained ground in the late twentieth century. It was a move by African, Asian, and Latin American theologians who questioned the relevance of Western theology for Christians in today's majority world.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Oduyoye also questions how African male theology could be relevant to African women.

The following crucial element in Oduyoye's methodology is experience. Experience is one of the significant sources of theology in the Christian tradition and feminist theory. Rosemary Radford Ruether affirms that experience is unique in feminist and liberation theories but centred on women's experiences.¹⁵² She argues, "The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women."¹⁵³ Moreover, revelation starts with an individual.¹⁵⁴

In feminist theology, there are epistemological and ontological researchers, feminist empiricism researchers, feminist standpoint researchers, and radical construction researchers.¹⁵⁵ It can be inferred that Oduyoye falls under the category of a standpoint researcher. The feminist standpoint is a turn from focusing on beliefs and dogmas found among religious leaders and institutions to focusing on the the "...embodied practices in the daily lives of ordinary people."¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Oduyoye comments that "women adopt a perspectival approach rather than analysis and critique of existing works."¹⁵⁷

According to the standpoint of feminist theory, experience is the starting point. It focuses on the actual experiences of women's lives in a given time and context. It is also an

¹⁵¹ Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, "Contextual Theology. God in Human Context," in *Evangelical Theological Methods: Five views*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Steven M. Studebaker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), ebook pp.94, 95, https://web-p-ebshost-com.pthu.idm.oclc.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxiYmtfXzE4MzM1MzRfX0FO0?sid=fb2969fd-a294-4b20-9663-bea78366289b@redis&vid=0&format=EB&lpid=lp_v&rid=0

¹⁵² Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p.12.

¹⁵³ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, p.18.

¹⁵⁴ Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk*, pp.12, 13.

¹⁵⁵ Mary Jo Neitz, "Feminist Methodologies," in *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge Taylor and Friends Group, 2011), p.55.

¹⁵⁶ Mary Jo Neitz, "Feminist Methodologies," p.61.

¹⁵⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.11.

effective methodology toward a new path in knowledge and decolonization.¹⁵⁸ As described under subsections 2.2.1 to 2.2.3, Oduyoye uses her experience as a methodology for her views of Motherhood. Gwinyai Muzorewa, an African Christian theologian, states that the African experience is an essential source of theology.¹⁵⁹ Ezigbo adds, "Theology, like all fields of study that concern human beliefs and practices, cannot escape constantly shifting human experiences, cultures, and social locations. If theology does not address these currents that constitute human contexts, it will become irrelevant to humanity."¹⁶⁰ Experience as a methodology source helps look at past experiences and bring new meaning to the present experience. Musa Dube, a post-colonial feminist and the current African Continental Coordinator, also uses experience as a source in reading the Bible. She states, "For me to read the Bible as an African woman and from my experience, therefore, is to be involved with the historical events of imperialism. Reading with the memories of slavery, colonialism, apartheid, neo-colonialism..."¹⁶¹

Consequently, in Oduyoye's attempt at cultural hermeneutics, she seems to blend the use of Scripture, tradition (church), experience, and critical examination or reflection (reason) in her methodology. In *Daughters of Anowa*, she emphasizes writing from a Christian perspective with a liberating tone and from the "church," acknowledging she is coming from the roots of the African Christian church, a church "performing the Christlike functions."¹⁶² Some of her works discussed in this thesis present her attempts at using Scripture in her critical reflections. She notes that using the Scripture within the African context remains a methodological challenge. Hence, African women theologians resort to tradition (African) but with the skill of critical examination.¹⁶³ Oduyoye also suggests the method of women studying the Bible from their thinking and experiences as the starting point.¹⁶⁴ She further argues that the Bible was written from people's experiences and the whole community in the past years. It proves that

¹⁵⁸ Mary Jo Neitz, "Feminist Methodologies," pp.59-60.

¹⁵⁹ Gwinyai P. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology* (Mary Knoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1985), p.82.

¹⁶⁰ Victor Ifeanyi Ezigbo, "Contextual Theology. God in Human Context," p.103.

¹⁶¹ Musa W. Dube, "Toward a Post-colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible," in *Hope Abundant, Third World and Indigenous Women's Theology*, edited by Kwok Pui-lan (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p.91.

¹⁶² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.3, 4.

¹⁶³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, pp.11, 12, 13.

¹⁶⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.191.

African women can also write a new book, a new "African Testament."¹⁶⁵ She advocates that African women should harmonize their lived experiences with liberation against the stipulations of dogmas, religion, and culture that have compelled them to live their lives in the past. Women should read the Bible and be open to God's voice, because what happens in certain situations and times is not necessarily the same in another.¹⁶⁶

Oduyoye's ecology gives an excellent example of how she balances the sources she accepts in her methodology. Undoubtedly, Idowu is cited chiefly in her works, as mentioned earlier in her biography. Noticeably, she also uses African culture and religion as a starting point with women at the centre of the narratives. For example, from selected works on her views on Motherhood under section 2.2. Oduyoye remarkably revisits Sankofa philosophy, which she upholds in her work *Mother Earth, Mother Africa*. Much strength is sourced from references to Idowu and Daniel B. Botkin's¹⁶⁷ concepts that relate to African Traditional Religion. For example, she cites Daniel as saying that the problem with ecology today is a loss of traditional knowledge, values, and ethics associated with celebrating what it means to respect the sacredness of the natural world.¹⁶⁸ She argues that the science of African Traditional Religion is still being developed because African Traditional Religion respects and honours the relationship between humans and creation, which earlier scholars identified with animism and pantheism.¹⁶⁹ She also upholds the richness of Akan's African Traditional Religion which refers to the Earth as sacred and female.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, she is firmly against oppressive elements from African Traditional Religion and culture against women.

¹⁶⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.191.

¹⁶⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.191.

¹⁶⁷ Botkin is a renowned environmental scientist who has been practicing for a couple of decades. Although he is a Western theologian, Oduyoye refers to his works, which fit in to African Traditional Religious concepts of the Earth. cf. Daniel B. Botkins, About Dan, <https://www.danielbotkin.com/about/>, (accessed May 5th 2022).

¹⁶⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, p.xv.

¹⁶⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, p.xiv.

¹⁷⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface" in *Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Indigenous Religions*, p.xiv.

2.3.2 Methods in Oduyoye's Theology

This section recognizes Oduyoye's method as interdepending on her methodology. Methods do not stand independently without a methodology. A method is a logical and organized way of helping collect and analyze data on the reality of life.¹⁷¹ In this sense, it can be used towards developing a theological theme.

Oduyoye uses the technique of storytelling as a method in her theology towards different theological themes discussed in this research. She points out that the significant sources of African women's theology are storytelling from women's experiences, African folktales, myths, and proverbs. She sees that women's stories, especially from Africa, remain unwritten, and there is a need to consider it a rich source for creative writing from a contextual theological perspective. She opines that it is a necessary framework that correlates with narrative theology. She notes that narrative theology thrives in oral and written sources and that storytelling is a classical source of theology.¹⁷²

She collects information from her experiences and other women, African culture, myths, folktales, and proverbs centred on women. *Daughters of Anowa* gives a clear example of how she uses storytelling as a method in her theology. She refers to her form of storytelling as three interlocking circles: stories from Language, African Culture, and Dreams with the woman at the centre of the narratives, searching for what will shape women's lives or finding answers to what a woman is.¹⁷³

The first circle is referred to as Language storytelling. It retells the significance of African myths, proverbs, and folktales with attention to African language and imagery. She harmonizes myths and folktales as "folktalk." She argues that myths and folktales are not considered human narratives in Africa because Africans regard them as highly significant and they are known to have traditional influence in their lives. Muzorewa refers to Mbiti's thought that myths

¹⁷¹ Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler, "Introduction: Research Methods in the Study of Religion/s," in *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Study of Religion*, edited by Michael Strausberg and Steven Engler (London: Routledge Taylor and Friends Group, 2011), p.5.

¹⁷² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, pp.10, 11.

¹⁷³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.19, 20.

effectively pass ideas from generation to generation. He says that "...myths provide Africans with the best context to live out their theology."¹⁷⁴ Muzorewa adds that the sources of African Traditional Religion handed over from generation to generation are a means for African theology. He says, "Africans receive religious ideas through cultural and linguistic structures, such as prayers, proverbs, myths, art, experience, and various religious and rituals."¹⁷⁵

Oduyoye's storytelling is interwoven with women's experiences in Africa to give ideas on the humanity of a woman.¹⁷⁶ Most of the "folktalk" consisted of collections from Ghana and Nigeria that provide theological reflections about creation and gender discourse. The myths of *Woyengi or Tamaru, the Great Mother*, the *Ozidi* saga, and *Ogboinba* are good examples. These myths were used to show that the creator is a woman, which helps to understand the discourse of gender differentiation.¹⁷⁷

Oduyoye further explains that folktales are an African heritage used in schools towards proper morality and communal relationships.¹⁷⁸ As for applying proverbs, she argues that proverbs are used as an everyday language, a native practice by Africans. Even contemporary African theologians are observed to validate a point or argument by using African proverbs.¹⁷⁹ Muzorewa cites Lugira as saying that proverbs are not just didactical sayings but a reservoir of native wisdom and philosophy.¹⁸⁰ To show how proverbs are significant for Oduyoye, she repeatedly uses the following proverbs:

1. "A hen might step on her chick, but not intending to kill it," "The tortoise has no breasts, and yet she feeds her young ones,"
2. "When you catch the mother hen, the chicks become easy prey."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Gwinyai P. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, p.81.

¹⁷⁵ Gwinyai P. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, p.79.

¹⁷⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.19, 21.

¹⁷⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.29.

¹⁷⁸ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.13.

¹⁷⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, pp.13-14.

¹⁸⁰ Gwinyai P. Muzorewa, *The Origins and Development of African Theology*, p.80.

¹⁸¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, pp.57, 58.

She uses them to emphasize that African women are nurturers, disciplinarians, and protectors towards the welfare of their children, which validates the point that women are procreators. Therefore, African women fulfilling this sacred and indisputable role are commended and appreciated.¹⁸²

The second step of the storytelling method in *Daughters of Anowa* is derived from Asante, Akan, and Yoruba culture. In this circle, Oduyoye critically examines African culture and women from the context of both a patriarchal and matriarchal society. She examines how culture affects women's political, economic, social, and religious lives. She identifies that mothers are trusted and considered with high regard. For example, the African child places mothers first, followed by fathers, then wives. She explains that "...at the deep centre of a woman's being, uncontrolled and unknown by any other human being, lies motherhood."¹⁸³ Based on this understanding, she presents the importance of mothers as solid voices in traditional African politics. For example, in the role of Queen Mother in Ghana, the *Iyalode* (mother of the town or mother of all women) of southern Nigeria from the Yoruba culture is chosen by the *Oba* (King) to serve as a voice representing women. These illustrations aim to understand Motherhood in African women's liberation from oppressive patriarchal systems. It is observed that Oduyoye combines theological discourse on creation and gender relationships with the illustration of Motherhood. For example, she submits that Motherhood is not about childbearing but about actively participating in the ongoing creative process. Moreover, Motherhood should not just be a role valued by and open to women, but both women and men and society should desire it.¹⁸⁴

In the final cycle of her storytelling in *Daughters of Anowa*, Oduyoye concentrates on imaginative theological reflection, which she refers to as Dreams. This method is storytelling about women's dreams of the newly liberated women becoming who they want to be. She emphasizes women's dream of liberation by proposing more "Mothers' unions" in churches and rediscovering the Christian art of painting and sculpting Madonnas. This idea implies that

¹⁸² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.60.

¹⁸³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.143.

¹⁸⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.141.

envisioning such dreams can contribute to understanding what Motherhood entails and how it should be expressed against what culture has presented for the good of society.¹⁸⁵ However, Oduyoye is seen to apply a dialogical approach under this category because she seeks gender relationships within the church and other religions such as ATR and Islam for better lives of both men and women.

Oduyoye's essay "A Coming Home to Myself" gives another vivid example of her method of storytelling. The narrative begins with her experience of a childless marriage within the context of African matriarchal and patriarchal systems, followed by a critical examination of Akan and Yoruba culture, a critical reflection on the Christian church, and an imaginative reflection on the liberation of the African woman. It is noticeable that Oduyoye focuses on the biblical Christian church because she is critical of the Western church. She also criticizes how the church applies Scriptures such as Psalms 128 during weddings, stressing fruitfulness, without balancing this with the situation where a woman does not bear children.¹⁸⁶ Hence, she draws attention to the need to create a balance in this regard.

Most importantly, Oduyoye's views on Motherhood emanate from her experience and the African cultural perspectives of both the Akan and Yoruba cultures of West Africa. She is critical of the oppressive elements and picks out the liberating ones based on the views on Motherhood from her cultural background. For Oduyoye, Motherhood is a means for the liberation of both the African church and society. It is a means of maintaining human lives and the creation connected to her ecology. Motherhood is also a means of modeling either socio-economic liberation or philanthropy in Africa.

While her methodology is cultural hermeneutics, emphasizing the use of women's experience within the African context and the Sankofa philosophy, her method is storytelling, which is interwoven into her methodology. The Sankofa philosophy is the reservoir from which Oduyoye draws her sources with a critical lens; that is, the use of what belongs to Africans to do theology, and not from the use of external sources. These sources include African folktales,

¹⁸⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p.159.

¹⁸⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.116.

proverbs, myths, culture, and religion but with an emphasis on picking liberating elements and deconstructing what is oppressive, especially for African women.

Interestingly, Oduyoye's methodology, illustrated by her views on Motherhood, stands in the spotlight in African women's theology. Since methodologies are means of developing theologies, I see the need to construct her Motherhood theology. But we first need to lay a foundation by looking at the context of this research and attempting to use the Sankofa philosophy as a tool for discussing the Yandang people of Northern Nigeria, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER THREE

THE YANDANG¹⁸⁷ PEOPLE AND THEIR VIEWS ON MOTHERHOOD

Oduyoye's methodology and her views on Motherhood were influenced by her Asante, Akan, and Yoruba cultural contexts and her experiences as an African woman. The motivation for this research is also informed by the experiences of Yandang women and Northern Nigerian women in the struggle with oppressive patriarchal systems and the poverty of understanding Motherhood as socially constructed. Thus, this chapter is a presentation of where the research is situated. It attempts to build on the ongoing Sankofa philosophy in African women's theology. It explores another context different from Oduyoye's to unravel more sources from the Yandang culture that can be used in doing African women's theology and connecting the Yandang culture and Oduyoye's liberation theology of Motherhood at a dialogue table. It also explores and analyzes liberating and oppressive elements in the Yandang culture derived from their views on Motherhood. The discovery of both oppressive and liberating elements in the views on Motherhood by the Yandang culture is projected toward evaluating Oduyoye's views on Motherhood and developing her Motherhood theology in African women's theology as a means towards liberation theology for Yandang people. The chapter also briefly describes the Yandang people's culture and their views on Motherhood.

References are from an Insider's perspective. Sources are the works of Cornelius Dedan Nyari (a Yandang man), who edited the most referenced material in Yandang culture, and C. K. Meek's (a European researcher) work on Northern Nigerian tribes,¹⁸⁸ internet sources, Yandang women's experiences, and Yandang men's experiences.

The chapter begins with a brief history of the Yandang people, followed by how patriarchy and the views on Motherhood are expressed within the culture.

¹⁸⁷ 'Yandang' is also spelled 'Yendang' or 'Nyandang' in some publications. This research uses 'Yandang.'

¹⁸⁸ Nyari also makes references to his works.

3.1 Brief Background of the Yandang People

The Yandang people was a name given by the Mumuye people. Both tribes refer to each other as distant cousins. *Ya-Dan* means people from the 'other side' or 'outsiders.' Originally, the Yandang people call themselves *Nhwin Kuk* meaning, 'fellow town's people.'¹⁸⁹ They are said to have migrated from Egypt with the Mumuye people to Wayorro, the present-day Yorro Local government of Taraba State, Nigeria.¹⁹⁰ Yorro is the ancestral and religious base of the Mumuye and Yandang people. Despite their differences in the language they speak, they have similarities in their cultures and their manner of traditional dress.¹⁹¹ It was from Wayorro that the Yandang people migrated to Yakoko, Yonko, and then Gorobi hills. Yakoko and Yonko are villages within the Zing Local government area of Taraba State, Nigeria,¹⁹² and Zing is the hometown of the Mumuye ethnic group.¹⁹³ Both Mumuye and Yandang people are from sub-Saharan Africa, located in the Northeastern region of Nigeria. They have spread across the Taraba and Adamawa states of Nigeria. The Yandang people are found within the Mayo-Belwa Local government of Adamawa State while the Mumuye people are primarily located in the Ardo-Kola, Gassol, and Lau Local government areas of Taraba State.¹⁹⁴

3.1.1 Socio-political, Economic, and Religious Context of the Yandang People

As earlier mentioned, the Yandang people settled and spread into 15 clans within Adamawa and Taraba states. They have five village heads in the Dapanti, Alkali-Manga,

¹⁸⁹ Bellanaija.com, *BN Presents beyond the Three: From the Gorombi Mountain Range, Lynda Presents the Yandang People*, <https://www.bellanaija.com/2018/09/bn-presents-beyond-the-three-yandang-people-lynda/> (accessed April 23rd 2022).

¹⁹⁰ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari (Yola: Paraclete Publishers, 2011), p.16.

¹⁹¹ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.17.

¹⁹² Towns and Villages, Zing, Nigeria, <https://townsvillages.com/ng/zing/>, (accessed April 19th 2022).

¹⁹³ DBPedia, About: Zing, Nigeria, https://dbpedia.org/page/Zing,_Nigeria, (accessed April 19th 2022).

¹⁹⁴ Jeremiah Aluwong, "Ethnic Groups in Nigeria: Yandang People", <https://articles.connectnigeria.com/ethnic-groups-in-nigeria-yandang-people/> (accessed April 19th 2022).

Bumbum, Waka, and Bajama villages. The village head from Dapanti is the tribal chief, and this was organized administratively during the British colonial rule and stands as it is to this day.¹⁹⁵

Economically, the Yandang people are farmers, hunters, blacksmiths, weavers, artists, and potters. They farm crops such as yams, groundnuts, beans, millet, guinea corn, potatoes, cassava, and rice, and the work of blacksmith is a unique skill found only among the *Watashi* clan. They make hoes, sickles, swords, knives, and other instruments. The weavers are specialized in weaving the local cloth called *Langtang*, which is mainly used on different occasions.¹⁹⁶ Another similarity between the Yandang and Mumuye is the use of Lantang dress during occasions.¹⁹⁷

The Yandang people are traditional African worshippers. They believe in the existence of the Supreme being, whom they refer to as *ruh* (the Sun), and in their ancestors, who are their defenders, providers, and protectors.¹⁹⁸ It does not imply that they are Sun worshippers; they worship the Being that created the Sun. Yandang Christians refer to God as *Rubi* and to Jesus Christ His Son as *Valerubi*.¹⁹⁹ Despite the ancestral connections between the Mumuye and Yandang people, religiously they differ in how they refer to the Supreme being and other practices. The Yandang people connect with Yorro as their spiritual contact source; even the Mumuye people depend on Yorro as the rain-making centre.²⁰⁰ In the occurrence of drought the village heads of the Yandang people pay homage to the Mumuye Chief Priest for the need for seeds with gift items such as dogs, goats, and chickens.²⁰¹ Prayers for rains are also directed to Yorro; for example, during the planting season called *nyasundari* (pray for rain), the Chief Priest prays in these words translated by Nyari,

¹⁹⁵ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.18.

¹⁹⁶ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives* edited by C. D. Nyari, pp.24, 25.

¹⁹⁷ BN presents Beyond The Three: From the Gorobi Mountain Range, Lynda presents the Yandang people, <https://www.bellanaija.com/2018/09/bn-presents-beyond-the-three-yandang-people-lynda/> (accessed April 19th 2022). The British Museum, Textile; garment, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_2010-2035-1 (accessed April 25th 2022).

¹⁹⁸ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.45.

¹⁹⁹ Jeremiah Aluwong, *Ethnic Groups in Nigeria: Yandang People*.

²⁰⁰ C. K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, Volume one (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1931), p.482.

²⁰¹ C. K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria* Volume one, p.487.

*The rites which I am performing were bequeathed to me by my ancestors who lived in Yorro. Though they are dead, their spirits still live on. I, therefore, stand here in their presence, with nobody's property in my hand, to pray for rain and bumper harvest so that my people will not suffer and scatter among strangers or die of hunger.*²⁰²

During the harvest season, called *phuki* (new crops or thanksgiving), the Priest performs the rituals for the season by pouring brewed beer on his father's grave and calling on the ancestors in these words, *'The food which we sought from you has been given to us in plenty. We thank you, and we bring herewith your share. Bless it, cleanse it and make it safe for our consumption.'*²⁰³ Afterwards, the Priest goes to his mother's grave and pours the brewed beer on her grave, followed by chewing and spitting the new crops on the doors, bows, and the sacred pots, by the heads of all families. An accompanying feast signals to the community that they can now eat their harvest. However, it is expected that no man or woman should eat his or her new corn until the chief priest performs the *phuki* rituals; non-compliance to the rule attracts a curse.²⁰⁴

According to the Peoples Group reports, the Yandang people have been reached by the gospel of Christianity. They are estimated to be 115,000 globally and are mostly Evangelical and Neo-Pentecostal Christians. They have Bible translations, Jesus films, and gospel records.²⁰⁵ Their activeness in Christianity is proven by the fact that one of the illustrious sons of the Yandang people, Dr Panti Filibus Musa, is the present Archbishop of the Lutheran Church in Nigeria and the President of the Lutheran World Federation.²⁰⁶

²⁰² C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.46.

²⁰³ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.47.

²⁰⁴ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, pp.45, 46, 47.

²⁰⁵ Peoples Groups, *People Name: Yandang of Nigeria*, <https://www.peoplesgroups.org/Explore/groupdetails.aspx?peid=14184> (accessed April 19th 2022).

²⁰⁶ The Lutheran World Federation, President, <https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/president> (accessed April 20th 2022).



207

The Gorobi hills are where the Yandang people first settled.



208

Mumuye women with Langtang



209

A Yandang woman and girls with Langtang



Locally woven Lantang. The pictures of women displayed above show prints made by the textile industry.

²⁰⁷ BN presents Beyond The Three: From the Gorobi Mountain Range, Lynda presents the Yandang people, <https://BellaNaija.com>, (accessed April 19th 2022).

²⁰⁸ Northeast Reporters, The Mumuye People (Tribe) of Taraba, <https://www.facebook.com/637228206760552/posts/the-mumuye-people-tribe-of-taraba-statethe-mumuyes-are-a-people-of-nigeria-they-/778126392670732/> (accessed April 25th 2022).

²⁰⁹ Dedan Nyari Cornelius, Facebook Photos, <https://www.facebook.com/dedannyari.cornelius> (accessed April 19th 2022).

3.2 The Views on Motherhood in Yandang Culture

It is expedient that this section sketches a background by briefly discussing Yandang women and patriarchy since Motherhood is associated with women. We have already observed that the culture is has matrilineal traits, which will be unfolded under this subsection. Subsequently, the views on Motherhood in Yandang culture are discussed via some selected proverbs and sources from the experiences of Yandang men and women and some Yandang customs.

3.2.1 Yandang Women and Patriarchy

The Yandang people are patriarchal and, to some extent, matriarchal, but it is mostly men who are considered in the matriarchal context. Below are some indications of patriarchy in the culture. In each clan, the senior male is the head of the extended family and decides on their behalf.²¹⁰ Respect for elders is unavoidable. Every male child is expected to respect his maternal uncles and help them either on their farms or when they see them carrying heavy things when they meet on the road. Although, according to custom, the young male can have sexual intercourse with his elder brother's wife and inherit his widow, the elder brother cannot do the same in relation to the younger brother; it is taboo.²¹¹

Women and children are categorized at the same level in the Yandang community. The place of a Yandang woman is to be in the kitchen and give birth to children. Women have no say in the decisions at home and in the community.²¹² A young man's voice is more respected than the community's older women. This custom is changing now, but some still practice it.²¹³

One can say this is not different from other cultures in Nigeria. On 14th October 2016 the present President of the Republic of Nigeria, who is a Fulani man from Katsina State of Northern Nigeria, was quoted as saying during an interview about his reaction to his wife's

²¹⁰ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.19.

²¹¹ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.20.

²¹² Briskila Thomas Yerima, interviewed by Mairo Anthony, Jalingo, Taraba State of Nigeria, April 17th 2022.

²¹³ Ebi Luka Akila, interviewed by Mairo Anthony, Jalingo, Taraba State of Nigeria, April 17th 2022.

concern about his administration, "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room."²¹⁴ It was reported that he made that bold response during his visit to Germany and while standing close to one of the most powerful women in the world, Angela Merkel.²¹⁵

Secondly, the place of women in Yandang culture is that women are used as property. A young woman does not have a say sometimes when it comes to her decision about whom to marry. C. D. Nyari explains that "...age and consent of the girl to be married are in some cases irrelevant, as a girl of, say 12 years, could be given out to be married by a man of her father's age."²¹⁶ Widows remain married to their husbands' extended families until they remarry. With her consent, she can be inherited within the family of her late husband's family but only as the wife of one of the younger brothers, which will not require him to pay any dowry. If she decides to marry an outsider, he will have to pay the dowry to her late husband's family. However, the payment is weighed by the value of the children she bore with her late husband. If this value is outweighed, they will pay the balance to the new husband.²¹⁷ Another source adds that before the outside suitor marries the widow, he has to pay *dana kirji*, which means an effort to "massage the burning chest of her late husband's family." The suitor can offer gifts such as a goat to calm the jealousy of the late husband's family.²¹⁸

Thirdly, in traditional worship, women cannot be members or priests of the Yandang Juju cult, nor can they know any secret about the masquerades. These masquerades are performed by humans dressed in some grass-like locally woven material. These men are said to be possessed by some spirits that control what they do the moment they are dressed in the masquerade outfit. No one is expected to know the man behind the mask except those within the cult's inner circle. They are not friendly to women, men, and boys who are not initiated into the cult. They come out in the village occasionally when a cult member dies, during burial,

²¹⁴ British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "Nigeria's President Buhari: My Wife Belongs in the Kitchen," <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37659863> (accessed April 19th 2022).

²¹⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), "Nigeria's President Buhari: My Wife Belongs in the Kitchen."

²¹⁶ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.27.

²¹⁷ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, pp.43, 44.

²¹⁸ Ebi Luka Akila, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

initiation, or other urgent meetings.²¹⁹ Men and boys who are initiated are warned not to talk about Juju among women.²²⁰ Women, uninitiated men, and boys should not cross paths with the masquerades. The masquerades make noise to alert all women and men who have not been initiated to take cover or hide in their houses because they are about to come out. A woman who crosses their paths or gets to know the secret of Juju will suffer the wrath of the Juju. She is expected to appease the Juju with kegs of local beer and several goats, depending on what they prescribe. Failure to pay the fine can cause a woman to become blind or remain a barren woman.²²¹

The last point considered in this thesis about the place of women in Yandang culture is the aspect of polygamy. A man in Yandang culture can marry as many wives as he can afford. The idea is that having many wives and children is a treasure. Having many wives and children is a means of having more hands on his farm; in this regard, he is seen as a rich man in the community. However, this was practiced when farming was still an effective means for the Yandang people's economy.²²²

3.2.2 The Matrilineal Context in Yandang Culture

The matrilineal context in Yandang culture is only connected with the firstborn child of any woman or mother. When a woman is married, all her children belong to her husband, the father of her children, except for the firstborn child, called the *marrah*. The *marrah* entails a right that must be fulfilled. Nyari describes the concept of the *marrah* as an example of

²¹⁹ This information comes from what I have observed and experienced. Some of the information comes from my maternal grandmother. She is a daring woman who built her house close to the Juju shrine. She seems not to be afraid like some women anytime the masquerades are out. It is a taboo to talk about the costumes of the masquerade. Most information about the masquerades is second-hand. But my maternal grandmother claims she has an idea of how they are dressed and that is how I have described it above.

²²⁰ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.21.

²²¹ I have witnessed how women ran for their lives when the masquerades were coming out in the village during the late 1990s when I visited my maternal grandmother in Gorobi village of Mayo-Belwa Local government area of Adamawa State. I also ran and hid under my grandmother's bed. My maternal grandmother explained more of this practice to me and I remember that I saw a blind woman who suffered the wrath of the Juju because she could not pay with the fine. Despite many being Christians in the Yandang community, some still practice the traditional worship of Juju.

²²² C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.30.

primogeniture. The first-born child is entitled to the rights of their total welfare from their maternal uncles; by extension, they belong to their mother's family.²²³ But it is not clear, neither has it been witnessed, if a *marrah* gets to inherit their uncles' wealth. What is explained by Nyari suggests that a *marrah* is a reward for their sister's fruitfulness which they receive as a blessing. But it can be understood that the male *marrah* is expected to take care of his maternal uncles; what he benefits is received when he is about to get married. Because of the patriarchal nature of the Yandang culture, the mother's brothers are the decision-makers in the child's welfare, especially when he or she is preparing to marry. Just as sexes vary, their roles vary also. The male child is to live with his maternal uncles as their legitimate son and is expected to hunt animals and farm for them. If he chooses to live with his biological parents, his maternal uncles are still responsible for paying for the bride price of his intended bride, and when he dies, he is to be buried by his uncles. As for the female child, she is to live with her biological parents, but her maternal uncles are the ones to decide and collect her bride price from her intended bridegroom, though her engagement rites are permitted to be carried out by her biological parents. When she dies, she is to be buried by her maternal uncles. The first female child is also responsible for running errands for her maternal uncles when needed. Her maternal uncles are obliged under the Yandang culture to prepare and purchase all household items she needs in her new home when she gets married; this is regarded as her right and privilege.²²⁴ The mother of the firstborn female child benefits in the share of the payment of the bride price through service rendered by her daughter's suitor. He is to build a hut for her,²²⁵ serve on her farmland known as *soh-konang*, and cultivate 40 measures of groundnuts.²²⁶

Consequently, maternal uncles are to be highly respected and treated with caution because refusing to comply with their wishes can incur the wrath of witches and wizards from the maternal family; according to Jeremiah Aluwong, a scholar and poet and an insider, the *marrah* system creates kinship ties and a balance of power between the two families.

²²³ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.34.

²²⁴ Jeremiah Aluwong, *Ethnic Groups in Nigeria: Yandang People*.

²²⁵ Jeremiah Aluwong, *Ethnic Groups in Nigeria: Yandang People*.

²²⁶ C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, p.28.

Furthermore, a firstborn female child belongs to another family and village apart from her family and village.²²⁷

3.2.3 Motherhood in Yandang Culture

Out of the wealth of proverbs about mothers in Yandang culture, the following few are selected in this research as useful sources (Sankofa) regarding the views on Motherhood in their culture.²²⁸ Subsequently, other sources derived are from Yandang customs, culture, and the experiences of some selected Yandang women.

- *Rabi kpesi la a tubi, yentingwi kusi ilon yuyi I nahetanlo bi zuli a ule. Be rabi doku la bi ya la ukiba, bi la niki ilon yuyi.*

Translated, When a bush is on fire, the mother hen covers her chicks under her wings. She does not care if she burns, but she makes sure her chicks are safe.

- *Tolibi nhu nyalo ye uk bilong vawi.*

A mother antelope lays down her life for the sake of her child.

The first two proverbs here mean that mothers protect sacrificially even with their lives.

- *Kpong vawi kosi winsuwing la ne nak le lewini.*

Desiring to have a child can make a mother match people's blood.

Meaning: A Yandang woman can go to any lengths to have a child of her own. For example, she performs certain rituals that may be physically hurtful, such as drinking bitter herbs or piercings.

²²⁷ Jeremiah Aluwong, Ethnic Groups in Nigeria: Yandang People.

²²⁸ These proverbs were collected from the wealth of oral knowledge preserved and passed on from Yandang ancestors. Rev. John Kenan was able to safeguard it and shared it with the researcher. Kenan is a Yandang man, a Bible translator, and a Chaplain with the Nigerian Army.

- *Yentini nsika, I tosa nyawara, I mooko.*

Hens do not eat crow; they do not open doors but wade only.

Meaning: In a family setting, a mother has a say about some issues, especially masculine issues. However, she does not have the strength to handle challenging issues. In other words, women cannot handle what men can handle.

- *Yenu ya la za muk aan nyu zak.*

If you do not have a mother, you will suck dog milk.

Meaning: Life can be challenging without one's mother alive.

- *Ya telang le yenuk buri bi kpansuri bi be.*

Your mother's pot content is better than that of the queen.

Meaning: Mothers are the best. Alternatively, it can be interpreted as what you have is better than what you depend on from the outside. It also reflects the idea of Sankofa.

- *Va wiribi yok la na winsuwing le la nzaku.*

Any orphan that a woman raises will be useful.

Meaning: Women as mothers are empowering and can model any child to become meaningful in a community. It may also imply communal mothering.

According to Yandang customs, a woman is considered valuable in the community only when she proves to be a mother by giving birth to children. This connects to the selected proverb number three: "Desiring to have a child can make a mother match people's blood." Hantibe Joseph, a 38-year-old Yandang male, describes that children are assets in Yandang culture, and a childless woman in the community is regarded as inferior.²²⁹ Also, Briskila Thomas Yerima, 67 years old, a Yandang woman and married to a Yandang man for 39 years, says that a childless woman is not considered a woman. She is called degrading names such as

²²⁹ Hantibe Joseph, interviewed by Mairo Anthony, Yola, Adamawa State of Nigeria, April 18th 2022.

"toilet filler" because she eats her husband's food and throws it in the toilet rather than producing children. Because children are an asset, as earlier pointed out, her husband's family decides for him to take another wife. Another option is that her husband's family might decide to adopt a child from the family for her to take care of as a mother.²³⁰ But that will not change her status; she is still seen as a childless woman and cannot benefit from her husband's inheritance when he dies, except when he decides to give her some portion while he is alive; everything goes to the second wife and her children.²³¹ It is also proven that even the bride price of a woman who gives birth is higher than that of the woman who has not given birth.²³²

Every Yandang mother is responsible for modeling her daughters, who are the future mothers of the community, by teaching them to develop themselves economically, socially, and religiously. For example, a young woman yet to be married is given a portion of farmland to cultivate crops such as groundnuts and rice. Groundnut cultivation is known as women's business in the Yandang community. Most women, both young and old, are groundnuts farmers and marketers. This business develops them economically because they help toward the welfare of their homes and community. They form local banks and multipurpose financial corporations where they make monthly contributions, and at the end of the year, they withdraw their contributions. They use their yearly contributions to purchase more farming items such as fertilizers or buy household items to prepare for their future weddings, cash crops, and sell during planting season or for personal needs.²³³ They also engage in skills such as making braids and any trending business in society.²³⁴

The young woman in Yandang culture is like a second mother. She is to nurse her younger siblings even if the mother is alive.²³⁵ Young women are supposed to endure marriage no matter how difficult, and it is expected that there should be no room for divorce. Madam Yerima stressed that mothers remain in difficult marriages just for the sake of their children.

²³⁰ Briskila Thomas Yerima, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

²³¹ Ebi Luka Akila, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

²³² C. D. Nyari, "Customs and Beliefs" in *Yandang Culture: Contemporary Issues in Perspectives*, edited by C. D. Nyari, pp.28, 29.

²³³ Ebi Luka Akila, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

²³⁴ Hantibe Joseph, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

²³⁵ Ebi Luka Akila, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

The reason is that children should rather grow up in a problematic marriage than end up with divorced parents.²³⁶ There is much emphasis on respect for the males, no matter how young they are. To-be mothers and wives are exhorted during their send-off ceremonies as they prepare to get married to be humble, respectful, and patient to their to-be husbands no matter the situation. They are expected to be hospitable to their extended family because a wife is not just a wife to her husband but to the extended family.²³⁷

Finally, Yandang mothers contribute to the ecosystem by using harvested corn leaves to produce potash for seasoning soups. They preserve human and animal residues after decomposition to be used as manure during the planting season. They also use natural pesticides such as neem seed oil, ashes from burned dried leaves, dried chilis for beans storage, preserved in mud-made barns. Fresh vegetables are also preserved locally without artificial additives and consumed during the dry season. It means that one does not have to buy much when preparing local soups. These women of skill also plant the moringa trees around the house as a fence.²³⁸ It should be noted that moringa trees thrive in both dry and rainy seasons, and every part of the moringa tree is economically valuable.

Therefore, it is understood that Motherhood in Yandang culture is communal because a barren woman can nurse an adopted child as given to her by her husband's extended family despite the oppressive situation she may find herself in. The proverb *Va wiribi yok la na winsuwing le la nzaku*, "Any orphan that a woman raises will be useful," implies that Motherhood in Yandang culture is also a means of mothering nations. The Yandang community is extended not just in Nigeria through the matrilineal context or within the *marrah* system. An intertribal or interracial marriage with a Yandang woman blessed with children is an extension of the Yandang nation. The *marrah* system is an extended womb and empowers the privileged firstborn child to be more comfortable about their welfare. The *marrah* system is also a form of communal Motherhood. Although the Yandang culture is patriarchal and oppressive to women, one can say that Yandang mothers are the source of the thriving Yandang world. It can also be

²³⁶ Briskila Thomas Yerima, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

²³⁷ Hantibe Joseph, interviewed by Mairo Anthony.

²³⁸ This information comes from observing how my grandmother and mother-in-law relate with the ecosystem.

explained with this illustration: the lion is the King of the pride and can roar, but what makes the pride thrive is a hardworking lioness who hunts to feed both her cubs and the male lions. The Yandang woman has no voice, but her womb speaks the loudest for her through the first fruit that breaks out of her womb (*marrah*). No wonder women as mothers are seen as a source of wealth, a reason why every Yandang woman wants to be a mother, no matter the pain.

In conclusion, this chapter affords us a unique Sankofa take on the views on Motherhood in Yandang culture. In general, the Yandang culture is patriarchal and oppressive to women. There are elements of a matrilineal system, but patriarchy suppresses it. Their ancestral background is a communal network, as seen in their relationship with their cousins, the Mumuyes. This communality is so strong that it serves as a bond in marriage. Marriage in Yandang culture is economic, because when a woman marries a Yandang man, she is also married to the extended family. It indicates that marriage is a means of an extended Yandang community as it seems associated with women and Motherhood. The *marrah* system, which is matrilineal in nature, can be a significant liberating element in the understanding of Motherhood in African women's theology. But patriarchy subjects women and Motherhood as a source of wealth and possession for the Yandang men.

Mothering in Yandang culture is essential. A childless woman undergoes oppression. Womanhood is measured by giving birth, especially for a married woman in the Yandang community. But the culture fails to see the richness of its proverb that says any child raised by a woman is an added value to the community. This idea contributes to the understanding that Motherhood is communal and Mothering is a woman's role in the Yandang culture whether she gives birth or not. Motherhood in Yandang culture also discourages divorce in the community because mothers remain in challenging marriages for the sake of the healthy nurturing of their children. The research also discovered that Motherhood in Yandang culture contributes to a thriving community economically, socially, politically, and religiously, as against how the culture sees women as properties or sources of wealth.

This chapter also showed that Yandang women's experiences can be a source of narrative theology in African women's theology. The Yandang proverbs of Motherhood also

indicate significant sources that can be used in Sankofa philosophy within African women's cultural hermeneutics.

Therefore, we now turn to the next chapter as it intends to evaluate the methodology of Oduyoye within the corpus of cultural hermeneutics and examine her views on Motherhood with the Yandang culture as a dialogue partner toward developing Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood for the liberation of Yandang women in African women's theology.

CHAPTER FOUR

TOWARDS ODUYOYE'S THEOLOGY OF MOTHERHOOD

The chapter evaluates Oduyoye's methodology, illustrated by her views on Motherhood, and attempts to develop her theology of Motherhood in African Women's theology and find its relevance within the context of the Yandang people.

4.1 An Evaluation of Oduyoye's Methodology

Methodologies in theology have strengths and weaknesses. They involve continuity, discontinuity, complexities, and remodeling.²³⁹ We have unearthed that Oduyoye is unique in her methodology. Thus, I shall begin by looking at the strengths of her methodology and close with its weaknesses.

We have established that Oduyoye is an advocate of cultural hermeneutics with an emphasis on women and their experiences. Her methodology is concentrated on storytelling or, in other terms, on narrative theology. Oduyoye's sources are derived from what Africans have, which are African folktales, myths, and proverbs, also known as Sankofa philosophy. She believes that what Africans have is enough to do theology in Africa. This can also be explained with a Hausa saying, *dana ciki ake jan na rijiya*, "it is from what one has in his or her belly that strength is found to draw waters from the well." It indicates that African theologians have so much in their bellies that needs to be used to draw out fresh water (theology) from the many wells (sources) in Africa.

Oduyoye's methodology can relate well to African theology, especially for ordinary African women. This research believes that her methodology should not be complex or

²³⁹ Stanley E. Porter and Steven M. Studebaker, "Method in Systematic Theology. An Introduction," in *Evangelical Theological Methods: Five views*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Steven M. Studebaker (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), p.214.

discontinuous; instead, it argues for a remodeling of it for its relevance to ordinary African women. Oduyoye argues that beliefs in dogmatism have lost significance and are no longer relevant to African women, especially rural women. Significantly in relation to this view, most church women in Northern Nigeria are not literate. One of the first female clergy of the United Methodist Church in Nigeria, Dr Eunice Iliya, was also involved in teaching ordinary United Methodist women in Northeast Nigeria how to read and write and develop themselves through skill acquisition in order to be voices in leadership roles.²⁴⁰ However, remodeling Oduyoye's methodology serves to engage ordinary Northern Nigerian women in African women's theology and not just in the formal learning of reading and writing and other skills.

While buttressing her views on the need for praxis theology, Oduyoye cites Kathleen Heasman, who said, "Evangelicals are remembered for their deeds, not their theology."²⁴¹ Rosemary Radford Reuther also argues that women's experience exposes "...classical theology, including its codified traditions, as based on male experience rather than universal human experience."²⁴² Accordingly, the experiences of African women and, within the context of this research, African feminist cultural hermeneutics lay the path that should be trodden, because ordinary women hardly understand dogmatism. African feminist cultural hermeneutics can be remodeled within the Yandang culture, which is most familiar to ordinary women. It is a turn to what is liberating in Yandang culture that can speak to women's experiences. African women and Yandang women are at the centre of society's religious, social, political, and economic space. What the society and church present are codified systems and male-dominated theology. Oduyoye's methodology is a cornerstone for building a theology relevant to African women.

Secondly, Oduyoye's methodology serves as a tool for dialogue with culture. African women are known to promote peace and harmonious relationships in society. And building harmonious and peaceful relationships between patriarchy and women can be achieved with Oduyoye's methodology. It can also erase the notion that feminism in Africa is a dragon that

²⁴⁰ United Methodist TV (UMTV), Pastor Leads Nigerian Women, <http://ee.umc.org/who-we-are/umtv-pastor-leads-nigerian-women> (accessed May 18th 2022).

²⁴¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, p.38.

²⁴² Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God Talk*, p.13.

needs to be tamed. Oduyoye insists that African women uphold their Africanness and their culture and do theology that can speak against oppressive cultures at a round table with liberating African cultural elements. This perspective can be illustrated as the use of sieving cloth to take what is helpful in African culture (wheat) and throw away what is oppressive to women (chaff). She believes that African women's theology, as the other wing of African theology, is correcting the images thought to be inaccurate and filling in the blanks African male theologians have left.²⁴³

Thirdly, Oduyoye's method of storytelling derives from African folktales, proverbs, myths, and African culture is a means of preserving African culture and tradition. This research discovered that Oduyoye references some Akan myths and proverbs published by Western scholars who were missionaries in Ghana, W. H. Barker, and Cecilia Sinclair, in her book *Daughters of Anowa*. There is a handful of publications of African folktales, proverbs, and myths, but few are found published by African women theologians in their theological works. Therefore, this calls for African female theologians to venture into preserving African sources in their theological works. This is quite an exploration for the Yandang female theologians as well. The need for preserving African sources in storytelling theology can also be considered a path to reducing the impact of colonialism and globalization. At the same time, from my experience as a preacher and teacher in Northern Nigeria, the use of stories as illustrations while preaching changes the atmosphere. Church men and women show more interest and concentration in listening to stories rather than when they are presented with the formal tradition of a historical biblical background of a given text. Oduyoye thinks that the use of stories is to make theology accessible to ordinary women in Africa. She explains the storytelling as a normative voice and the role of story in biblical theology "...gives women the paradigm for their theological reflection."²⁴⁴ Thus, she calls to concentrate on developing skills in narrative theology that can speak to both men and women in Africa.

On the other hand, using the views on Motherhood as illustrations found in different theological themes in Oduyoye's works raises concerns about how to develop her theology of

²⁴³ Oluwatomisin Oredin, p.161.

²⁴⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, p.11.

Motherhood constructively. But it was earlier noted in this work that African women's theology is an ongoing process. Oduyoye started by tilling the soil with her methodology, and it is now the turn of the contemporary African women theologians to continue the work by developing it constructively.

A significant concern in Oduyoye's methodology is the use of Scripture as a source. She submits that using Scriptures in the African context is challenging, and the only way to make theology easy is to complement Scriptures with tradition (African tradition).²⁴⁵ At this point, one can say that Oduyoye is indeed an advocate of African tradition and places less emphasis on the Scripture. However, the Scripture should be at hand as one does cultural hermeneutics. It is an essential source of theology, even in African theology, as it speaks to the African culture. African female theologians should uphold their Africanness in developing theology, and it is expected that the Scripture should be used as the measuring rod in theology. It is a fact that the Scripture comes from a cultural (Jewish) background. However, it can be interpreted from a Christocentric perspective because Christ is the expression of Christianity and what Christian theology is all about. Christocentric scriptural interpretation in cultural hermeneutics is critical because most African contexts are influenced by the Evangelical tradition. Hence, it must be involved in remodeling Oduyoye's methodology, which is African and Evangelical. It was pointed out in chapter three that the Yandang people of Northern Nigeria are mostly Evangelicals and Neo-Pentecostals. The Evangelicals uphold the Scriptures above any other source in theology. And the Neo-Pentecostals seriously focus on experience with the Holy Spirit, evident in speaking in tongues, other spiritual gifts, feelings of God's presence, and the like. It is clear that the Evangelical tradition and Neo-Pentecostalism are associated with Western cultures. Most African Christians from these traditions are influenced by the idea they first received from the early African missionaries that thought that African traditions were barbaric and cannibalistic.²⁴⁶ This is a situation that will be challenging to deconstruct. But building on Oduyoye's methodology, one can argue that we can dialogue with African Evangelicals that there is nothing barbaric and cannibalistic in African traditions. What needs to

²⁴⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, pp.11, 12, 13.

²⁴⁶ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, p.31.

be done is select the liberating elements in African culture for liberation theology for African Evangelicals and discontinue what is oppressive, especially for Yandang women.

Consequently, for an African female theologian, there is a need for caution, which requires skills when the African tradition is brought to the place of dialogue. It requires a careful critical analysis that blends with the Christ-like liberation method. It is the incorporation of both the Holy Spirit and Christocentric scriptural interpretation into the space of dialogue with African culture and religion. Christ applied wisdom and anointing of the Holy Spirit in His liberation theology. What is proposed here is to interpret the Scripture in relation to culture just as Christ interpreted the laws of the prophets.

An example of Christ's liberation theology comes from His inaugural speech. When He was to begin ministry on earth, He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."²⁴⁷ Christ gave an excellent example of what cultural hermeneutics should be. He was born and brought up as a Jew and was in dialogue with the Jewish culture and the lifestyle of the Kingdom of God. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."²⁴⁸ The life of Christ was inherited by the early church, a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, yet they thought in terms of doctrines that speak for every cultural context. For example, the early church was sensitive about the needs of widows and did not give room for any oppression of women and widows from either native Jews or Greek-speaking Jewish cultures.²⁴⁹

In this sense, a Yandang female theologian is not to condemn her culture but to enter into a dialogue with the cultural elements that are liberating for both men and women. The next step requires the use of wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit as the source of selecting liberating elements from the Yandang's myths, folktales, and proverbs. Then she becomes a voice for the voiceless and for women who are oppressed and proclaims that there

²⁴⁷ The Gospel narrative of Luke 4:18, English Standard Version.

²⁴⁸ The Gospel narrative of Mathew 5:17, English Standard Version.

²⁴⁹ The Book of Acts 2:5-9, 41-42; 6:1-6.

are rich sources in Yandang culture that relate to the Scriptures as a path to recovery of sight and liberty from all oppressive cultures. The Scripture is to be incorporated into Yandang culture through wisdom and by the help of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture is the only book that one reads in which one feels the presence of the author, and the blending of rational thinking and Spirit-filled authors can make African women's theology impactful. He, the Holy Spirit, can connect with our rational mind and thus allow us to discern what is liberating and to discontinue what is oppressive. The role of wisdom and the leading of the Holy Spirit enable the application of caution and the avoidance of syncretic accusations in African theology.

At some point, Oduyoye states she has been critiqued as a syncretist advocate.²⁵⁰ But she argues that she has no regrets and the criticism will not slow her down in bringing the religio-cultural heritage of Africa into the space of study, analysis, and transformation.²⁵¹ One can say that Oduyoye is critical in this perspective, especially in her use of cultural hermeneutics. Nevertheless, she points out that it is a challenging task for her.²⁵² She believes that the theological task comes with challenges because of contemporary society and how culture changes continuously,²⁵³ and the method to purge European culture is also problematic.²⁵⁴ She acknowledges that no single theological approach can serve as a solution to the development of Christian theology in Africa.²⁵⁵ The contemporary African has been dramatically influenced by Westernization, and their 'Africanness' seems lost.

On the other hand, it can be observed that African theologians have different opinions when it comes to what should be continued, discontinued, and transformed in African culture and religion. And although it is a challenging task, there is a possibility, starting with Oduyoye's methodology, for an African feminist cultural hermeneutics that can be African, Evangelical and liberating for African women from what is oppressing from African, Western, and Arabic

²⁵⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Christianity and African Culture*, p.78.

²⁵¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Christianity and African Culture*, pp.84, 85.

²⁵² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Introducing African Women's Theology," p.10.

²⁵³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Christianity and African Culture*, p.79.

²⁵⁴ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Christianity and African Culture*, p.79.

²⁵⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Christianity and African Culture*, p.81.

cultures. This approach can also be seen as a means to contribute to what changes African culture in contemporary African society.

4.2 An Evaluation of Oduyoye's Views on Motherhood

This section attempts to evaluate Oduyoye's views on Motherhood compared with Yandang views on Motherhood within the corpus of feminist cultural hermeneutics. The references in this section are cross-references to chapters two and three of this thesis.

Oduyoye's view of Motherhood goes towards the liberation of African women from oppressive cultures and church traditions. She is also critical of Westernization, Islam, Christianity, and African cultures that oppress women. She emphasizes that Motherhood is communal and genderless. Mothering is a societal responsibility; it is life and enriching to the community. Mothering is a means of modeling men and women toward the liberation of the Earth.

Under the evaluation of her views on Motherhood, the following points are found as both oppressive and liberating elements in her critical reflection on oppressive cultures and systems.

Starting from the liberating perspective, Oduyoye points out that the Akan culture is matrilineal and that the gift of a girl-child is the continuity of the family. The girl-child is a second mother of the family where she begins to develop leadership skills. In the Yandang culture, the same liberating element is found. But it has been discovered that patriarchy suppresses these elements, a situation still in practice in both cultures. Both the Asante and Yandang cultures indicate that Motherhood is enriching to society. And for the Yandang people, receiving the bride price of a girl intending to marry brings fortune and riches to the family and community. The Asante culture claims that a child belongs to the mother, while for the Yandang people, the first-born child, either male or female, belongs to the mother. Unfortunately, the maternal uncles systematically enjoy the gift of the first-born child of their sister within the Yandang culture. And this is the point where Oduyoye might see it as oppressive to women despite a child belonging to the mother. From the Akan perspective, Oduyoye has emphasized

in her work that the Akan culture is matrilineal and her marriage into the patriarchal nature of the Yoruba culture was a shock for her. At the same time, the pressure she had from her family and the scorn she received in her community because of her childless situation prove how patriarchy runs through the Akan culture.

In Oduyoye's Motherhood views under her liberation theology, she argues that the absence of Motherhood disorganizes the children. Without a mother, children cannot thrive, just as without the mother hen, the chicks are scattered and exposed to danger. Also, the Yandang proverb says, "If you do not have a mother, you will suck dog milk." Without Mothering, there is no life, for "Motherhood is life." One can infer that this idea is a leading path in Oduyoye's economy of Motherhood. This will be discussed under section 4.3.

It is identified that the Asante and Yandang cultures are oppressive to childless women. It is taboo in the Asante culture for a woman not to give birth, as Oduyoye highlights, while in the Yandang culture, a childless woman is called derogatory names. Even if she has an adopted child, she is not considered a mother but a babysitter. It is natural for the woman's body to reproduce another human, but it is not true that all women must give birth. The biblical narrative reveals that the name Eve, a prophetic name, "mother of all living," indicates that every woman is a mother whether she gives birth to children or not. The most crucial role of a woman is to mother the creation through her care of God's creation alongside the man.²⁵⁶

Oduyoye's works, especially *A Coming Home to Myself*, point toward a theology of Motherhood. It is a piece focused on the theme of eschatology, but her illustrations are heavily derived from her views on Motherhood. Also, Oduyoye never sees herself as a mother, nor does she want to be called a mother, as found in her reflections on a childless woman. She claims she is childless, but if her thoughts are understood within her understanding of African communal Mothering, then she is a mother. She has already established that she has done all the Mothering; she is the second mother of her siblings, nieces, and nephews and the mother of African women's theology.

²⁵⁶ Genesis 2:15, 18; 3:20

4.3 Oduyoye's Theology of Motherhood in African Women's Theology

To develop Oduyoye's Mothering theology, I selected the following significant points: Oduyoye's communal Mothering, Oduyoye's modeling Mothering, and Oduyoye's economy of Motherhood.

4.3.1 Oduyoye's Communal Mothering

Oduyoye consistently emphasizes communal Mothering in her works. It is reflected in her biography, storytelling theology, critical liberation perspective, and her eco-theology. This shows how important and unique it is in African women's theology. Her cultural background and the Akan belief in communal Mothering influenced this. And this is true because, in Asante culture, biological Mothering is holistic. A child belongs to the community, and the community is responsible for the welfare of a child. Even the gods such as Woyengi saw the need for communal Mothering when she connected the destiny of the mother of the rich and famous with Ogboinga, the woman with mystic powers, to help raise the rich and famous children in the myths of Woyengi, borrowed by Oduyoye's storytelling theology. In her critical liberating perspective of Motherhood, there is nothing like single motherhood in Africa. However, this is being challenged today because of Western influence. The notion also relates to a common ideology in most cultures in Northern Nigeria; in Hausa, it is said, *yaro ya bar cikin yar'uwan mamansa ya fito a cikin uwarsa*. It means all wombs are the same among women. It's just that the child decides to come out from the womb of his other mother (his aunt or any extended relative).

The communal Mothering theology of Oduyoye in African women's theology brings to light that the African cultural philosophy (Sankofa) of communal Mothering is a rich source for

the theology of Motherhood for the liberation of childless women in Africa. It is the fulfillment of Oduyoye's wish that the voices of childless women be heard.²⁵⁷

Oduyoye's communal Mothering correlates with the idea of the attributes of God the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The unity of the three Godheads and one God makes the Christian God unique. Each Godhead is independent in His role, but they unite as One in the role of creation, salvation, sanctification, and preservation of the Saints. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct in their roles, but their roles are one toward nurturing humanity, and this can also be called the Triune God performing communal Mothering. The creation and the maintenance of creation is a Mothering role, and salvation is a Mothering role, together with the nurturing of the Saints. The three persons in the Trinity unite to mother the creation and its maintenance and preserve the church. Likewise, communal Mothering reflects the essential attributes of the church. The church of Christ can only thrive and be effective as a communal body, and this body needs nurturing by the Holy Spirit. Another attribute of the church is that it forms a single body that expresses communality. Each church member has different functions and gifts, but they all serve to expand God's Kingdom. The church is a body where sacrificial love, peace, empathy, tolerance, respect, patience, teaching, discipline, and endurance are expressed.²⁵⁸ Mothers in Africa have the attributes of the church. They are sacrificial, tolerant, patient, and enduring of patriarchy or difficult marriages to promote peace and harmonious relationships for the good of men and children. There are many mothers and women in Africa, but they come together in Mothering to raise children of wealth and influence for a better society. This fits with a famous African proverb: "It takes a village to raise a child."

Jesus prayed for the church to be united.²⁵⁹ His prayer is for a united church, just as the three persons in the Trinity are united. Communal Mothering in Africa fulfils Jesus' prayer. Communal Mothering is a prayer that should lead to a thriving, prosperous, harmonious African community. One can say it is a consistent emphasis in Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood and

²⁵⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.108.

²⁵⁸ Romans 12

²⁵⁹ The Gospel narrative of John 11:21.

in her prayer that all women and mothers in Africa may be one just as God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one.

Moreover, Oduyoye's communal Mothering symbolizes wealth and empowerment in the community. Communal Mothering contributes to the community's well-being socially, politically, religiously, and economically. From my observation, African mothers give riches to their communities through the development and cooperative associations that benefit the society in all ramifications. The power of communal Mothering has given rise to market women associations that have contributed to the Nigerian economy. Even in the church, they are the financiers of projects.

Furthermore, in Nigerian society, most women have the virtue of maintaining harmony, peace, and care for the community. The ubuntu philosophy is a common characteristic of Motherhood in African society, alongside the ability to maintain harmony, care, and peace.²⁶⁰ The Yandang people also believe in *Tilo binti*, which means "we should always be in harmony with one another." Mothering in Africa is wealth; mothers give everything to the community until they have nothing more than their poverty. This can also be explained as a reflection of the salvific role of Christ to offer himself as a living sacrifice so that all men and women will be adopted into the family of God's love. Christ gave His life and love, and glory is giving all. He became poor so that all men and women might be rich. Hence, it is a Mothering role indeed. The same notion is expressed in Oduyoye's Christology, where she elucidates that Christ also performs Mothering roles. Also, African mothers make sacrifices by enduring difficult marriages because they want the best for their children. They prefer pain in marriage, even if it costs them their lives, over divorce. They will say, "I am staying in this difficult marriage for the sake of my children." The sacrifices of Yandang mothers also relate to the sacrificial proverbs of a mother hen and mother antelope: *Rabi kpesi la a tubi, yentingwi kusi ilon yuyi I nahetanlo bi zuli a ule. Be rabi doku la bi ya la ukiba, bi la niki ilon yuyi.* "When a bush is on fire, the mother hen covers her chicks under her wings. She does not care if she burns, but she makes sure her

²⁶⁰ Nortjé-Meyer, S.J., 2017, "Mutual-mothering as wise living or living wisely," p.1.

chicks are safe." Tolibi nhu nyalo ye uk bilong vawi. "A mother antelope lays down her life for the sake of her child."

But it should be understood that Oduyoye's views on Christ performing the Mothering role or what is established as mothers giving all they have, including offering their lives as a sacrifice to a problematic marriage, for the sake of their children's well-being, are not supportive of abusive marriages. Yandang mothers should separate from abusive spouses physically, emotionally, and mentally so that they can be alive to mother their children. Dying from burns in an abusive marriage will scatter the children and make them vulnerable to danger, just as in the case of a burned mother hen. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." To have a mother who is physically disabled is better than a dead mother, especially in the African context. It is a common saying in Northern Nigeria: "It is better for one to lose their father to death than a mother." Even fathers will prefer to die earlier than their women (mothers of their children). Yandang women pay less attention to the emotional, physical, psychological, and health consequences that might be dangerous to both the children and the mother; this is a dangerous path to tread. It might end with a dead mother and motherless children, a consequence that is hardly repairable.

Patriarchy from African culture, Western religion, and Arabic religion has influenced African men and African "women against women" and has led them to oppress women who are fruitless biologically. They became so blind to understanding the concept of Motherhood. This blindness oppressed Oduyoye with pain. She had to undergo fibroid surgery, ingest bitter herbs, and consult native doctors under the pressure of her family and her husband. This built a tense situation around her because her plight became a communal agony.²⁶¹ She was once scorned with words by a Christian woman who is also an academican, 'We brought you here to give us children, not to grow corn to feed us...'²⁶² This same pain is experienced by the Yandang woman who is childless.

²⁶¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," pp.111, 112.

²⁶² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.113.

Seemingly, the oppressive element found in the *marrah* system in Yandang culture benefits the maternal uncles and grandfathers, not the first-born male child. It can be said that the Yandang *marrah* system should be towards genderless communal Mothering to develop all the first-born male children so that they become great in the society rather than suffer servitude. It is just like using the mystic powers of Ogboinga to nurture famous and wealthy children in the Yandang community. Even more so, Yandang's patriarchal system should learn from the masculinity displayed by Modupe, Oduyoye's husband, who encouraged Oduyoye to survive a childless marriage, in other words, a difficult marriage, despite the fact that he comes from a strongly patriarchal culture where a childless marriage is a taboo.

4.3.2 Oduyoye's Modeling Mothering

Oduyoye is a role model in African women's theology because she became who her mother was in the Akan society. One can infer that Mercy Dakwaa Yamoah was her first liberation-theological influence, especially in that she built on what her mother used to say, "what about the women?" Her mother was a role model to her. It is no wonder the story of Mama Yamoah was told as being part of the story of great women in African church history.²⁶³ The modeling Mothering role of her mother made it possible for Oduyoye to ascend as the the pacesetter of African women's theology and become a liberation theologian. She became one of the strong feathers that kept African theology soaring. Musimbi Kanyoro eulogizes that Oduyoye is now known as "...a mover and shaker."²⁶⁴ Oduyoye never had a biological child, but she is referred to as the "Mother of our story"²⁶⁵ and "Mother of African women's theology."²⁶⁶ Her children are the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. And that is what Oduyoye refers to as "spiritual fruitfulness," as found in her story of a childless woman. It makes a strong point that can encourage childless women to become confident that women

²⁶³ Isabel Apawo Phiri, Betty D. Govinden, S. Nadar, "Introduction" in *Her-Stories. Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others, p.5.

²⁶⁴ Musimbi Kanyoro, "Beads and Strands: Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," in *Her-Stories. Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others, p.16.

²⁶⁵ Christina Landman, cited in footnotes under chapter 2.

²⁶⁶ Julius Gathogo, cited in footnotes under chapter 2.

can be modeled to become great mothers towards the liberation of women in Africa. Today, African female theologians such as Kanyoro, Njoroge, and Dube have taken the role of modeling Mothering by mentoring young female theologians to bear fruits in African theology. Women as mothers are indeed role models of the faith, not just to female children but also to the male child. Biblical characters such as Eunice and her mother Lois modeled Timothy, a son and a grandson who became a church leader.²⁶⁷ The Wesleyan tradition also results from the role modeling of Susana Wesley, who was John Wesley's first theological influence.²⁶⁸ It is no wonder that Oduyoye states, "As children, girls and boys, our mothers shaped our faith. Their faith and life nourished our spirituality. Often they were our first teachers of religion at home and in faith communities..."²⁶⁹

There are several means of modeling Mothering, but a unique one found in Oduyoye is her views of Motherhood from her storytelling theology, which remains a liberation theology. Storytelling is a Mothering role. It is what I grew up to know. Isabel Apawo Phiri and others also attest that mothers are indeed storytellers; thus, "Our foremothers, our present mothers, and our future mothers are going to tell us stories."²⁷⁰ In storytelling, we learn societal morals, and we became meaningful in society today. Therefore, storytelling is a means of liberation theology in Africa.

Another path of Oduyoye's modeling of Mothering is the propagation of communal theology oozing out from the cup of communal Mothering. Oduyoye, a mother of African women's theology and understanding of communal Mothering, saw the need to model the daughters of Africa towards communal theology known as African women's theology.²⁷¹ The Circle itself is the expression of communality. Today, communal theology puts emphasis on

²⁶⁷ 2 Timothy 1:5

²⁶⁸ Henry Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism* (London: The Epworth Press, 1937), p.13.

²⁶⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Preface: Naming our Mothers," in *Her-Stories. Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others, p.xi.

²⁷⁰ Isabel Apawo Phiri, Betty D. Govinden, S. Nadar, "Introduction" in *Her-Stories. Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others, p.1.

²⁷¹ Musimbi Kanyoro, "Beads and Strands: Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," in *Her-Stories. Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Apawo Phiri and others, pp.16, 19.

narrative theology. Narrative theology is a unique and inclusive way of encouraging all women in Africa to relate with theology, which used to be seen as just for academics.

Interestingly, the daughters of Oduyoye have maintained narrative theology as a communal theology. As a community of women, African female theologians write on different themes, focusing on narrative theology. For example, *Mother Earth, Mother Africa* (2020) and *Mother Earth in African Literature* (2022) are recent publications. These women have different approaches in their methodology, but they are one in maintaining narrative theology within the sphere of Sankofa philosophy. Oduyoye's eco-theology is expanded through African myths, folktales, and poems. An example is Dube's poem,

Mother Earth
You birth us from your womb
You hold us with the palm of your loving hand
You host us in your house of plenty—the Earth
You fill our hunger with every good food
You quench our thirst with sweet water
And fill our lungs with fresh air
You spoil us with beauty.²⁷²

Consequently, Oduyoye's modeling Mothering is a way of modeling the Yandang men and women with regard to the need to transform their oppressive cultures. Going by the use of Oduyoye's Sankofa philosophy, it is possible to construct some of the liberating elements of the views on Motherhood in Yandang culture towards communal theology that can be a proposal for dialogue in harmonious gender relations. Another understanding of communal theology is its inclusion of ordinary women and other women of faith in Africa to join the connection of the beads and strands. It is so beautiful and unique that theology is made relevant for all men, women, and children in Africa, which is what can be best known as communal theology.

²⁷² Musa Wenkosi Dube, "Mother as Metaphor: Representations of the Earth and the Natural Environment" in *African Literature, Mother Earth and Religion*, edited by Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga, Josephine Muganiwa, and Musa Wenkosi Dube (Wilmington, Delaware: Vernon Press, 2022), p.33.

4.3.3 Oduyoye's Economy of Motherhood

When Oduyoye says, "...Motherhood is life," this gives the idea of the economy of Motherhood. Motherhood is the cycle of life and a means for survival. In the myth of Woyengi, Ogboinba has to take cover under a pregnant woman to survive the wrath of Woyengi, because of her decree that no pregnant woman should be killed. It also connotes that mMothering is the maintenance of life. It is under the umbrella, wings, and shield of Mothering that the life cycle can thrive.

In Oduyoye's work *Coming Home to Myself*, she points out that the prayer of African religion is directed toward the fruitfulness of plants and animal life, because it is necessary for the survival and maintenance of genealogy.²⁷³ This indicates that Africans have an understanding of how ecology works. For example, it has been discovered that ordinary African women also have their ways of contributing to caring for the Earth. The older women in the Yandang community care for the Earth by preserving food naturally. During planting season, they use decomposed human and animal waste rather than the industrialized fertilizers and pesticides harmful to the Earth, humans, and animals.²⁷⁴ Unfortunately, it is observed that contemporary Yandang women have not maintained the continuity of the Yandang older women's preservation of the ecosystem. Instead, they accept the global trend of buying expensive fertilizers for their crops that are harmful to Mother Earth and women's bodies. Research has discovered that one of the causes of fibroids among African-American women is connected to the environment and the diet²⁷⁵ by which Northern Nigerian women and the Yandang women are affected.

Consequently, as a result of the consummation of an unhealthy diet and a polluted environment, African women's bodies become vulnerable to certain medical conditions that affect their hormonal balance. The soil does not produce naturally anymore; it depends on

²⁷³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.105.

²⁷⁴ Cf. chapter three; 3.2.2 the views on Motherhood in Yandang culture.

²⁷⁵ McLeod Health, Fibroids: Greater in African-American Women than White, Why?, <https://www.mcleodhealth.org/blog/fibroids-greater-in-african-american-women-than-white-but-why/> (accessed May 19th 2022).

industrialized fertilizers before production because it is already used to industrialized fertilizers. Ordinary women in Northern Nigeria have also voiced concerns about women's gynecological health. An example is a conversation with one of the older women in my hometown, who expressed her concern about the rise of medical conditions associated with giving birth through Caesarean section (CS) and cases of fibroids. She said, "it is because of what you young women consume into your bodies. You eat a lot of monosodium glutamate (msg) and processed foods. In those days, we eat *toka* (that is a seasoning made from any dry grain leaves or stalks), and we can easily push our babies out."²⁷⁶ Oduyoye laments how women's bodies are affected by the drugs they take, the processed food they eat, the environment, and the contemporary reproductive technology introduced in contemporary African society.²⁷⁷

Thus, Oduyoye's economy of Motherhood is an appeal to nurture women's bodies and God's creation. It calls for returning to the Edenic experience of the Creation account where nature thrives before the Fall.²⁷⁸ Contemporary Yandang women should change their paths and draw on the ancient roots of older Yandang women to maintain the survival and cycle of life.

Another challenge is also connected to the economic system in Northern Nigeria that affects the wealth of women's bodies. It is the inaccessibility of a proper health care system in Northern Nigeria, which is a concern of Oduyoye as well. Lack of access to health care for women in rural communities has led to complications in child-birth and sometimes maternal and infant mortality.²⁷⁹ Women in Africa lack choice in how they plan motherhood. It becomes a burden left to the women, not a concern for the men. Women harm their bodies with contraceptives, and sometimes with substandard products, while the men do not take any action about planned motherhood. Also, as observed in the traditional church setting in Northern Nigeria, influenced by patriarchy, before any solemnization of marriages, it is only the intended bride that is required to run a test that includes proof of her fertility. Not much

²⁷⁶ Based on personal experience. It was a conversation in 2004, Jimeta-Yola, Adamawa State of Nigeria.

²⁷⁷ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, pp.59-60.

²⁷⁸ Genesis 2 and 3

²⁷⁹ Anthony Idowu Ajayi, Inequalities in access to birth by caesarean section in the context of user fee exemption for maternal health services in southwest and north-central Nigeria, <https://academic.oup.com/inthealth/article/13/6/598/5805500> (accessed May 11th 2022). This is reported within the context of southwest and north-central Nigeria but it is observed to be the same situation in northeast Nigeria.

attention is directed to the intended bridegroom to prove his fertility before the wedding. The woman is burdened with pains and expected to endure the challenge of a husband who eventually proves infertile or impotent after the wedding. All assumptions in the society will be that he married a fruitless woman. His family will suggest he takes another wife or one of his male relatives helps him in impregnating his wife. This was a situation Oduyoye found herself in as well. Although this was no joking situation, Oduyoye makes it light by describing it as African surrogate fatherhood.²⁸⁰ But that is not my focus at the moment. My focus is to explicate how oppressive some African cultures are towards childlessness in women. From my observation in African society, separation and divorce are not acceptable. It is hard to do because of the influence of the strong patriarchy in the African church and African cultural traditions. Single women, divorced women, and widows are regarded as incomplete. A woman in a problematic marriage opts to stay in such a marriage rather than having a single status. Even in the Yandang culture, as discussed in chapter three, a higher bride price is collected when a woman proves her fertility. I see this concern as an issue for further research on the pressure on women to prove their fertility before a wedding. Oduyoye argues from the Akan beliefs that Motherhood is a sacred duty and that the changes in the understanding of Motherhood are against God's economic system.²⁸¹ If African women's bodies are affected, then this is challenging for the prayer of African religion on the fruitfulness of the lives of animals and plants and the maintenance of genealogy.

Now, building on the idea of Motherhood is a sacred duty. One can explicate that a sacred duty is caring for God's creation. It is sacred because caring for God's creation is also an act of worship. It is a mandate given to men and women. The act of worship is genderless. Caring for the creation is a Mothering role, and it is a role without gender differentiation. Unfortunately, humanity has failed in this responsibility. Both the Earth and women are suffering. Oduyoye makes it clear in her views of Motherhood from her ecological perspective that women and the Earth are treated as possessions²⁸² and are not cared for. The Bible reveals

²⁸⁰ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "A Coming Home to Myself: The Childless Woman in the West African Space," p.114.

²⁸¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands*, p.57.

²⁸² Cf. chapter two; 2.2.4 Oduyoye's views on Motherhood as metaphor in her ecology.

that the creation is groaning, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. This is eschatological, but also a dire expectation for the present. The whole world today is melting down. In Nigeria, lakes are shrinking, the soil is polluted with crude oil, erosions are causing land to collapse, temperatures are rising, and droughts have set in,²⁸³ all because humanity has failed in the task of creation care. African women, as co-partners and co-creators of God through the name they bear, "...mother of all living,"²⁸⁴ are responsible for caring for the creation that is melting away. It is a matter of urgency that Oduyoye has seen the need to use the illustration of Motherhood to be a voice against the destruction of the Earth.

Therefore, in consonance with Oduyoye's views on Motherhood, it is submitted that the failure of the economic system in Nigeria and the lack of care for Mother Earth, Mother Africa, and women's bodies are due to the poverty of understanding Motherhood.

4.4 Relevance of Oduyoye's Methodology

This thesis has discovered that Oduyoye's methodology is relevant for theology in Africa and the Yandang culture.

Oduyoye's methodology is a ground-breaking contribution to liberation and contextual theology in Africa. Her methodology is imperative, as it is the other wing of African theology to make African theology fly higher. It is a liberation movement within the context of painful experiences of women. It gives space for creative writing in African women's theology, as is seen in the latest publications.

Oduyoye's methodology helps to reconnect Africans to their communal heritage that seems threatened by Westernization and globalization. Communal theology (narrative theology), as propounded by Oduyoye, has the potential to free Africans from colonialism, Westernization, globalization, oppressive religions, and restrictive African cultures. Without

²⁸³ Haider Huma, *Climate Change in Nigeria: Impacts and Responses*, <https://www.preventionweb.net/publication/climate-change-nigeria-impacts-and-responses> (accessed April 28th 2022).

²⁸⁴ Genesis 3:20.

Oduyoye's modeling Mothering of African women's theology, there wouldn't be the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Today, the Circle is connecting African women despite the differences and complexities of their cultures and languages. Colonization, through its cultures and languages (French, Portuguese, German and English), broke the strands and the beads that united Africans. However, the fruits of Oduyoye's methodology are helping African women theologians to start the project of connecting the strands and beads through Sankofa philosophy. What Africans have is enough for developing theologies to make a global impact. Interestingly, this research has discovered that some African myths, folktales, proverbs, and storytelling could be used to illustrate theological themes such as the Trinity, Christology, church unity, and ecology.

On the other hand, storytelling as part of African tradition has lost its place in modern African society. During the 1980s, storytelling was a common practice. Children in the neighborhood looked forward to listening to their mothers' and grandmothers' stories. Fortunately, it performed a Mothering role. The practice of storytelling was also promoted on a popular program sponsored by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), known as 'Tales by Moonlight.' 'Tales by Moonlight' promoted local Nigerian culture and morality against post-colonialism and Westernization. The title 'Tales by Moonlight' "...recalls the traditional performance of stories when the moon is shining in the traditional Nigerian context. It recalls a traditional African orientation to nature and the natural, linking cultural life with realistic situations."²⁸⁵ Since it was earlier established that storytelling is a Mothering role, I see the path of the storytelling theology of Motherhood as a means that can be used for the liberation theology of Motherhood and even for the future of Sankofa in Africa.

Most importantly, Oduyoye's methodology has helped this research construct Oduyoye's theology of Motherhood, which liberates not only Yandang men and women but Africans and possibly has global impact.

²⁸⁵ Obododimma Oha and Louisa Andah, "'Tales by Moonlight' and the Televisual Education of the Nigerian Child," *Identity, Culture and Politics*, Volume 3, Number 1, (July 2002): pp. 111-124, <http://calternatives.org/resource/pdf/%E2%80%9CTales%20by%20Moonlight%E2%80%9D%20and%20the%20Televisual%20Education%20of%20the%20Nigerian%20Child.pdf> (accessed August 4th 2021).

Furthermore, Oduyoye's methodology has helped Yandang female theologians find a path for doing theology that is liberating, especially for women oppressed by the powerful Yandang patriarchal culture.

The research on Oduyoye's methodology is a pointer for highlighting the Yandang culture and its Sankofa philosophy for both Nigerian and other African theologians. The Yandang are one of the minority tribes in Northern Nigeria. However, this research shows that the Yandang people and their culture are expanding to reach a global community and have global impact. One can proudly say that Oduyoye's methodology has contributed to starting the more significant project of the liberation theology of Motherhood in Yandang culture.

Finally, the methodology of Oduyoye, which is storytelling theology derived from Sankofa philosophy, has awakened the researcher to the realization that the Yandang culture can contribute to the ongoing Sankofa project. It is also interesting to note that the same understanding as Sankofa can be found in the Yandang proverb, *Ya telang le yenuk buri bi kpansuri bi be*, meaning, your mother's pot content is better than that of the queen. The pot of mother Yandang also contains myths, folktales, proverbs, and Yandang women's stories that need to be explored to taste how good they are. It will be a discovery of another aroma different from what was taken from the Akan, Asante, and Yoruba mother's pot. As a matter of caution, the Yandang female cook needs skills to fetch the fine ingredients that liberate and discard the oppressive ones. These skills need to be developed in African women's cultural hermeneutics.

Hence, this thesis concludes within Oduyoye's Sankofa philosophy that Africans have rich resources that are better than what is sought elsewhere in African theology. This methodology helps us find Oduyoye's liberating theology of Motherhood for the Yandang women and African women.

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