

THE UN-AFRICANNES OF ECTOGENESIS FOR AFRO-FEMINISM A CHALLENGE TO MOTHERHOOD.

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Abstract

This abstract explores the complex dynamics of ectogenesis in the context of traditional African conceptions of motherhood and Afro-feminism. It looks at how traditional Yoruba conceptions of motherhood, which place a strong emphasis on the spiritual and relational components of the mother-fetus bond, are challenged by ectogenesis. This paper examines the contradictions between ectogenesis and fundamental African values through critical interaction with Afro-feminist concepts and the ontology of parenting among African adults. This paper recognises that ectogenesis has the ability to solve infertility and provide possibilities for parenting in modern-day Africa, despite worries about its un-Africanness. These draw from the works of specific African feminists and scholars (such as Siwila, 2015, on indigenous knowledge in African women's theology of motherhood; and Ohaja et al., 2019 and 2021, on rituals and embodied cultural practices at the beginning of life) alongside Western feminist bioethicists (such as Smajdor, 2007; MacKay, 2020; and Cavaliere, 2020), as well as a methodological framework. The study seeks to shed light on the practical and moral implications of ectogenesis for African women, along with its relevance, opportunities, and difficulties in African contexts.

Keywords: Un-Africanness, Ectogenesis, Afro-feminism, Challenge and Motherhood

Introduction

This article explores the discourse surrounding ectogenesis and how it can break the sacred bond between mothers and unborn children, challenging traditional Yoruba conceptions of motherhood¹. With a focus on the tensions that emerge in contemporary African motherhood between the intersections of ectogenesis, Afro-feminism, and motherhood, this study seeks to shed light on the complicated discussion surrounding historical perspectives on motherhood in African contexts.

Historical Perspectives on Motherhood in African Contexts:

In African communities, motherhood has long been deeply ingrained with cultural, spiritual, and social importance. Rich tales and customs from traditional African societies, like the Yoruba, influence how people see maternity and its place in society². Motherhood in traditional Yoruba society is defined by a complex network of spiritual and relational ties, rather than only biological reproduction³. Rituals and rites of passage that honour the mother-child link make pregnancy a sacred journey⁴.

Women are honoured throughout the whole reproductive process, from conception to motherhood, and their stories are deeply ingrained in the community's identity. The concept of the mother-foetus bond, which starts at conception, is fundamental to the Yoruba sense of motherhood. It is thought that expectant mothers converse with their unborn offspring, creating a close relationship that goes beyond the material world⁵. This relationship is strengthened by naming customs and other activities, which help to shape a child's identity and future even before they are born. But in African cultures, the advent of ectogenesis presents a serious threat to conventional ideas of motherhood. The intentional raising of human foetuses outside of the womb, or ectogenesis, upsets both the spiritual dynamics of the mother-child bond and the normal course of birthing. Ectogenesis is viewed as an insult to the sanctity of childbirth and the spiritual connection between mother and child in Yoruba culture, where motherhood is intricately entwined with spirituality and tradition⁶. Additionally, ectogenesis presents more general concerns regarding women's roles in African communities and the upholding of traditional values⁷. While technology developments provide opportunities to treat infertility concerns and increase alternatives for parenthood, they also present

¹MacKay, K. (2020). The 'tyranny of reproduction': Could ectogenesis further women's liberation? *Bioethics*. 2020 May;34(4):346-353. doi:10.1111/bioe.12706. Epub 2020 Jan 13. PMID: 31943247; PMCID:PMC7217043.

²Okeanya, O.J, Angelica J. G., Abideen A. O., Hakeem, K. H., Kristine J. A., Gacutno, N. O., Olaleke, R. O., Adesola, J. J., Lasala, E. M., Don, E. L., (2024). Ectogenesis: understanding opportunities, implications, concerns, and ways forward. *International Journal of Surgery: Global Health* (2024) 7:e0398.

³Adebowale, O., (2020). Understanding the cultural and traditional importance of mothers in Yoruba society. Available at: <https://guardian.ng/life/understanding-the-cultural-and-traditional-importance-of-mothers-in-yoruba-society/published> on 01 March, 2020.

⁴Jegede and Fayemiwo (2010). Cultural and Ethical challenges of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in the management of Infertility among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 14 (2): 114- 121.

⁵Jegede and Fayemiwo (2010). Cultural and Ethical challenges of Assisted Reproductive Technologies in the management of Infertility among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 14 (2): 114- 121

⁶Ibid.

⁷Aladésanmi, O. and Ògúnjinní, I. (2019) Yorùbá Thoughts and Beliefs in Child Birth and Child Moral Upbringing: A Cultural Perspective. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 9, 569-585. doi: 10.4236/aasoci.2019.912041.

ethical conundrums and societal challenges. African feminism, which is based on the affirmation and enhancement of women in African environments, has the challenge of reconciling the adoption of modern advancements with the preservation of customary values⁸. African motherhood's historical background and current concerns about political representation and gender equality interact⁹. Despite the vital role that women play in society, there are still impediments and established patriarchal standards that prevent women from participating fully in political areas. By promoting greater participation of women in governmental and decision-making bodies, affirmative action programmes seek to redress these discrepancies¹⁰. Understanding the connections between culture, tradition, and modernity is crucial for managing the challenges of parenting in African cultures. Ectogenesis is one example of a technical advance that may help with reproductive issues, but it must be used carefully and mindful of ethical and cultural norms. A paradigm for reinventing parenting that respects women's autonomy and dignity and affirms the distinct cultural legacy of African nations is offered by African feminism.

Afro-Feminist Critiques of Ectogenesis and Reproductive Technologies:

Within African feminist thought, afro-feminism is a dynamic and ever-evolving movement that challenges Western-centric perspectives and advocates for the recognition of African women's agency and experiences. It provides incisive critiques of reproductive technologies, including ectogenesis¹¹. The worry that ectogenesis—the artificial raising of human foetuses outside the womb—undermines the comprehensive conception of motherhood and womanhood that is characteristic of African societies is at the core of Afro-feminist criticisms. Motherhood has a significant part in moulding women's identities and responsibilities in many African communities, where it is closely linked to spirituality, community, and tradition¹². Ectogenesis interferes with this natural process, prompting concerns about the cultural and spiritual ramifications of removing childbirth from its biological setting. Furthermore, ectogenesis, according to Afro-feminists, frequently comes at the price of African women's independence and wellbeing in order to uphold Western-centric ideas of development and emancipation. While ectogenesis may provide answers to problems with reproduction and reproductive health, promoting it in African contexts without taking into account the ethical, social, and cultural implications runs the danger of further marginalising African women and undermining traditional traditions. The larger socio-political

⁸ Aládésanmí, O. and Ògúnjinní, I. (2019) Yorùbá Thoughts and Beliefs in Child Birth and Child Moral Upbringing: A Cultural Perspective. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 9, 569-585. doi:10.4236/aasoci.2019.912041.

⁹ Ogugua, C.V.I. (2010). Legislating Women's Affirmative Action and Its Constitutionality in Nigeria. *Bars Perspective*. 10

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Okesanya, O.J, Angelica J. G., Abideen A. O., Hakeem, K. H., Kristine J. A., Gacutno, N. O., Olaleke, R. O., Adesola, J. J., Lasala, E. M., Don, E. L., (2024). Ectogenesis: understanding opportunities, implications, concerns, and ways forward. *International Journal of Surgery: Global Health* (2024) 7:e0398.

¹² Aládésanmí, O. and Ògúnjinní, I. (2019) Yorùbá Thoughts and Beliefs in Child Birth and Child Moral Upbringing: A Cultural Perspective. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 9, 569-585. doi: 10.4236/aasoci.2019.912041.

ramifications of reproductive technologies are also highlighted by afro-feminist criticisms of ectogenesis¹³, with a focus on women's rights and bodily autonomy in particular. Women in many African nations encounter structural obstacles when trying to obtain family planning and reproductive healthcare, which exacerbates inequality and prolongs oppressive and impoverished cycles. Pitched as a technological answer to reproductive problems, ectogenesis might unintentionally perpetuate current power relations and inequality, especially if it gives privileged groups' needs precedence over those of marginalised populations¹⁴. Moreover, Afro-feminists question the moral and ethical aspects of ectogenesis, refuting the idea that technological advancement is intrinsically progressive or liberating. Although ectogenesis presents novel opportunities for conception and childbirth, it also brings up difficult moral questions about the monetization of human life, the use of women's bodies as commodities, and the dissolution of conventional family and kinship structures¹⁵. Afro-feminists respond to these criticisms by promoting a comprehensive strategy for reproductive justice that places African women's experiences and agency front and centre. This method promotes laws and procedures that maintain women's autonomy, dignity, and cultural heritage while acknowledging the connections between social justice, reproductive rights, and cultural sovereignty¹⁶. Advocating for alternative conceptions of femininity, motherhood, and family, afro-feminist movements are actively involved in questioning the prevailing narratives around reproductive health and technology throughout the African continent. Afro-feminists want to alter the conversation on reproductive justice by elevating African voices and experiences, giving women a voice, and restoring authority over their bodies and lives. Thus, critical analyses of ectogenesis and reproductive technologies by Afro-feminists provide valuable perspectives on the intricate relationships between culture, technology, and gender. Afro-feminists work to promote an equitable and comprehensive understanding of reproductive justice in African contexts by opposing Western-centric paradigms and standing up for the agency and dignity of African women.

Cultural Constructs of Motherhood and the Notion of Un-Africanness:

In the traditional Yoruba culture, motherhood is more than just biological functions; it also has spiritual, social, and cultural aspects. The holy relationship that exists between a mother and her unborn child, starting at conception in the womb, is emphasised in the Yoruba idea of sexuality and motherhood. The importance of the mother-foetus bond is highlighted by this comprehensive viewpoint, which is fundamental to Yoruba society's

¹³Cavaliere, G. (2020). Gestation, equality and freedom: ectogenesis as a political perspective. *J Med Ethics* 2020;46:76–82.

¹⁴Alghrani, A., (2008)'Regulating the Reproductive Revolution: Ectogenesis—A Regulatory Minefield?', in Michael Freeman (ed.), *Law and Bioethics: Current Legal Issues Volume 11, Current Legal Issues* (Oxford, 2008; online edn, Oxford Academic, 1 Jan. 2009).

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Orcid, N, Hammond-Browning, N. (2018). A new dawn? Ectogenesis, future children and reproductive choice. *Contemp Issues Law* 2018;14:349–373

¹⁷Adebayo, Q.A., and Fagborun, T., (2023). *Ìyá ≠ Mother: Making a Yoruba sense of Motherhood*. Available at: <https://shado-mag.com/opinion/iya-%E2%89%A0-mother-making-a-yoruba-sense-of-motherhood/April 8, 2023>.

ontology of motherhood¹⁸. Pregnancy is regarded in Yoruba culture as both a highly spiritual and bodily phenomenon. Expectant mothers participate in naming ceremonies, rituals, and dialogues with their unborn children, creating a strong attachment that influences the child's identity and social interactions¹⁹. The Yoruba people's ceremonies, which have their roots in spirituality and history, show how personhood, motherhood, and cultural identity are intertwined. These traditional notions of motherhood and womanhood are called into question by ectogenesis, the artificial raising of human foetuses outside the womb. Ectogenesis, according to Ohaja et al.²⁰ upsets the normal sequence of childbirth and jeopardises the spiritual and interpersonal components of motherhood for the traditional Yoruba. The Yoruba culture's deeply rooted cultural beliefs that define motherhood are said to be incompatible with the practice of ectogenesis, which isolates the mother from the process of conception, labour, and delivery.

Furthermore, ectogenesis gives rise to worries regarding the breakdown of customs and the spiritual bond between mothers and their unborn offspring²¹. An artificial environment renders the bonding experiences and naming rituals that take place during pregnancy outdated, robbing mothers and children of vital cultural identities and experiences.

Critiques of ectogenesis by Afro-feminists reflect similar cultural anxieties by emphasising the conflict between Western-oriented ideas of development and African traditional values. Afro-feminist places a stronger emphasis on the empowerment and preservation of African women within their cultural contexts than does Western feminism, which frequently views technical improvements as means for emancipation²². Ectogenesis is un-African since it does not support and advance fundamental African ideals related to motherhood and women (Ohaja et al., 2021). Ectogenesis compromises the cultural integrity and spiritual importance of delivery in African civilizations by going around the normal mother-foetus link and upsetting customs.

Nonetheless, it is critical to recognise the potential advantages of reproductive technology in treating infertility and increasing the number of maternal alternatives available. Ectogenesis may provide answers to problems with reproduction, but its application in African contexts needs to be guided by cultural sensitivity and ethical

¹⁸Ohaja, Magdalena, Jo Murphy-Lawless, and Margaret Dunlea. (2019). Religion and Spirituality in Pregnancy and Birth: The Views of Birth Practitioners in Southeast Nigeria. *Religions* 10: 82.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ohaja, Magdalena, Jo Murphy-Lawless, and Margaret Dunlea. 2019. Religion and Spirituality in Pregnancy and Birth: The Views of Birth Practitioners in Southeast Nigeria. *Religions* 10: 82.

²²Siwila, L. 2015. The role of indigenous knowledge in African women's theology of understanding motherhood and maternal health. *Alternation Special Edition* 14: 65.

concerns.

Ethical and Societal Implications of Ectogenesis in African Contexts:

Within African contexts, ectogenesis, the act of rearing human fetuses outside of the womb, presents ethical and societal problems²⁴. Although the technology may help with infertility and other reproductive issues, its introduction presents difficult ethical, societal, and cultural implications²⁵. Regarding ectogenesis, one of the main ethical issues in African cultures is how it would affect customs and beliefs about birthing and motherhood. Childbirth is considered a holy and communal experience in many African communities, closely linked to spirituality, identity, and cultural legacy. These deeply embedded cultural norms and beliefs are challenged by ectogenesis, which removes the gestation and birthing process from the natural domain of women's bodies²⁶. Ectogenesis also calls into question the commercialization of human reproduction and life. The artificiality of ectogenesis may cause natural delivery to be devalued and women to be seen as nothing more than reproductive instruments in civilizations where women's reproductive capacities are frequently appreciated and glorified. The commercialization of reproduction has the potential to worsen already-existing power imbalances and disparities in African communities, especially for women who can experience pressure to undergo ectogenesis in order to meet social norms around motherhood. Ectogenesis also gives rise to worries over the possible exploitation of weaker groups of people, especially in situations where access to reproductive technology and healthcare is restricted. Ectogenesis' high costs have the potential to exacerbate already-existing gaps in access to healthcare and reproductive rights by further marginalising groups and individuals from lower-income backgrounds²⁶. Moreover, the introduction of ectogenesis could affect gender roles, family, and community dynamics in larger social contexts. Ectogenesis has the potential to upend established gender norms and power dynamics in patriarchal countries where women's identities and social standing are fundamentally shaped by their responsibilities as mothers. The capacity to conceive and raise a child outside of a woman's body challenges preconceived ideas about motherhood and may cause changes to social and familial institutions. Positively, ectogenesis may provide fresh chances for reproductive autonomy and choice, especially for women who could have infertility or other difficulties with their reproductive system²⁷. Ectogenesis might enable people to make educated decisions about their reproductive destinies and increase the opportunities for starting a family by offering alternate routes to parenting²⁸.

However, in African cultures, the ethical ramifications of ectogenesis go beyond personal preferences and encompass more expansive ideas of social justice, cultural values, and human rights. Engaging in inclusive and culturally sensitive debates that take into account the different views and experiences of all stakeholders is crucial as African countries grapple with the challenges of technology breakthroughs in reproductive care²⁹. Without further ado, ectogenesis has deep and multidimensional ethical and societal ramifications in African situations. Although the technology may help with infertility and increase the number of reproductive alternatives available, its adoption raises serious concerns about social fairness, cultural integrity, and human rights. To ensure that reproductive technologies are in line with the beliefs and requirements of African societies, it is crucial to approach the development and use of ectogenesis with careful consideration of its ethical, cultural, and societal repercussions

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Conclusion:

Afro-feminism and the highly esteemed bond between motherhood and African cultures are seriously threatened by the loss of Africanness linked to ectogenesis. This technological breakthrough upends long-held conceptions and practices related to birthing, sparking conversations about ethics and culture. Although ectogenesis offers treatment for infertility, its introduction needs to be done carefully to respect African traditional values. Handling the intersection of ectogenesis, Afrofeminism, and motherhood requires a close analysis of both cultural values and scientific advancements

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²³ Ohaja, Magdalena, Jo Murphy-Lawless, and Margaret Dunlea. 2019. Religion and Spirituality in Pregnancy and Birth: The Views of Birth Practitioners in Southeast Nigeria. *Religions* 10: 82.

²⁴ Segers S, Pennings G, Mertes H. The ethics of ectogenesis-aided foetal treatment. *Bioethics* 2020; 34:364–370

²⁵ Smajdor, A. (2007). The moral imperative for ectogenesis. *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, 16, 336–345.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁶ Di Stefano L, Mills C, Watkins A, (2020). Ectogestation ethics: the implications of artificially Extending gestation for viability, newborn resuscitation and abortion. *Bioethics* 2020;34:371–384.

²⁷ Segers S. The path toward ectogenesis: looking beyond the technical challenges. *BMC Med Ethics*. 2021 May 13;22(1):59. doi: 10.1186/s12910-021-00630-6. PMID: 33985480; PMCID: PMC8120724.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Okesanya, O.J, Angelica J. G., Abideen A. O., Hakeem, K. H., Kristine J. A., Gacutno, N. O., Olaleke, R. O., Adesola, J. J., Lasala, E. M., Don, E. L., (2024). Ectogenesis: understanding opportunities, implications, concerns, and ways forward. *International Journal of Surgery: Global Health* (2024) 7:e0398.

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