

**Philosophical complexities and economic realities of mothering:
A Nigerian mother's travails and tenacity in
Funke Akindele's *A Tribe Called Judah***

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Abstract: Motherhood and mothering are universal commons that depend on locale-specific philosophies, economic realities and global worldviews for their manifest similarities and dissimilarities in manifestations and interpretations. Globalization increasingly influences mothering perceptions, thereby making mothering progressively a syncretism of locale-specific norms and multicultural ideas. This paper examines critically the authorial articulation of motherhood and mothering in a Nollywood film *A Tribe Called Judah*, to highlight the polemics of familial dysfunction vicious cycle, plausible reasons behind instances of negative mothering, and its impact on children. This paper argues that the social construction of reality theory is a pertinent articulation in explaining rationales informing the authorial classification of mothering in *A Tribe Called Judah* as one of the following: negative, positive, retrogressive, progressive, dysfunctional, functional, good, or bad. This paper utilized an interpretive approach in analyzing selected scenes in *A Tribe Called Judah* by cross-referencing them with selected portrayals subsuming relevant suppositions in other studies. In the end, this paper reaffirms the importance of girls' pre-mothering nurturing as a non-negotiable obligation. In addition, this paper observes with dismay the banality and indifference that define realities of troubled-mothers and how their society blames them when familial dysfunction becomes evident. Our view is that Jedidah's travails and tribulations are avoidable and unfortunate. Her mother's derisive lampoons typify the injustice child-mothers like

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Jedidah endure. Her father's actions represent entrenched opprobrium, selfishness, and sanctimonious proclivity elucidating Jedidah's Nigeria. Lastly, Funke Akindele's creative vision in utilizing *A Tribe Called Judah* as an enduring space for an interrogation of motherhood and mothering validates the utility of film as an efficacious platform that enables conscientious portrayal of pertinent social realities.

Keywords: film, philosophy, motherhood, mothering, Nigeria

Introduction

Beyond scholarly contributions in journals and books on mothering and its realities by philosophers, psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists and humanists; creative filmmakers are also contributing plausible articulations adding to the expansion and deepening of knowledge, perspectives, and worldviews on mothering. The utility of film as an efficacious platform for meaningful interrogations and sharing of pertinent ideas about societal issues is an unambiguous reality globally. In Nigeria, film is “a tool that has been” and is being “effectively employed in x-raying every aspect of the Nigerian society” (Odi 2016, 165).

Films in many ways like other art forms represent the realities in the societies that produce them. In films with mothers as part of the cast, surely, the mothers' actions expectedly will relay shades and nuances of mothering and, according to Carl Jung, mothers play very crucial roles in children's unconscious minds because the ‘mother image’ embeds in the children's psyche, and continually generates several fundamental unconscious contents (Ibid. 508).

Jung and other philosophers such as Sigmund Freud, Erich Newmann and Gottman, et al. variously opine that a mother's emotion particularly her exteriorities, which are supposedly projections of her interiority, influences her child's inclination formulation and aggregation. Their suppositions accord on the basis that motherhood enables profound flow between a mother and her child. Newmann (1955, 4-5) notes that a mother's interiority relays her exteriority of mood and emotions – which gradually calibrates her child's consciousness through involuntary inculcation and adaptation. In academic circles, discourse on filmic portrayals of social realities such as ‘motherhood’ and ‘mothering’ have continued to receive significant attention, however, paucity of studies touching on filmic portrayals of dysfunctional childhood as a variable that contributes towards dysfunctional mothering in Nigerian subsists. Thus, this study will be

focusing on an interpretive analysis of the intersecting suppositions and articulations that situate dynamics and variables of mothering in the film *A Tribe Called Judah*. Therefore, our priority is to share our interpretation of some salient authorial articulation linking motherhood and mothering in *A Tribe Called Judah*, to highlight some subsumed contestations and polemics as a means of deepening understanding of the alluded variables that intersect and influence mothering in the film's story. In addition, some suppositions and articulations in *A Tribe Called Judah* that embody the philosophical contextualization of practical mitigation processes for dysfunctional families are also included in our discussion.

A Tribe Called Judah

A Tribe Called Judah is a Nollywood film with Lagos and Kano as sites of action. The director and producer Funke Akindele narrates a story, which revolves around a Nigerian single mother's travails and her attempts to remain sane and afloat in her battle against the intense adversity that her Nigeria represents. The protagonist, Jedidah remarkably has five children from five different men, who incidentally are from five different tribes in Nigeria. Jedidah's intense problems started when she got pregnant inadvertently before marriage at the age of 16 with an Igbo man named Kalu. Jedidah's father, Rev. Simon Judah became very livid and he furiously denounced her. He chased her away, forcing her to move in with Kalu despite a passionate plea by his wife who wants Jedidah to remain with them and have her baby. Rev. Judah laments bitterly that his career as a pastor has taken a massive knock by Jedidah's fornication and pre-marital pregnancy. He argues that if he allows Jedidah to remain at home, his career will tarnish irredeemably, hence, in obstinate resolve he disowns her. Jedidah largely disoriented, ashamed, and heartbroken relocates to Kalu's house. Though Kalu indifferently welcomed Jedidah, unexpectedly he secretly fled, abandoning Jedidah who was 17 with a son Emeka. As Jedidah's mother stepped in and began to take care of Emeka, Jedidah gets entangled with Sani a Hausa man from Kano who got her pregnant. After staying with Jedidah awhile, Sani took her to his family in Kano for an introduction and marriage proposal but his family resolutely declined to support his intent to marry Jedidah because they had betrothed a Hausa girl for him. Again, Jedidah reverted to single motherhood with a second son Adamu, and soon after, she met Boma, and they began a romantic relationship which

produced her third son Pere. Boma took very good care of Jedidah, sadly he passed on abruptly after a year of being with her. Once more a single mother, Jedidah met Lekan Isiaka, whom she employed as a private tutor to her sons. As the days went by, Jedidah began to fantasize about an enduring intimate relationship with Lekan because she wanted him to be a father to her children and a husband to her. As she went beyond fantasy, Lekan impregnated her leading to the birth of her fourth son, Oluwashina (Shina). Thereafter, Lekan unexpectedly flees from Jedidah taking a few of his belongings and a couple of Jedidah's valuables to Ibadan without trace. This saddened and depressed Jedidah, thus, she began drinking alcohol heavily. In one of her numerous visits to her usual drinking joints, she met a man and because of alcohol intoxication, she engaged in an unprotected impromptu sexual intercourse with him leading to pregnancy and her fifth son Ejiro. After Ejiro's birth, Jedidah who became very disenchanted with men, remained a single mother and continued her struggle to take care of herself and her five adult sons. At the point the film's story commenced, Jedidah was managing her own tricycle business with a fleet of three tricycles; Emeka was a sales rep at a furniture shop, Adamu a security officer in a mall, Oluwashina a gangster, Pere a pickpocket and Ejiro a student.

Theories and perspectives on mothering: Relevant highlights in *A Tribe Called Judah*

As we relayed in the beginning of this paper, Funke Akindele's *A Tribe Called Judah* articulates archetypal realities and variables that define a single mother's mothering travails in Nigeria and her creative tenacity and philosophy in a less heart-warming cultural and economic space. The film's story portrays plausible intersections linking variables such as Nigeria's ethnic fault lines, poor human nurture, and human nature's inevitability in each individual's behaviour as core variables that propel and sustain pervasive multi-dimensional melancholy entwining dysfunctional single motherhood syndrome in Nigeria.

A good number of studies indicate that definitions of mothering practices across generations and cultural milieus by different races within locale-specific worldviews and philosophies vary significantly; hence, some mothering practices remain consistently fluid and flexible while some are not (Collins 1994; Glenn et al. 1994; Finch 2007; Afflerback et al. 2013; Frederick et al. 2019; Byrt & Dempsey 2020;

Morgan 2020; Carroll & Yeadon-Lee 2021). On definitions of mothering (Bicchieri 2006, 2017; Finch 2007; Daly 2016 and Morris et al. 2015), variously present mothering as various ways of thinking, feeling, and doing that accord and replicate locale-specific social constructs, intersecting wider shades of meanings, worldviews, and philosophies that relay “cultural scripts, codes, and institutionalized ways” (Daly 2016, 52). John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2005, 428) describe motherhood as a “term encompassing the practical realities and social significance of being a mother”. Motherhood connotes the process of being a mother with its central expectation, which is mothering. Consensus in the above-mentioned scholarly contributions is that mothering is a natural reality for women; however, there are contestations regarding the intersecting aspects such as the criteria defining mothering as either functional or dysfunctional, the variables that determine how mothering will turn out, the best processes for the mitigation of dysfunctional mothering, and the practical ways of sustaining positive and functional mothering. The actions a mother or a woman takes that are describable as taking care of her children and other people's children are mothering. Mothering is a set of practices that are primarily family-focused but intersects inevitably with the economy and well-being of the immediate community (Morgan 2011; 2020).

The philosophy of mothering learned from the aforementioned studies requires a mother to embody a comprehensive knowledge of children's needs, which aids her in articulating needs and desire specificity of her child or children. In addition, more trajectories of mothering philosophy highlight that mothering yields better results when mothers are physically and emotionally present and decidedly attentive. Therefore, satisfactory response to a child's needs intersects with a mother's mothering knowledge deep and density. According to Christine Odi (2016, 194) “motherhood in the Nigerian society is greatly esteemed and held sacred” thus, “it is at the same time an institution in which the mothers most times are treated with less than the dignity, respect, and humanity they deserve from the society”. While Odi points at ‘the socio-cultural construct of motherhood as a topic that attracts differing arguments, where some scholars describe the condition of motherhood as the pinnacle of any woman's existence’, others suggest that motherhood remains a major source of women's oppression. Motherhood according to Molatokunbo

Oluwaseunfunmi Olutayo (2021, 978) remains highly venerated in different African cultures, and in her elucidation, she notes:

The general picture that seems to portray the female gender from the Western perspective presents the oppressive image of women in society. On the contrary, despite cultural flow as a result of globalization, certain insinuations and indeed realities among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria portray a privileged status for the female gender. ‘Yaniwura’ mothering is gold, in Yoruba society and indeed the world over shows the value attached to mothering. The psychological impression made on yet-to-be mothers prepares them for privileged statuses despite possible negative experiences in mothering.

Olutayo suggests that mothering “in most cases, is seen as an act, which starts from when a woman gives birth, to the period her children start to have their babies” and “the image of the mother is culturally elaborated and valued in most societies” (Ibid., 979). Despite the influence of globalization and its efficacy in propelling social worldview aggregation, mothering across national contexts and in various settings such as in biological families, foster families and motherless babies homes have continued to remain largely a gendered thing (Bianchi & Milkie 2010; Bianchi 2011; Goldscheider et al. 2015; Evertsson & Grunow 2019; Scarborough et al. 2019; Valiquette-Tessier et al. 2019; Arendell 2000; Few-Demo & Allen 2020; Ehmer 2021). Another subsisting global reality is that parents particularly mothers are expected to invest their resources, time, energy and sacrifice their leisure in lure of child rearing, to establish strong attachments with them by attending to their needs, wishes, and desires to the best of their abilities (Hays 1996; Ennis 2014; Faircloth 2014; Hamilton 2016; Berghammer & Milkie 2021; Hulen 2022). The widely acknowledged worldview is that both proper and improper factoring and execution of mother-related functions and expectations will inevitably lead to positive or negative outcomes respectively for the family and society (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Cialdini & Trost 1998).

Locale specific realities of motherhood and mothering metaphors in *A Tribe called Judah*

To look at the wider systems of meaning within a locale-specific social ideology of motherhood and mothering as regards to the efficacy of mothering on children as suggested in *A tribe Called Judah*, we observe that the socio-economic consequences of the mothering outcome on Pere and Shina are negative. This is because Pere turned

out a pickpocket whereas Shina became a vicious gang-member. As a pickpocket and a vicious gangster, Pere and Shina respectively are dysfunctional men and societal ills. Their actions create social insecurity and restiveness that lead to economic loss to individuals, communities, and the State.

Regarding mothering outcomes and realities, scholars suggest that mothering outcomes are likely to be influenced by mothers' and familial circumstances, contexts, and categories such as single motherhood (Robinson et al., 2018), lesbian motherhood (Biblarz & Savci 2010; Bos & Gartrell 2020), mothers of children with disabilities and various health challenges (van Wyk & Leech 2016), and mothers with violent partners (Hardesty & Ogolsky 2020). No doubt, these studies have profoundly influenced the articulation of the complexities that revolve around the supposition that similarities are bound to exist in the approaches women adopt in their mothering, however, exactness in approaches is highly unlikely. Jedidah's circumstance as a single mother places the entire load of child rearing on her, which exacts significant toll on economic wellbeing. Jedidah is a mother who emanates from a dysfunctional circumstance to become a 'child-mother' after family abandonment in a time she was in a desperate need for compassion because her psychological dexterity was utterly battered. Her misadventures in men and mothering are products of her poor cognitive density in matters concerning romance and its aftermaths. Part of her negative experience in motherhood and mothering is the betrayal by men she shared intimacy with. The level of inconsistency men such as her father and her several romantic partners such as Kalu, Sani and Lekan exhibited depressed and traumatized her. The manner the above-mentioned men and biological father of her children abandoned their child co-rearing responsibility for her indicated that Jedidah's society requires to institute and execute regulations that makes its mandatory to biological fathers to share in child co-rearing burden. The natural and social construction of reality in the film's story suggests that positive mothering entails giving a lifetime of service towards reproducing, guiding, nurturing, and managing others' lives.

In mothering psychology, studies suggest a growing philosophy towards pro-neo-liberalism mothering inclination, an idea that elevates mothers' pro-choice autonomy and self-optimization (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Joecks 2021; Lewis 2001; Lightman & Kevins 2021; Eva-Maria Schmidt 2022). According to M. F. Belenky et al.

(1986, 157) “By focusing our attention on the family and the mother's role (an institution devoted to the care, connection, and human development), we might help to bring a different language into the study of psychology”. Constance A. Barlow and Kathleen V. Cairns in their study, which characterizes the psychological experience of mothering, particularly highlights the challenges and opportunities that childbirth and child-rearing offer to women. They observe that mothering experience “involves a continuous re-evaluation of attitudes, beliefs and personal characteristics which provide opportunities for personal growth and development” for the mother and child (Barlow and Cairns 1997, 232). The idea here is that mothering propels individuals to care for young ones who depend on such care to develop and thrive positively. Barlow and Cairns observe that “cultural myths about mothering suggest that mothers are endless sources of nurturance to their children, an expectation that may be difficult for mothers to sustain in that childrearing can often evoke emotions such as indifference, cruelty, envy, possessiveness, and resentment” (Ibid. 233). Here, we can see the evidence of mothering starting from the birth of a child and lasting until the death or permanent separation of the mother and her child.

In *A Tribe Called Judah*, Jedidah continued her mothering even when her children were adults. Similarly, Jedidah’s mother exhibited continual life-long mothering towards Jedidah. Barlow and Cairns opine that essentially in different cultures “mothers are expected to know instinctively how to raise children and inadequate mothering is usually believed to be the source of children's problems and suffering” in life (Ibidem). Usually, society expects mothers such as Jedidah to care for their children competently and relentlessly. Jedidah’s mother observes that her grandchildren Pere and Shina, whom she did not train, turned out dysfunctional because of inadequate mothering by her daughter Jedidah. Let us pause and look critically at the above supposition by Jedidah’s mother. Clearly, this supposition is a scathing lampoon directed at Jedidah. It is also a self-exoneration, which dumps all the blames of evident dysfunctional behaviour by Shina, and Pere on Jedidah’s poor mothering. The comment by Jedidah’s mother is evidential of sanctimonious penchant by individuals and the society on mothers such as Jedidah who began their journey in mothering from the dysfunctional dimension. Jedidah’s best ability in mothering is classified as poor and bad by her mother’s comment, however, the contestation here is if Jedidah’s mother provided apt and flawless

mothering to Jedidah, how did she easily get lured into fornication and pre-marriage pregnancy at the age of 16? From our observation and very dependable field study reports, mothering could be a happy or a sad experience, thus Barlow and Cairns note that “Western culture presents mothering as fulfilling to women in ways that no other experience can” (Ibidem). Consequently “women are, therefore, seen as individuals who can effortlessly engage in the task of emotional giving, and are likely to feel inadequate and guilty when they cannot meet this ideal, or when their children experience problems” (Ibidem).

Mothering psychology is a complex reality and studies suggest that women by virtue of nature and the value of nurture can cope sufficiently with multi-tasking circumstances (Ruddick 1984). Conceptually, mothering competency emanates from cognitive capacity and process; there is a need for proper cognitive development of the girl-child who naturally becomes a mother in time, for her to achieve adequate positive mothering. For instance, Jedidah becoming sexually active and pregnant leading to pre-marriage childbirth at 17 is a scenario that suggests that she was a child who happened not to be ready for the complexities of mothering because she was cognitively immature. Linking the significance of cognitive maturity to mothering sufficiency, A. B. Balaji et al. (2007, 1388) observe that “parenting involves several mental health costs, including time, physical and emotional energy, conflicts with other social roles, the economic burden of childrearing”. In addition, Balaji et al. note that “hardships are especially salient for women, who are often the primary caretakers of children, and compounded if they are also single parents” (Ibidem). According to Suniya S. Luthar (2015, 295) “being a good enough mother is very hard work”, therefore being consistently “a good enough mother to children across a period of decades is a challenging task at best, and one enormously taxing for parents experiencing stressors such as mental illness in the family or prolonged poverty”. Jedidah’s lack of prolonged passionate support after her first pregnancy by her father and her romantic partners propelled her to seek respite and refuge in alcohol which damaged her kidney. More so, Jedidah experienced prolonged poverty without harbouring plausible hope. Scholars such as Luthar strongly prescribe well-articulated support systems and approaches for vulnerable individuals in circumstances similar to Jedidah’s. Thus, Luthar explains:

I would like to see front and centre, an unambiguous emphasis on ensuring the well-being of those primarily charged with raising the next generation: typically, mothers. This must be done in all ‘at-risk’ groups, defined as individuals who are statistically more likely to show adjustment problems than people in the general population (Ibidem).

Those who will be responsible for raising the next generation are the young girls and their training should be included in academic curriculum, so that proper tending should not be left to their biological parents alone. The expression ‘this must be done in all-risk group’ suggests that those who are products of dysfunctional homes such as Jedidah will require a different kind of specialized help system and support. Jane Knitzer (2000) in her contribution contends that a dysfunctional home can propel psychological imbalance in children, therefore the need to support at-risk young girls who may eventually be mothers will go a long way in reducing the vicious cycle of familial dysfunction. Knitzer affirms the importance of relationship-based interventions for mothers trying to raise children in the face of serious adversities, including chronic poverty and psychiatric problems such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Shonkoff and Fisher (2013, 1645) observe that interventions offered to vulnerable girls are ways of “promoting resilience in young children who experience high levels of adversity” and that such support approaches “depends upon the availability of adults who can help them develop effective coping skills” which Jedidah did not get.

Conclusion: Dysfunctional mothering’s cost to economy

Even though mothering remains widely viewed as an individual activity of the mother who chooses approaches convenient to her, it is pertinent to point out that studies indicate that bad or negative mothering is not just bad or negative for the family; ultimately, society usually bears the brunt socially and economically. To elaborate on this point of view, we draw from Carl Jung’s supposition which argues that within the collective unconscious, a mother can be viewed from multiple trajectories; one is a mother being “all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, furthers growth and fertility” and the second trajectory is a mother that “devours, seduces, and poisons” (Jung 1959, 82). A positive mother embodies positive ideals such as purity, superior morality, and selfless devotion to her family and other families. According to John Carroll (2001, 114), a mother subsumes the potentiality of good and bad, hence, mothering can be the root of

many kinds of personal and societal ills or the solution. Therefore, the girl-child requires proper training for her to be able to recreate positive ideas and practices when she starts mothering. The idea here is that improper management of homes can lead to familial dysfunction, just as Rev. Simon Judah's family, which produced Jedidah, and Jedidah produced social ills and dysfunctional individuals in Pere and Shina – a clear indication of a vicious cycle.

This paper relied on the story presented in the film *A Tribe Called Judah* to highlight and discuss some instances of positive and negative mothering. The paper adds to existing studies elaborating different realities of motherhood and mothering, the factors that influence both positive and negative mothering, and how to provide mitigation to negative mothering through functional approaches.

The paper reaffirms the priority of proper pre-mothering training for girls, and the need for proper intervention mechanisms for accidental mothers or unfortunate mothers as a means of ameliorating the vicious cycles of familial dysfunction. This paper adduces that the film *A Tribe Called Judah* is a deep and dense articulation of subsisting salient concerns surrounding mothering and motherhood in different climes and specifically in parts of Nigeria.

Philosophically, we observe that the creatively crafted attributions in the film's story concerning Jedidah reflects the nexus of truth, the idea of wrong, the notion of a better humanity, the power of conviction, the energy in voice, and the practical utility of cognition as themes that encapsulate trajectories of discourse that speaks volume about quality of humanity. Philosophy as a universal common is evidential in daily permutations and practice of every articulate human; hence, Jedidah despite her dysfunctional circumstance, her philosophy drives her views and actions. Philosophy explains the basis of human reflection, conviction, thinking, ideology formation, and its re-aggregation. Among Jedidah's prominent philosophies is her adoption of 'no matter what we do, to some or many, it is good, or to some or many it is bad'. The philosophy suggests that the reality of life is about a sufficient understanding of your observers' desire at any point in time if you would receive fewer knocks, blows, and wounds. The study opines that support mechanisms are vital for pre-mothering training, which could be in communities, clinics or professional settings. More so, the need to train professionals such as social workers and psychologists that will be available for those in immediate need of

support towards sharing struggles from travails of dysfunctional single motherhood.

Another philosophy by Jedidah is encapsulated in the expression ‘what will be, will be’. In these few words, Jedidah shares her conviction and the question is ‘what is her philosophy relaying about her circumstance and her social environment? Can we say that her philosophy generates disillusionment and hopelessness, or does it point at the mundane as vanity? Philosophies are indoctrinations individuals receive and assimilate from homes, streets, schools, media, meditation, literature, and peer chats, so where did Jedidah receive has? Another question is where did a child-mother such as Jedidah receive her worldview about ‘mothering’ and for her misadventures and triumphs who takes the blame or commendation respectively? Poignantly, when any mother begins mothering, she can only give what she possesses. No one gives what he or she does not have. Lastly, this paper affirms that film is an efficacious medium through which filmmakers can interrogate and convey societal realities.

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Chidi Igbokwe, Emeka Aniago, Mary-Isabella A. Chidi-Igbokwe,
Felicia C. Abada, Adaora Arah, Magnus Aniago and Jude C. Agbo

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