

A Literary Study of Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán Tí Ó Dé*

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Abstract

Tópé Àlàbí is a renowned Yorùbá artiste, whose gospel music is widely recognized within and outside of Nigeria. In one of her titles, *Lógán tí Ó Dé*, she makes it explicit that barrenness goes beyond biological classification. In Àlàbí's opinion, any void in human's life means barrenness. The lyrics reveal that the significance of barrenness is associated, not only with childlessness, but also with individuals who are unable to keep pace with their equals in the world of achievement. By using Schleiermacher's hermeneutics, this essay explored how Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó Dé* deconstructs the import of barrenness, reveals people's attitude towards the barren and indicates the effects of people's view of the barren. In addition to listening to, and transcribing Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó Dé*, oral interviews were conducted with twelve selected individuals. The study concludes that metaphoric expressions in music could help project a people's understanding of their socio-cultural environment.

Keywords: *Lógán Tí Ó Dé*, sociocultural, barrenness, gospel music, Yorùbá belief system.

Introduction

Music is a natural gift that enables an individual to give expression to his/her emotions in his or her own way. Holistically, “music can provide interpretive framework that allows one to generate inferences” (Boltz, 2004:1196). The inferences that are drawn from music could create a lasting impression, by which attitudes are influenced. Music, as an oral genre conveys multiform interpretations to listeners. Such can be found in Tope Alabi’s kind of music. Her category of music is what is commonly regarded as gospel music. Ojo (1998) sees gospel music as a distinct kind of music composed and rendered by men and women who call themselves Christians, and to their music as ministration of the Good News in songs. Ojo’s (1998) observation makes it obvious that men and women who regard themselves as embracing the Christian faith are the singers of gospel music. Since religion adherents in the world of Islam also compose and render music that express their beliefs, it is imperative to distinguish that Tópé Àlàbí’s *Lógán tí Ó dé* is a Christian Gospel Music. Music, depending on a listener’s taste is so awesome that it can speak straight to the heart. It is endowed with the potency to move its listeners to excitement, it can as well reduce them to tears (be it tears of joy or sorrowful tears). The rationale behind our submission is that humans’ emotions are involved when music is being played. Practically the full range of an individual’s emotions finds music appealing and soothing. Little wonder Layade (2018) remarks that “musical art is a profession assume not only because of pressure of impoverishment and the need to survive, but also because they find great delight in music as an aspect of oral poetry and cultural identity.” Okafor (2005:1) explains that music should be culturally expressed, determined, interpreted, and addressed or colored by the culture and the cultural environment of the people. From Okafor’s (2005:1) explanation, we deduce that a people’s music and cultural environment should be able to complement each other. That is, a society’s music is expected to influence its customs and vice versa. In other words, it connotes that there should be an interconnection between music and the people’s cultural environment. Sunday-Kanu (2017:96) posit:

New direction in every facet of life is inevitable in this ever-changing world. Over time, so many aspects of human lives have undergone and evolved various evolutions as a result of change. These changes are very reflective in the cultural, social, economic, and religious life of human society. Music as an aspect of culture evolves as the experience and culture of the people changes [sic].

The position of Sunday-Kanu (2017) indicates that the belief system of a people is usually affected by the passage of time. Music is a genre that swiftly expresses the change in people's view of utterances, attitudes and even body languages as necessitated by daily events and further understanding. Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó dé* makes this submission quite explicit, as the analysis of her song will show. Nettl (1983:237) quotes Merriam (1967a:3) thus:

All people, no matter what culture, must be able to place their music firmly in the context of the totality of their beliefs, experience and activities, for without such ties, music cannot exist.

Merriam's (1967a:3) observation, as indicated by Nettl (1983:237) points out that music must be well situated within the context of cultural experience and societal affairs. Earlier, Merriam (1964:28) expounded that music is inter-related with the rest of culture. According to him, music "can and does shape, strengthen and channel social, political, economic, linguistics, religions and other kinds of behavior." Sunday-Kanu (2017:96) asserts that "music of any age or time is meant for the people of that generation and must be meaningful to the people of the time." This study's analysis of Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó dé* will confirm the veracity of the above assertion.

Theoretical Framework

The study applies Friedrich Schleiermacher's modern hermeneutics to analyse the diverse meaning of barrenness implied in Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó Dé*. Findings establish that the origin of the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, meaning to interpret, from which hermeneutics is derived is not really known. Even though it is not a religious term in the actual sense, hermeneutics has forged an essential connection with religion. Originally, hermeneutics was used in the interpretation of biblical texts, with time though its application came to cut across literary, philosophical, and psychological texts among others. This theory has been identified "as theoretical reflection on the principles and rules of interpretation and understanding." Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was credited with being the founder of modern hermeneutics. He was seen as a major figure in the early Romantic Movement. Schleiermacher is of the opinion that the nature of the understanding by which a text is read and interpreted should be concentrated upon, rather than the nature of a particular text, this is what he regards as 'art of understanding'.

Schleiermacher's hermeneutical 'art of understanding' has a bipolar structure. Here, a grammatical (objective) dimension is distinguished from a psychological or technical (subjective) aspect in the art of understanding. Using a

grammatical (objective) aspect requires that the interpreter be grounded in the linguistic and cultural modes of expression in which the author lived, while the psychological or technical dimension requires the interpreter to comprehend the unique subjectivity of the author as expressed through the unified whole of the work. This latter task favors what Schleiermacher calls 'divination'. By 'divination', he means the ability of an interpreter to accurately decipher what is on the mind of the author. Schleiermacher's ideas are said to have immense influence on the development of hermeneutics. - (Green, 2005). In this study, we will adopt the grammatical (objective) dimension that requires an interpreter of a text to possess a great deal of knowledge in the cultural modes of expression that the author finds him/herself.

The examination of the work also warrants a critical exploration from a feminist perspective, considering the inherent gender-specific nature of the primary issue. However, there are several arguments challenging the barrenness as detrimental to marriage since the contemporary feminist praxis frowns at the assessment of female worth by their success or otherwise in the realm of motherhood.

Historically, the discourse surrounding motherhood has been a subject of intense debate among feminists, originating with early feminists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, and Betty Friedan. These notable women from the first and early second waves of feminism have highlighted "a strong link between women's oppression and women's naturalized position as mothers" (UC e-books collection, 5).

A critical analysis of Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, "The Second Sex," by Gerda Neyer and Laura Bernardi (2011), highlights Beauvoir's assertion that the attribution of concrete equality to women through maternity is fraudulent. Beauvoir contends that motherhood, is a defining characteristic that relegates women to the status of "others" and confines them to immanence (Neyer and Bernardi, 2011, 5). This perspective becomes particularly pronounced in the historical context where women's individual successes are intrinsically tied to their ability to fulfill their natural responsibility and the societal expectation of motherhood.

Contrary to this narrative, some feminists argue against the conventional notion of motherhood, particularly in contemporary times especially in the light of advancements in Assisted Reproductive Technology, which has created social motherhood as against natural or biological motherhood. Neyer and Bernardi (2011) observe that feminists reject the assumption of motherhood as an innate quality in women, they advocate for a clear distinction between biological and social aspects of motherhood. They conclude that "the social perceptions of motherhood are constructed so as to allow the exploitation of women as bearers of children and as rearers of children" (6).

Consequently, these different perspectives suggest that barrenness, from the feminist standpoint, may not be perceived as a significant issue, as it relieves women from the contested “natural responsibility” constructed by society for the exploitation of women. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this perspective may not be universally applicable as the implications of barrenness in an African traditional society differ markedly from the Western-centric feminist lens and theoretical frameworks. In navigating these complexities, it is imperative to recognize the limitations of applying a singular feminist perspective to diverse cultural contexts.

General Survey of *Lógán tí Ó Dé*

In Christians' Bible, barrenness is used in reference to men and women, land, livestock, and lack of godly qualities.¹ In the same vein, the Qur'an features the issue of barrenness in men and women; it also calls a disastrous day barren.² In Ifá literary corpus, specific mentions are made of the dilemma of those that are contending with barrenness. These are Ọṣun,³ Olúódi,⁴ Ọlójà kan-òkìtì-ẹfọn⁵ among others. The resolute step each took to break free from barrenness is also indicated.⁶ The lyrics of *Lógán tí Ó dé* pinpoints barrenness in various phases to corroborate the existing views.

Lógán tí Ó Dé is split into 15 stanzas. In stanza 1, the singer, though using a first-person singular pronoun, represents the musing and consciousness of certain individuals, who are invariably found wanting in certain sphere of human endeavors, because of their lot in life. Stanza 2 appraises divine intervention and the attendant relief:

*Èmi mọ ohun ojú mi ti rí,
Mo mọ ohun etí mi ti gbọ
Èmi mọ ohun ojú mi ti rí,
Mo mọ ohun etí mi ti gbọ
Lógán tó gbọ iró ayọ rẹ ò Olùgbàlà,
Ayé mi létò
Lógán tó gbọ iró ayọ rẹ ò Olùgbàlà,
Ayé mi létò*

1 See Exodus 23:26; Deuteronomy 7:14; 2 Peter 1: 5-8.

2 See Súrah 3:38-40; 19:5, 8; 22:55; 51:29.

3 Ọṣun- Yoruba Goddess of water, fertility, purity, sensuality, beauty, love and abundance

4 Olúódi- a barren female character in the tale narrated by an Ifa Priest

5 Ọlójà kan-òkìtì-ẹfọn- a barren female character in the tale narrated to a client by an Ifa Priest

6 The Ifa verses that contain the resolute steps taken by barren female characters, as required by Ifa are: Ọyẹkútúá; Ìrosungúdá; Ọbàràrẹtẹ; Ogbèwèyìnwò.

(I well know what my eyes have seen,
 I know what my ears have heard
 I know what my eyes have seen
 I know what my ears have heard
 At the instant of hearing your sound of joy, oh Savior,
 My life became settled
 At the instant of hearing your sound of joy, oh Savior,
 My life became settled)

Stanza 3 reveals the singer's awareness of hurtful remarks and name-calling from the world around her. In stanza 4, the singer counts on the prompt deliverance from her Savior (as if it had already occurred) for the betterment of her lot in life:

*Mo mọ ohun ayé mà ti wí,
 Mo mọ ohun èyàn mà ti sọ
 Wọ̀n ti pè wá ní àgàn rí,
 Bóyá wọ̀n ti pè ẹ̀ lólòṣì rí*

*Ṣùgbọ̀n lógán tó dé o, Olùgbàlà
 Layé mi létò
 Ṣùgbọ̀n lógán tó dé o, Olùgbàlà
 Ayé ẹ̀ létò*

(I am aware of what people have said,
 I am aware of what humans have commented,
 They have tagged us barren at some point,
 Perhaps they have called you wretched at some point

But at the instant of my savior's intervention,
 My life became settled
 But at the instant of my savior's intervention,
 Your life became settled)

Stanza 5 further establishes what is hinted at, in stanza 3. Here, the singer describes a life of discomfort, a life that is devoid of success, as being in disarray. She points out how such an unpleasant condition does attract and give room to name-calling (insulting names) and cruel remarks from fellow humans. In the same stanza, the chorus, *Lógán tí Ó dé* evinces a steady build-up of suspense:

Ayé tó ti dàrú tẹ̀lẹ̀tẹ̀lẹ̀ o, lógán tí Ó dé
Òrọ̀ tí ènìyàn ti fi sàlùfàní rẹ̀,
Lógán tí Ó dé
Òrọ̀ tí kò dára tí a ti sọ sí ọ
Lógán tí Ó dé
Orúkọ̀ tí kì n ẹ̀ tìrẹ̀ ta ti pè ọ,
Lógán tí Ó dé

(A life that was formerly miserable,
 At the instant of His coming
 People's disgusting expressions
 At the instant of his coming,
 Stabbing words that have been said against you
 At the instant of His coming
 Abusive names that people have given you
 At the instant of His coming)

Stanza 6 breaks the suspense and hit the nail on the head, indicating unequivocally that the Savior's action brings about a settled life:

Àní lógán tí Ó dé o, Olùgbàlà,
Ayé ẹ̀ létò
Lógán tí Jésù dé o, Olùgbàlà
Láye ẹ̀ létò

(Surely at the instant of the Lord's coming,
 Your life became settled.
 At the instant of Jesus, the savior's coming
 Your life became settled)

Stanzas 7-9 make it more specific that if an individual lag behind in terms of material, marital and other achievements, his/her ears must be prepared to listen to unpalatable utterances that spell out his/her barren status. Be that as it may, the singer keeps expressing hope by her repetition of *Lógán tí Ó dé* (At the instant of his arrival) and the abrupt positive turn around by virtue of the Savior's arrival:

Kò sórúkọ̀ táyẹ̀ ò lẹ̀ peni
Wọ̀n a máa peni lagan lònà gbogbo
Bó ò bá lówó lẹ̀wọ̀ àgàn ni,
Bó ò bá bímọ̀ o, àgàn ni

Bó ò bá tẹgbẹ̀ kò dàgbà àgàn ló jẹ́

*Ṣùgbón lógán tí Ó dé,
Sọ pé lógán tí Ó dé*

*Àní lógán tí Ó dé, lẹ̀sẹ̀kẹ̀sẹ̀
Lógán tí Ó dé,
Ààà, lógán tí Ó dé o Olùgbàlà,
Layé ẹ̀ létò*

(People could call you diverse names
In many ways, one will be tagged barren
If you are unwealthy, you are barren
If you are childless, you are barren
If you have little achievement and lag behind, you are barren

But at the instant of His coming,
Say at the instant of His coming

Surely, at the instant of His coming, immediately!
At the instant of His coming
Ahah! at the instant of His coming, oh Savior,
Your life was settled
At the instant of His coming, oh Savior,
Your life became settled)

In stanzas 10 and 11, Tópé Àlàbí stresses that the instant arrival of the deliverer does transform all the offensive names that the 'have-nots' have had to contend with, for a time, to pleasant names:

*Instantly ló n jẹ́ bẹ̀ẹ̀,
Bó ẹ̀ n dé báyìí,
Wọ̀n dẹ̀ yí orúkọ̀ padà
Lógán tí Ó dé, é e è
Lógán tí Ó dé
Ènì tá a pè lágàn
È máa sọ wí pé
Lógán tí Ó dé
Àwọ̀n tá ti forúkọ̀ aburú pè nílẹ̀ wọ̀nyí
Lógán tí Ó dé*

Àní lógán tí Ó dé o Olùgbàlà,
Layé ẹ létò
Lógán tí Ó dé o Olùgbàlà,
Layé mi létò
Àní eé, lógán tí Ó dé o Olùgbàlà,
Layé mi létò
Àní lógán tí Ó dé o aṣẹdà,
Layé mi létò

(That is to say instantly,
 As soon as He arrives
 Appellations change
 At the instant of His coming, for real
 At the instant of His coming
 The so-called barren
 Keep saying
 As soon as He arrives
 Those that have been called bad names all around
 At the instant of His coming

Surely at the instant of the Lord's coming
 Your life was settled
 At the instant of the Lord's coming
 My life is settled
 Surely at the instant of the creator's coming
 Your life became settled)

Stanza 12 evinces other endearing titles of the deliverer. These are *Ọlọrun*,⁷ *Ìràwọ̀ Ọ̀wúró*⁸ and *Alágbára*.⁹ Tópé Àlàbí accentuates that her deliverance from barrenness was made possible by the intervention of God. According to her, God's remembering her for good makes it possible for her to give grand testimonies:

Àní lógán tí Ó dé ọ̀, Ọlọrun ọ̀,
Layé mi létò
Ìràwọ̀ ọ̀wúró ọ̀mọ Mary yọ sínú ọ̀rọ̀ mi
Layé mi létò

7 In the Yoruba belief system, *Ọlọrun* means He who owns the heaven. The English version of the term is God.

8 *Ìràwọ̀ Ọ̀wúró*- Yoruba version of the biblical term that means Morning Star.

9 In Yoruba language, *Alágbára* means Mighty One.

Ah, alágbára ní Shiloh ló bá rántí mi sí rere
Layé mi létò
Ènu mi wá kún fún èrì ò gbogbo
Layé mi létò

(Surely, at the instant of God's coming
 Your life became settled
 Morning star, Mary's son intervenes in my manner
 My life became settled
 My mouth is full of testimonies
 My life became settled)

Àlàbí expands that the great change that overtakes her life remains the result of the timely arrival and thoughtful action of her deliverer. She indicates that the positive change in her life constitutes a shock to her foes as s/he watches her in disbelief. She reiterates with passion that her overcoming of her barrenness is truly due to the instant arrival of the deliverer (stanza 13-14):

Ayé mi gba iyípadà òtun ò lógán tí ó dé
Layé mi létò
Ayé mi bá létò lètá bá n wo iran mi
Layé mi létò
Ayé mi létò lètá bá wo iran mi,
Layé mi létò
Òtá káwọ̀ rọ̀, ẹnu wọ̀n gbẹ̀ tán lóri ojú kan
Layé mi létò

Eè, lógán tí Ó dé ò Olùgbàlà,
Layé mi létò

She heartily expresses her gratitude to Jesus whom she repeatedly addresses as Olùgbàlà¹⁰ in previous stanzas for who he is – The Deliverer from the awful state of barrenness (stanza 15):

Thank you, Lord Jesus for all that you are

Àlàbí's expression, "for all that you are" could be interpreted to mean that if Jesus chooses not to be who he is, escape from the grips of barrenness could either have been a challenge, or outright impossibility.

10 Olùgbàlà is a Yoruba word for Savior.

The Metaphor of Barrenness in Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó Dé*

As earlier mentioned, *Lógán tí Ó Dé* (At the Instant of His Arrival) is made up of fifteen stanzas. Salient points are going to be generated from all of them. However, the main focus of this study is on stanza 3, where the word *àgàn*¹¹ makes its first appearance; stanza 7, where the import of barrenness is enumerated and stanza 10, where those who are labelled barren are urged to remain hopeful. Whatever is relevant in other stanzas will be discussed under the three identified stanzas.

The word 'barren' is not unfamiliar to the human family. Across the 3 major religious groups in Nigeria – Traditional Religion, Islam and Christianity, 'barren' is a commonly used word. In the Bible, the first mention of 'barren' was made in connection with Sarah, the wife of the famous Patriarch, Abraham.¹² The reason Sarah was called was made clear in the aforementioned text thus: "she had no child." Like first century Christians and modern-day Christians, pre-Christian servants of God believe that faith is a prerequisite to gaining God's favor. So, if Sarai desired to win the battle against her prolonged barrenness (up to age 90), she must believe in God's ability to solve the problem.¹³ When the prophecy concerning her giving birth was made by an angel, Sarai laughed in disbelief,¹⁴ but she was corrected,¹⁵ because she needed to exercise faith, if she must become a mother, and this in spite of her old age. Genesis 21:2 relates that "Sarah became pregnant and then bore a son to Abraham in his old age". The Qur'an attests to references to women with no child as being barren.¹⁶ For instance, Anabi Zakariya spoke of his wife as being barren.¹⁷ For possible solution, Zakariya besought Allah thus: "My Lord! Bestow upon me of Thy bounty goodly offspring."¹⁸ The statement that follows this clearly shows that he exercised faith in Allah's ability to grant his request: "Lo! Thou art the Hearer of Prayer."¹⁹ His faith pays off as it is said to him by

11 *Àgàn*- This Yoruba term could mean infertile/infertility, desolate/desolation, sterile/sterility, lack, want, fruitlessness etc.

12 See Genesis 16:1

13 See Genesis 18:10-15

14 Verse 12

15 Verse 14

16 See Súrah 3:38-40; 19:5,8; 51:29.

17 See Súrah 3:38-40

18 Verse 38

19 Ibid.

an angel: “So it will be. Allah doeth what He will.”²⁰ In the Ifa corpus known as *Ọyẹ̀kútúá*,²¹ the following verses were extracted:

Rògbòkú awo Ọ̀ṣun
Ló difá fỌ̀ṣun
Ọ̀ṣun ní ñ fomi ojú sògbéré ọmọ
 (Rògbòkú, the Ifá priest of Ọ̀ṣun
 Performed divination for Ọ̀ṣun
 Ọ̀ṣun is mourning her inability.
 (barrenness) to produce children)

Ọ̀ṣun²² was one of those deities that descended from heaven to earth to fulfill the responsibilities that each of them was saddled with, by Olódùmarè.²³ Her major challenge was barrenness, her inability to have an issue, which according to the above extract, was a source of great sorrow for her. She struggles to free herself from the awful state by taking a certain step as shown in the extract below:

Wón ni kó rúbọ, kó lè bímọ...
Ó sì rúbọ,
Ọ̀ṣun sì bímọ lópòlópò
 (She was asked to perform a sacrifice, that she may birth...
 She performed the sacrifice,
 Hence, Ọ̀ṣun mothers several children.)

The examples above lend support to the belief that barrenness cannot be done away with by mere wishful thinking or baseless conviction. They show that the war against barrenness could be overcome, if only appropriate steps are taken. Taking steps, according to this study's analysis of *Lógán tí Ó Dé* and the examples given above, often yields positive results. Tópé Àlàbí is of the opinion that divine intervention is necessary if one must be rescued from the bondage of barrenness.

20 Verse 40

21 Ọ̀yẹ̀kútúá was recited by Oladiran Matthew Ademola, PhD, an Ifa Priest with three chieftaincy titles in Ogbomosho, one of the ancient towns in Oyo state, Southwest, Nigeria.

22 A female primordial Deity in the Yoruba belief system.

23 Olódùmarè refers to the Supreme Deity in the Yoruba Pantheon.

Barrenness: Lack of Societal Recognition and Acceptance (Social Poverty)

Poverty differs in scopes and dimensions (Yusuff 2018:207). As a phenomenon, it is not only multidimensional, but has different manifestations. As such, it can be defined from the economic and social angles (Akanke 2018:5-6). Thus, poverty indicates “a reduced (or complete lack of) access to material, economic, social, political or cultural resources (Phillip and Rayhan 2004:7). In stanza 3 line 3 of *Lógán tí Ó dé*, Tópé Àlàbí sings: “*wón ti pè wá ní àgàn rí*” (they have tagged us barren in times past). Since Tópé Àlàbí employs “us” a first-person plural pronoun, it is obvious that she is making reference to herself as well as others. Other people in question are members of her band. Thus, she has in mind a time, when she and her band were struggling to gain publicity. We are able to listen to the musician’s testimony on her experiences during the period of challenges, in stanzas 1 and 3, as shown in the extract below:

... *ojú mi ti rí*
 ... *etí mi ti gbó*
 ... *ayé mà ti wí*
 ... *èyàn mà ti sọ*
 ... my eyes have seen
 ... my ears have heard
 ... the world has commented
 ... humankind has spoken

The Yorùbá for the most part, do express themselves in this manner: “my eyes have seen,” “my ears have heard” to relate an unpleasant condition or a traumatic experience that they have gone through. Besides, those expressions are meant to describe people’s indifferent and unconcerned attitude to the plight of others. Simply put, the expressions describe the plight of people of all ages who may be battling with bitter remarks and unfair attitude from others, on account of their inability to make it in life.

Geremek (1994:4) remarks that “the gravest effect of poverty is the degradation of human dignity associated with it.” Tópé Àlàbí makes it quite clear that negative reactions towards the poor are always felt by them. Her feelings of disapproval and sometimes, outright rejection are expressed in the words “*Èmi mọ/Mo mọ*” (I well know/I know). The musician’s use of “*Èmi mọ*” (I well know) sounds emphatic. It indicates that her bitter experience and the lashing words that are deafening to her ears, even though unpalatable, are quite memorable.

The aftereffect of unkind behaviors and unwholesome remarks about the barren is shown to be highly appalling in stanza 5. Those cruel attitudes are specifically shown to be disgusting talks, painful utterances and name-calling. Tòpẹ̀ Àlàbí expresses the effect of apathy and insulting words on her life and by extension, on the life of those that the world around them have seen as failures, on account of their being barren: “*Ayé tó ti dàrú*” (A life that had been in disarray).

“*Ayé tó ti dàrú*” (A life that had been in disarray) is found in line 1 of the 5th stanza. There is no gainsaying that “*ayé tó ti dàrú*” strongly portrays the bitter feelings of an individual who is already down, but is still being beaten. It is obvious that “society has become accustomed to look down upon the poor with disdain.” Little wonder, a definition by the UN has it that “poverty is a violation of human dignity.”

Barrenness: Material Poverty, Childlessness, Setbacks and Failure

A popular Yorùbá adage vividly illustrates the dealings of most people with the economically barren thus: *Òsì ní ñ jẹ ta ní mò ó rí? Owó ní ñ jẹ mo bá ó tan.*²⁴ This saying evinces the helplessness of the poor. Just as it has earlier been indicated by Akande that “poverty has different manifestations,” the poor in this stance do not only mean those who are materially empty, rather it encompasses all those that are unable to achieve what their peers are achieving or better still, have achieved. In the same vein, the latter part of the proverb, *owó ní ñ jẹ mo bá ó tan,*²⁵ does not only refer to the wealthy class, rather it embraces all those who are viewed as achievers. That is, those who have successfully ascended the diverse ladders of success, as it were. Tòpẹ̀ Alabi expresses how badly she fared, while she found herself within the clutches of material poverty, at a particular point in her life. According to her, the situation was so bad that she could not afford to adorn herself with expensive jewelries. Since people hardly pay attention to the materially impoverished, the musician received little or no assistance from people who could afford to offer help. Thus, she made do with what she could afford. For instance, even though, she desired to appear in gorgeous outfit, she did put on modest dress, with an insignificant pair of earrings or no earrings at all.

In an ideal situation, it is the materially ‘barren’, people who lag behind in life, not because they are indolent, but because they have been unfortunate,

24 Nobody claims relationships with the poor; everyone claims to be related to the rich. (The translation of this Yoruba proverb to English is done by one of the authors of this article).

25 Meaning, everyone claims to be related to the rich.

having experienced disappointments, or being victims of natural disaster, and/or economic crisis, that should be rallied around. About the less privileged people, Adesoji (2020:152) remarks, “their lowly status notwithstanding, they are humans who should be treated with some modicum of respect, on the basis of their humanity.” Should friends and families empathize with the ‘barren’, show them affection, and make them feel loved and cared for, such manifestation of genuine concern will definitely serve to prevent feelings of worthlessness that can result to depression, and in extreme cases, suicide. In stanza 7, Tópé Àlàbí states point-blank that if a person achieves little or nothing, and is generally perceived to lag behind his peers; such a person may be tagged ‘barren.’ In line 1 of this stanza, Àlàbí sings:

Kò sórúko táyé ò lè peni
Wón a máa peni lagan lónà gbogbo
 (People could call one all sorts of names
 In many ways, one will be tagged barren)

The above extract reveals that people, who are generally unsuccessful, can be described as barren, and individuals are called barren “in many ways.” By “many ways,” Àlàbí implies that such statements can be put forward in many ways, through thoughts and actions.

More often than not, women who have endured several years of childlessness in their marriage contend with unfair treatment from their in-laws. Women in this category are especially pained when the love that exists between them and their spouses, starts dying out simply because of their inability to bear children. A childless woman become more conscious of this awful marital challenge especially when another woman protests against the “recurring errands” that her child is being made to run for the barren woman, either directly or through her action.

Abrupt layoffs from jobs can also reduce an individual to the status of the barren. A married man who is traditionally regarded as the breadwinner of the family could find the shock of sudden loss of job more cutting, when his once loving wife starts despising him. The consequential effects of a breadwinner losing his livelihood are loss of self-esteem, aggression, and resignation. Worse still, after sympathizing for a while, most friends do keep their distance from a man that has lost his livelihood, lest he and his family become a liability on them. As humans with emotions, withdrawal by friends could be very devastating, adding salt to the injury.

Another instance is that of a teenager who is struggling to pass an examination, for instance, Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME).²⁶ S/he may sincerely put in his or her best in preparation for the examination. Despite best efforts, s/he might keep performing below expectation. In most cases, the most painful aspect is when a student is one or two marks below the cut-off marks. When matters turn out this way, only a few parents tend to exhibit some understanding and keep encouraging their ward. Parents who toil to raise fund for purchasing a form and enrolling their child in an expensive coaching center to get him/her well prepared for the examination may unconsciously utter words that increase the bitterness of the child who may already be battling with feelings of worthlessness. The situation may be further complicated when close friends who have already been admitted into tertiary institution distance themselves from him/her.

Tópé Àlàbí's music makes it emphatic that one's failure to keep pace with his/her equals in the world of achievement or even outpace them portends by all standards that the individual is barren. By the time people feel unloved and rejected, be it verbally or by action, their psyche becomes affected. They tend to view life itself as unfavorable to them. Little wonder, the number of young people committing suicide is skyrocketing. Virtually, everyday news features the pathetic stories of young people taking their lives. Youths who do not want to experience the bitter treatment experienced by the barren, take to committing cybercrime, that they may get rich overnight and rescue themselves and their families from the clutch of poverty that paint them barren, all over.

If a young man hails from a lowly background (a poor and unpopular family), the rich may vow that should their daughter choose him as her future spouse, that will be over their dead body, no matter how highly educated the intending husband is. Disappointingly, the fiancée's parents would be so passionate about their stand that one cannot but wonder if poverty is contagious or irreversible. After much fruitless persuasion from the lady, she and her lover may decide to elope. There have been cases of ladies who threaten to take their lives if their parents determinedly refuse to give their consent. There have also been cases of ladies who resort to outright self-murder. Cases of those who abandon true love on account of parents' disapproval is not uncommon. Certain ladies in this category do eventually fall into the wrong hands and become caught up in a loveless marriage. If such a union that is forged based on high socioeconomic status does not end in divorce, it may result in one of the spouses killing the other. What is the genesis? The parents' view of the man that their daughter truly loves as being 'barren', on account of his

26 An examination conducted for entry into all Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities in Nigeria.

humble background and their resultant rejection of him. All the aforementioned scenarios interpret the part of the song that goes thus:

*Bó ò bá lówó lówó àgàn ni,
Bó ò ba bímọ o, àgàn ni,
Bó ò ba tégbẹ, ko dàgbà àgàn ló jé*

(If you are not wealthy, you are barren
If you are childless, you are barren
If you have little achievement and
Lag behind, you are barren)

So, to escape from all the unpleasant situations that typify barrenness, the barren, in certain cases, may try out illegitimate means to escape barrenness. However, in her song, Tópé Àlàbí makes it explicit that the despicable condition of barrenness is not beyond redemption, as this will be discussed in the next sub-heading.

Fruitfulness: The Positive Outcome of Divine Intervention

Throughout her music, Tópé Àlàbí repeatedly stresses that there is no 'barrenness' that cannot be solved by God. She points out that divine deliverance is always on point, and at the appropriate time. She makes it clear that God's involvement in solving the plight of the barren will surely result in the desirable condition. In stanza 13, she calls it '*iyípadà òtun*' 'new transformation'.

Tópé Àlàbí explains that transformation from the state of barrenness means change of designation. Those who have been made to feel that there exists a void (barrenness) in their life, either on the basis of material poverty, childlessness or backwardness, but who, on account of God's mercy have wriggled free, will now be treated honorably. This joyous transition from want to abundance according to Àlàbí, will be so shocking to the scoffers that they would become speechless:

*Ayé mi létò, lètá bá wo iran mi . . .
Òtá káwọ rọ, ẹnu wọn gbẹ tán lóri ojú kan . . .*

{My life becomes so settled that the enemy watches me . . .
with bended hands and dry mouth, s/he adopts a perplexed stance}.

Lógán tí Ó Dé encourages all those who are struggling to make it in one area or the other, to keep their focus on God for solution to their predicament. She makes this point stand out through her repetition of *Lógán tí Ó dé...layé mi/ẹ létò* (At the instant of his (Jesus) arrival... my/your life became settled). The meaning of *ayé mi/ayé ẹ létò* (my life/your life became settled) which features in Tópé Àlàbí's song, 22 times, is, I stopped being barren or I became fruitful. With the expression *Lógán tí Ó dé layé mi/layé ẹ létò* (at the instant of his arrival my life/your life became settled), Tópé Àlàbí is advocating hope. She is, in effect, counteracting the action of individuals who resort to taking their God-given life through suicidal action. This may happen because their environment, rather than embrace the 'barren' and make them feel loved and cared for, despises, and treats them as outcasts and nonentities.

Authorial Musing

Lógán tí Ó dé affirms that music is didactic, just like other oral genres. It enables its listeners reflect on human relationships. That is, the effect of humans' action or inaction on an individual. Music also possesses the potency that will help individuals develop imagination and comprehend themselves and their environment. It teaches moral values and could function as fortification against several unbecoming situations and circumstances that affect people's minds.

To save the socio-cultural environment from worsening an already complicated situation, parents need to instill empathy in their wards right from an early age. When they grow up they will be able to help, rather than hurt hearts that are already injured. A Bible injunction makes these points clearer: "Teach a child how he should live, and he will remember it all his life."²⁷ It simply conveys the thought of practicing what has been inculcated, without giving up at any point (all his life). Humans thrive on loving attention from one another. This is especially so when there exists a vacuum.

Conclusion

This essay employed Tópé Àlàbí's *Lógán tí Ó Dé* to appraise the significance of barrenness and its multi-layered meanings in the contemporary Yorùbá society. It closely analyzed the diverse meanings of barrenness in relation to varieties of contextual allusions from the Yorùbá traditional religion's, Qur'anic and biblical perspectives. *Lógán tí Ó Dé* makes it explicit that, in addition to signifying childlessness and wretchedness, barrenness also portends retrogression and backwardness. The lyrics indicated the apathetical and callous reactions of the modern Yorùbá society toward the 'barren'

27 See Proverbs 22:6. (Good News Version).

(the 'have-nots'). These included name-calling and insulting remarks. It also revealed that unfair treatments could result in miserable life for the barren. Tópé Àlàbí's recurring lyric, *Lógán tí Ó Dé...layé mi létò* (at the instant of his arrival... my life became settled) is quite engaging and encouraging. It reassures all those that are looked down upon and despised, because of a void (barrenness) in their life to keep a tight grip on the hope that someday, their afflictions will become a thing of the past. She connotes that the disappearance of barrenness through Jesus' help will be so instant, that it would just be as if the sufferer had never experienced such an affliction and the attendant pain, and anguish. This paper concludes that the belief system of a people can be modified on the basis of further societal experience and socio-religious reconstruction.

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