



# Historicising the concept of Motherhood in Buganda, 1840 – 2021

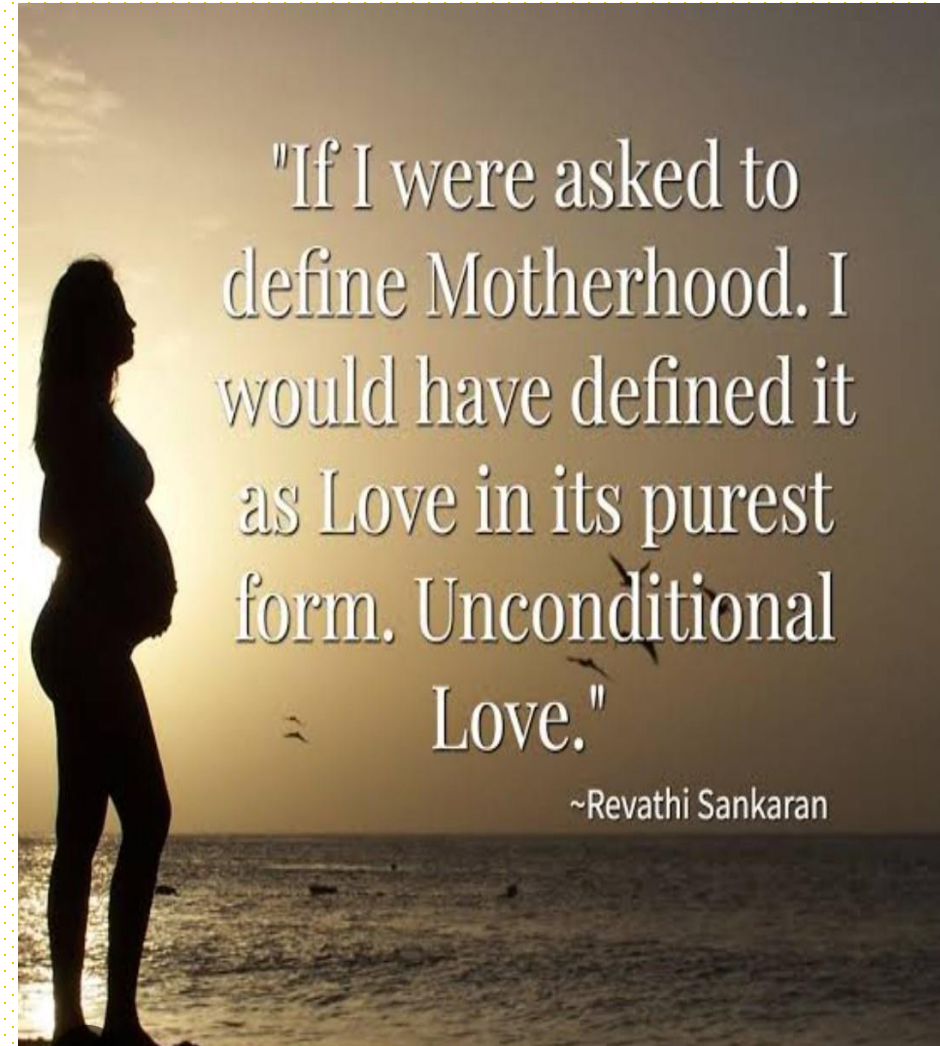
**Zaid Sekito**

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# The Motivation

“Whose definition of Motherhood” (Rubinstein, 2014)



# Introduction & the Problem

- ❖ Historically the primary role of the family was seen in terms of parenting children by both the mother and father to become responsible members of the community.
- ❖ The number of single parents, **predominantly women**, has vastly increased from 20% in 2020 to about 30% in 2023. (UBS, 2024). Although, the exact magnitude and numbers of ‘single motherhood’ or fatherhood (single-parenthood) are not known, there is a consensus that this is becoming a nuanced conversation. (Edin, 2000; Risman, 1986) – The dangers that these are within the youth age bracket (18-35)
- ❖ Is the increasing cases of single motherhood and labels coming with it an instructive example of emerging diversity of family structures, Yet it was a rare phenomenon - Nakyeombekedde ????
- ❖ How can we interrogate the meaning and usage of motherhood with a view to finding alternative meanings from the stereotypical representations and the place of fathers in parentage today?
- ❖ *What has the concept - motherhood meant over time, what impact did external contexts have over the concept and what challenges have been associated with the usage and application of the concept / ideology of motherhood?*
- ❖ Is it all about **Patriarchy** - “that mothering is natural to women and that child rearing is the sole responsibility of the biological mother” & “the practice that assigns mothers the sole responsibility for mother work, but gives them no power to determine the conditions under which they mother” (O’Reilly, 2004: 5)

## Historical Research

### Data Collection Methods

1. Archival – Masculine Preserve (C Martins, 2018: 455, Leach, 2012; Musisi, 2002; O’Barr & Firmin-Sellers 1995)
2. Documentary Review – *Sampling was conditioned by the availability of documents relating to any of the specific objectives.*
3. Interviews, oral histories & historical linguistics – folktales, proverbs, riddles...

- Ug National Records Centre & Archives(UNRCA)
- Archives of CoU (UCU)
- Uganda Society Library
- Ethnographies, diaries and correspondences of travelers & Missionaries (MaK)
- The production of knowledge is never innocent and neutral (Donna Haraway, 1988)
- Single Parents’ Association of Uganda (SPAU)

# Findings

*To me mothering is about looking for balance. In the first place, you have your responsibilities to your child [ren]. Your priority as a mother is to give them a good, consistent upbringing that leads your children to become good human beings. Nurturing is also about putting food on the table ... Parenting is prioritising children over other things. (Interview with a member of Mothers Union, 19 March 2023)*

*Before the man abandoned me, I was doing my job all the time. I did extra hours ... every week! I was at the office early in the morning and I stayed late. There was always someone with the children (father) so I could do it, but I had to stop this after he abandoned me. I just do the hours I'm paid for, not trying to do things better than my colleagues. (Interviewee, 23rd March 2023)*

# Findings

- **Mama (Luganda equivalent for mother) - cognate Word** - Mother/mothering meant specialising as Child career, Caterer, Teacher, Health caregiver/nurse, Spiritual medium, Counsellor, Administrator, Manager, **nurturance** – regardless of whether one was a **“social mother”** - played the motherly role to non-biological children. A biological mother (a confidant/giver of life).
- Mothers/mothering has been more accepting, responsive, supportive, behaviorally controlling, but demanding, and autonomy-granting to children.
- Pre-colonial & colonial times, fathers were viewed as all-powerful patriarchs who wielded enormous power over their families & vestiges of these notions continued until more recently. But fathers were, companions, care providers, spouses, protectors, models, moral guides, teachers, and breadwinners-hunter-gatherer.
- The advent of capitalism & western ideals – new forms of motherhood & the fathers primary focus shifted from moral leadership to breadwinning and economic support of the family until the 1980s. The conceptualizations of fathers’ roles, thus, often focused quite narrowly on breadwinning, and narrowly on “involvement,”
- Neo-liberal developments, the sociological “functions” of parenting become increasingly delegated to other social institutions. The result has been that the family is declining as an institution in its own right.
- Non-marital reproduction, same-sex marriages, non-marital reproduction permitting sexual pleasures free from the responsibilities of caring for and raising children.
- Neo-liberalism - many men poor providers, fathers as sex role models!!!, social scientists & commentators expressing concern about the failures of many men to model masculine behaviour for their sons.
- Following feminist and scholarly critiques of masculinity and femininity, there emerged in the late 1970s a concern with the **“new nurturant father,”** who played an active role in his children’s lives.
- Mothers accept they can do without men – **“nze mami nze Dad”** – polygamous dissenters, bakwabuzzi---

# Policy Implications

- ❑ Policymakers have ignored fathers when developing policies and programs designed to enhance children's well-being (Lamb, 1986), But recognize that single mothers often live in economically precarious circumstances, with many at least partially dependent on government programs. Should we emphasize breadwinning responsibilities bze it shifts economic costs from the state to individual men?
- ❖ The Child & family Affairs departments need policies on cognitive-behavioural therapies. Emotionally stressed parents/fathers do a poor job of monitoring their children, leading to - child abuse,/neglect, juvenile delinquency, depression or attempt to cope with substance abuse, suicide rates. Can we think of interventions to support fathers of children with dev'tal disabilities, **acceptance?**
- ❖ Supportive policies that provide continuous health insurance for children & those that emphasis the importance of harmonious partner relationships.
- ❖ MoGLSD need to undertake Cultural re-orientation (on both native & non-native) – Some Cultural norms need to be challenged as we do cultural re-orientation - Polygamy, and non-marital reproduction that permit sexual pleasures free from the responsibilities of caring for and raising children. Cultures that promote stigmatization, ostracism and discrimination especially on the side of single mums as the culprits are left to “**tusajjalatta**”
- ❖ MoGLSD + UPF should enforce policies that can support programs that meet family needs, such as the need for good education or housing, or programs that educate parents on healthy practices, livelihoods.
- ❖ Can the provision of Lactation rooms/feeding centres help minimise the challenges of balancing work & life & change parenting? Can we go beyond the Parliament breastfeeding centre that was launched in 2015? **WHO**

# *Appreciation*

*Asante sana*

*Thank you  
for Listening!*